Deceptive Revelation:
The Parable in Agnon, Kafka, Borges

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To

Henry, My Parents, and "Petrouchka"

ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the parable as a modern literary mode against its ancient model. Why tell parables? How do we understand parabolic speech? How do parables mean when the conditions of reception change? What do parables, as the point where sacred and poetic discourse meet, tell us about language in general? Intimately tied to the parabolic function in the Hebrew and Synoptic traditions are crucial questions concerning theological and literary interpretation--of all texts. The Semitic origins of the parable attest to the particular economy of its form. At once didactic and visionary, the term mashal covers a broad semantic range from direct or implied comparison to oracular utterance.

The problem of parabolic interpretation becomes more complex in New Testament theology where the parable is opposed to allegory while retaining its primary relation to metaphor. Centuries of doctrinal repression result in the dichotomization of parabolic and allegorical speech, the former thought to be straightforward (literal), the latter obscure (figurative). The notion of ideal language, where the Word is coincident with its interpretation, is first posited in the Creation Story of Genesis. It is re-written from a christological perspective in the Prologue to the Gospel of John. Speaking in parables is explicitly employed as the means for distinguishing between those who are capable of understanding and those who are not, and thereby, for ultimately

denying salvation to those who fall into the latter group. The persistent question, then, equally significant for the modern as the Biblical parable is: Why does the parable, putatively straightforward and evident enough, require interpretation at all? What is the secret of this mode of speech?

The parable is of special interest for hermeneutics because it simultaneously articulates two polarized tendencies of symbolic language: the restorative or salvatory, and the demystifying or subversive. The strategy of discourse implied in parabolic language is neither to further communication nor to insure univocity of belief but to question one's sense of the world by fracturing language, thus suggesting a radicalization of human possibility.

The modern parables of S. Y. Agnon, Franz Kafka, and Jorge L. Borges, respectively, manifest an increasing discomfort with the redemptive capacity of language. Agnon is a mythopoetic creator whose quest is to restructure a revered religious tradition. Thus his parables are always related to and deciphered according to some ultimate order of events, uttered against a background of eternity. In his writing it is not the certainty of language which is cast into doubt, but the precariousness of history which does not live up to the ideal.

In Kafka the parable does not illuminate the truth but expresses the impossibility of articulating it. Access and orientation are metaphysical problems posed in methodological terms. Thus where failed interpretations become a way of life, the desire generated by the parable always transmutes wonder into terror and impotence. The potential to elect change, to "be in parable," is in the Kafkan version, only an invitation to futility.

The Borgesian parable plays on the infinite challenge posed

by the idea of mystery. Equally concerned with strategies of discovery and the resolution of ambiguity, his works exemplify the inability of any code to penetrate or exhaust that which by its nature resists all such efforts. For Borges the parable is the consummate fiction: it strives to render that universal vision which contains all possible variations on itself.

Chapter 1

BACKGROUND

"These signs will accompany those who believe . . . they will speak in new tongues." (Mk. 16:17)

That the precariousness of meaning is not the unique problem or product of the modern consciousness, but part of an enduring literary heritage which extends at least as far back as the Biblical parable, is the point of the following excerpt from Hugh Kenner's The Pound Era:

> . . . the enigma . . . Always, the "story" has been a hermetic thing. Of the first hearers of the Parable of the Sower, it was those closest to the Parabolist who wanted afterward to know what it meant . . . Part of the primitive fascination of a story is this, that we cannot often be sure why it has been told. Often we can: it may say, I am Odysseus, this happened to me: share my self-esteem; or, This may happen to you, King Pentheus, be prepared; or, This happened here in Athens: know how to feel. Or often: You will wish this might happen to you. But devoid of arteries from me or you or here, why does that tale's heart beat? A sower went out to sow his seed . . . or, A governess went to Bly . . . Why are we being told that?[1]

What is the primitive fascination, that primordial secret contained in a particular kind of story, the parable? This is the focus of my study, whose principle intent is to examine the parable as a modern literary mode against its ancient model. Initially I will provide a general descriptive sense of the parabolic function in the Hebrew and Synoptic traditions and elucidate some of the

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[1]Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 23-24.

major problems involved in the interpretation of parables within theological criticism. My purpose here is not to present an exhaustive survey of the New Testament parables nor of their interpreters, but to trace along broad lines the main trend of parabolic interpretation as it has developed through this century. I will be concerned with the provenance of the parable and its normative function as perceived by both the early Church and modern theologians. How to define the parable "generically" has been the self-assigned task of Biblical scholars: the standard procedure being to oppose it to allegory while retaining its primary relation to metaphor. Yet the economy of the parabolic form--at once didactic and visionary--puts such categorizations into question.

It will become apparent in the following discussions about the form and function of parables that it is virtually impossible to keep theological and literary considerations separate. Indeed, it appears that much academic argument about whether parables are allegories or not would have been avoided had those so engaged been philosophers and literary theorists as well as theologians. Such a combination of forces could not have found the ultimate answers to many of these complex questions. Rather different questions would have emerged, and new problems generated from those; for both the over-arching reductive impulse and a natural resistance to "the spirit of ambiguity" of traditional Biblical scholarship have made penetration of the sacred text a formidable enterprise. But, can we speak of the parable outside a religious context? This investigation is addressed to this central problem: what parables have meant to various hearers/readers throughout the ages, and more importantly, how parables mean when the conditions of reception

change.

Because of their special status as embedded texts, first canonized as the Word of Jesus and integrated into the larger narrative of the ministry, and in such a way as to ultimately control their significance to all future perceivers, the parables present a nearly unique case for study. It is no wonder, then, that the most recent critical thrust has been of structuralist persuasion. Chapter II will explore its impact along with the predominant influence of the New Hermeneutics. The following chapters treat three modern exponents of the parable: Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Franz Kafka, and Jorge Luis Borges. Their works manifest, as does the Biblical model, that the character of parabolic disclosure is that it undermines content while reaffirming the "parabolic event." The Israeli, Czech and Argentinian authors share a fundamental sense of exile--of being always elsewhere in time and place. This alienation is transposed into linguistic terms, as is "the quest," as well.

The modern history of the interpretation of the parable began in 1888 with the publication of the first volume of Adolf Jülicher's Die Gleichnisreden Jesu.[2] There the now classical distinction between parable and allegory was first postulated. The second and much longer volume is a detailed textual analysis of the individual parables. So monumental was Jülicher's study that for many years no other work on the subject appeared and even now that

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[2]Adolf Jülicher, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu [The History of the Interpretaion of the Parables of Jesus] (Tubingen, 1899), 1910 2 ed. 1963) classification of parables discussed: Vol. I.
similitude: pp. 58-80
parable: pp. 92-111
exemplary story: pp. 112-115

substantial research on the parable exists, Jülicher remains the standard point of reference. This is not to say that Jülicher's definition and classification of the parable(s) are conclusive; rather that such a pervasive theory has solicited modifications, but until recently, rarely a re-conceptualization of the problem itself.

Jülicher's theory is derived from Aristotelian rhetoric: he divided the majority of parables into two classes, the similitude (Gleichnis) and the parable in the restricted sense (Parabel). The similitude narrates a typical or recurrent event in real life, usually in the present tense. The parable tells a fictitious story or narrates one particular invented incident, in the past tense. These together constitute the whole category of parables with the Synoptic similitude belonging to the same class as Aristotle's parabola and the Synoptic parable to the same class as Aristotle's logos or fable.[3] Jülicher distinguishes parable from allegory (a separate category) by identifying the former with simile and the latter with metaphor, which he describes as two radically different types of speech.[4] According to his view, in a simile since the two elements of comparison are explicitly named, no error in interpretation is possible; the meaning is literal. In a metaphor, where one word is substituted for another, the hearer is called upon to

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[3]Ibid., p. 98. Aristotle, in The Art of Rhetoric II.20.4, discusses the various types of proofs available to the rhetorician. One of these is the example (paradeigma) which consists of two types: the example taken from history and the example invented by the author. The invented example is then broken down into two types: the parabolē (e.g., those of Socrates: Phaedrus' dialogue) and the logos (e.g., those of Aesop). These terms are not defined, but examples of each are given.

[4]Jülicher, p. 69.

complete the interpretation, decipher what is meant.

He defines the parable as an extended simile and the allegory as a series of metaphors.[5] The allegory, considered to be figurative speech, has as many points of comparison as it has metaphors and denotes concealment at each one. The parable is literal with intention to illuminate and instruct a single thought, a moral or religious principle to be given the broadest, most general possible application.[6] Jülicher categorizes similitudes, parables, and example stories together as literal speech (Eigentliche Rede) and as the singular mode of Jesus' teaching. Allegory, mysterious and willfully inscrutable, is inauthentic, an interpretative perversion by the evangelists and early Church of Jesus' original intent.

Jülicher's demystification of the parable has had significant implications. He rejected the layers of allegorical interpretation and commentary embedded in the parabolic tradition, and the extent to which these arbitrary obfuscations were inextricable from the narratives themselves. Seeking to recover the parables' "original meaning," Jülicher performed an invaluable purgative service.

At the same time, however, his mechanistic definitions of parable and allegory manifested severe limitations. Jülicher's methodology represents a series of contingent choices which continue to plague modern scholarship. His critics have responded to the effects of these choices but do not challenge the premises on which they are founded.

Jülicher tends to confound the difference between making an allegory and giving an allegorical interpretation of a story which

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[5]Ibid., pp. 52-58.

[6]Ibid., pp. 58-80.

is not itself an allegory. Yet this kind of reduction is imperative for his schema. The dichotomization of parable as authentic, straightforward speech and allegory as inauthentic, obscure speech, and the natural consequence that Jesus, therefore, could only have spoken in parables, finds its most striking expression in the controversy surrounding the Parable of the Sower, Mark IV. This parable is about the interpretation of parables, yet it provides no less than the paradigm for the interpretation of all texts, that point where sacred and poetic discourse meet. The parable begins:

> Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it had not much soil, and, immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.
>
> And he said, He who has ears to hear, let him hear.
>
> Mark 4:1-9

Clearly, the parable is based on the apt metaphorical image of seed for word, its dissemination, and the various dispositions (kinds of ground) of the hearers to receive it. The controversy about this parable and the purpose of parables in general has been generated by what follows. After Jesus utters the parable, he is asked privately by the apostles "concerning parables:"

> And he said to them, To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is given in parable; so that they may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven.
>
> And he said to them, Do you not understand the parable? How then will you understand all the parables?
>
> Mark 4:11-13
> (my underlines)

The parable is then interpreted allegorically in the following passage, where the birds stand for Satan (vs. 15); the rocky ground for those hearers who fall away because of "tribulation or persecution" (vs. 17); and the thorns for "the cares of the world, and the delight in riches, and the desire for other things" (vs. 19), which enter in, choking the word and preventing it from bearing fruit. The chapter concludes thus:

> With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples, he explained everything.
>
> (Mark 4:33-34)

What is considered repellent about the Markan passage is the very concept of parabolic speech: that Jesus would employ it to deliberately mystify and to conceal truth, and thereby to deny salvation to those incapable of understanding. Initiates, the privileged insiders, should have no need for parables for they would already know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God; while ironically, the parables would be of no use or benefit to the multitude, since intrinsically obscure to them. Thus, the interpretative circle remains hermetically closed, and esoteric knowledge as the access to grace becomes the Church's version of a tradition already predominant in both the Hellenistic and Hebrew worlds.

Questions of translation (from the original Aramaic of Jesus' speech to the Greek transcription) have been of dominant consideration for future interpreters; multiple versions of the parable exist within the Gospels. The "so that" (hinna) of Mark's rendering is softened by Matthew (13:13) to "because" (hoti): Jesus spoke to them in parables <u>because</u> the multitude could not understand, repent, and be forgiven. But this is hardly a substantial

difference; there is no indication that Matthew believed the parables to be transparent or democratic in spirit either.

A perplexing passage this is, but not only for the reasons explicitly offered by theologians. Is the narrative in which the parable is encased, Jesus' explanation of the function of parables and the appended allegorical interpretation, the only problematic element here? The reader is troubled by something else--the reception of the parable itself. To paraphrase Jülicher in another terminology, if the parable is to be regarded as a single, indivisible sign, with a single, configurative meaning, and an immediately perceptible one at that, why the difficulty? Why then does the parable, appearing evident enough, require interpretation at all? Why is it not comprehensible to any of Jesus' hearers, especially the Apostles?

An allegory is deciphered without leaving any residue of signification. The problem posed by a parabolic interpretation is of another order, simultaneously moral and metaphysical--(in the) beyond (of) the text. What was Jesus asked "concerning parables?" Engaged as we are in the pursuit of meaning, we perceive that there must be other designs for this putatively straightforward mode of speech.

The Parable of the Sower, like other parables only more so, is semantically self-referential: one of its possible conceptual referents is the very act of parable-making. It can be read as Jesus' description of himself as a speaker who cannot ensure that his audience will understand what he says and who can expect that only a few of his hearers will be receptive at all. The parable becomes truth by its very enunciation. On the level of story and

on the level of discourse--prophecy--Jesus is signifying the impossibility of those hearers to recognize the meaning of his message even as it is uttered. He is at once the object and the instrument of interpretation, the author of the Word and the Word, both Sower and seed.

The theology of the Word, of course, originates in the Creation story of Genesis 1, which begins with the series of performative utterances in which God speaks the world.[7] This quality of performative utterance (as developed by Austin) pervading a text is almost exclusively and characteristically a function of scriptural literature. The Word once spoken has a kind of substantive existence all its own. Here the text has priority over the referent, the usual hierarchy inverted: the radical privilege of the Word over what it designates (a conceptual referent existing only in a world of moral and physical abstraction) makes "reality" by its double inscription in the world and in divine discourse. But parabolic speech is not the sign of something else. It is the posited origin and telos of language, the ideology of Presence traced by Derrida;[8] yet the text, while construed as representative of divinity is representative of nothing but itself, is supplement to itself.

Jesus, in The Parable of the Sower, invokes the words of the prophet Isaiah, who substitutes for the voice of Yahweh. With this gesture he announces the meaning and effect of his teaching and identifies himself as the source of that same performative

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[7]J. L. Austin, How to do Things with Words (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

[8]Jacques Derrida, L'Ecriture et la Différence, "La Struc, ture, Le Signe et le Jeu" (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), [cont.]

power:

> And he touched my mouth, and said:
> Behold, this has touched your lips;
> your guilt is taken away, and your
> sin forgiven. And I heard the voice
> of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send,
> and who will go for me? Then I said,
> here am I! Send me. And he said, go
> and say to this people:
>
> Hear and hear but do not understand;
> See and see, but do not perceive.
> Make the heart of this people fat
> and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes;
> lest they see with their eyes.
> and hear with their ears,
> and understand with their hearts
> and turn and be healed.
>
> Second Isaiah 6:7-10
> (my underlines)

The discourse offered by Jesus about his own discourse also serves to establish an inter-textual relationship between the Parable of the Sower and Isaiah's proclamation, between the Old and New Testaments. The signs and wonders of the Old are signifiers of the New, to be replaced by them; the historical Jesus will be replaced as well by the transcendental Christ. He comes as the fulfillment of a text prefiguring events that have already been announced but are yet to be accomplished:[9]

> For as the rain and the snow come down
> from heaven, and return not thither, but
> water the earth, making it bring forth
> and sprout, giving seed to the sower,
> and bread to the eater:
>
> So shall my word be that goes forth from
> my mouth: it shall not return to me empty,
> but it shall accomplish that which I
> purpose and prosper in the thing for which

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pp. 409-28.

[9]For a detailed analysis of typology and figural interpretation, see Erich Auerbach, "Figura," from Scenes from the Drama of European Literature (N.Y.: Meridian Press, 1959) and G. W. Lampe and K. J. Woolcombe, Essays on Typology (London: SCM Press, 1957).

I sent it.

Isaiah 55:10-11

Jülicher, Dodd and Jeremias have condemned the Markan passage as spurious or currupt. Thus the distinction between parable and allegory remains intact; since it is contrary to the nature of parables to necessitate explanation, those parables which are "allegories" or have point-by-point interpretations appended to them, are dismissed by Jülicher as inauthentic.[10]

What is the import of such decisions? For many centuries, the Church maintained its claim to exercise a sole and exclusive authority in the interpretation of the New Testament; that right is now challenged, where it is not ignored throughout the Protestant and even the Catholic world. The effects of this liberation have already been alluded to; modern claims of authenticity are often no less arbitrary than the medieval ones discarded.

The self-authenticating nature of the Gospel, as in mythic narrative, resides in the desubjectification, the total self-effacement of the narrator. Although he writes as witness to the events he relates and describes, with the glaring exception of Luke, the first person is never used. It is the Gospel "according" to, not "by"; and with the exception of the title, the names of the evangelists do not appear again. Thus the text is not contingent upon the ideas, will or memory of an individual; the anonymous, sometimes pseudonymous authorship guarantees the absolute veracity of the text. That the author does not attribute the composition to himself is not a sign of modesty, nor of deceit, but a way of conferring authorial knowledge upon what he writes which he as mere human could never possess. It is as if the text were written through him

[10]Jülicher, pp. 203-322.

(indeed it is divinely inspired); the focus is on the message of faith addressed to an incipient spiritual community. Jesus, then, was real--regarded as a contemporary--and the events described were the concrete details of his earthly existence and of those lives he touched, however modified in the telling. Only centuries later did these oral and written compositions become the Gospel-chronicle, biography and social document; the new Church's motives governed the transmission of these events, grounding them in time and space. The evangelist's narration, a virtual testimony to the words and deeds of Jesus, became the only real link with his life; episodes of dramatic revelation were re-shaped into a pattern endowed with genealogical significance. In other words, they became Scripture. The New Testament is not the product of a long, slow growth covering seven to ten centuries, or representing a wide social whole like the nation of Israel. Predominantly, it belongs to the literature of "social control" in a relatively small group; and it evolved within a century at most; most of it came into existence in the course of two generations.[11]

If the Bible were the Divine Myth often suggested, there would be no need for the Church to verify or authenticate its content or to protect it from individual misapprehension. It is because of its historicity that ambiguity and contingency, that is, interpretation, enters into its reading. The canonical process implicitly defined the Bible as history (or story) and removed it from the realm of myth. The attempt by modern theologians, notably

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[11]Frederich Grant, The Gospels: Their Origin and Growth (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 17.

Bultmann, to "demythologize"[12] (the change of emphasis from the literal/representational character of the New Testament toward the existential truths it conveys) the sacred text only transposes the old problems to another plane.

It will be seen that the enduring theological controversy over whether individual parables are parables or allegories is of concern to us as it relates to the aesthetic and rhetorical presuppositions of Jülicher's thesis. Attempting to preserve the integrity of the parables by imposing alien definitions upon them is his primary error, and one recognized by even the most faithful adherents to his theory.[13]

The crystallization of the parable as a literary form is the distinctive contribution of the New Testament. The Synoptic parables, while sharing analogous features with the fables of Aesop,[14] for example, are nonetheless unique in purpose and content, the expression of a supremely creative mind. But the origins of the parabolic model are found in the Hebrew tradition, and infinite possi-

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[12]Another aspect of demythologization is the effort to separate the essential message from the cosmological "mythology" no longer relevant to modern times. Ricoeur, in Freud, explains demythologization as one of two very different paths within modern hermeneutics. One, represented by Bultmann, looks to the symbol to recover a meaning hidden in it--the original communication of the text--as a window to a sacred reality. As such it is opposed to the "demystification" efforts of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud to whom the symbol is a representation of a false reality, and thus must be subverted.

[13]For example, Cadoux, Dodd and Jeremias among others.

[14]Both are fictitious tales with a moral point and stories conceived on one level and designed to act as a vehicle of truth on another. Both are stories often told not for their own sake but in order to confront the reader/hearer with a decision or type of behavior or ethical principle in a condensed manner. A fable, however, is usually about animals, whereas a parable is drawn from the familiar field of human life.

bilities for analysis and interpretation are suggested therein. Constructing a theory, as Jülicher did, based on concepts borrowed from Aristotelian rhetoric is, as it were, to ignore the source. The mashal (משל) was a familiar rhetorical and pedagogical device rooted in the Old Testament writings and inter-testamental and apocalytic texts and developed in the later Rabbinic literature.[15]

The Hebrew term mashal, from which the Greek parabola was translated in the Septuagint, covers a broad semantic range; not only does it meet a direct or implied comparison, but also similitude, example, proverb, gnomic saying, satire, byword, riddle, oracular utterance.[16] From the root משל comes משל, to speak in parables, משלנו, to become like, and משל, for example. Throughout the history of the linguistic development of Hebrew, such diverse associations are evident.

In the Old Testament, especially in the Wisdom literature, its dominant significance was that of popular saying or byword: "Therefore it became a <u>proverb</u>: Is Saul also among the prophets?" (Sam.I.10:12); "As the <u>proverb</u> of the ancients says: Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness" (Sam.I.24:13); "What do you mean by repeating this <u>proverb</u> concerning the Land of Israel, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge?" (Ezek.18:2). As a popular saying or byword, mashal was also an

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[15] <u>Paroima</u> is the Greek term used by John exclusively, for parable, meaning a presentation deviating from the usual means of speaking. The standard definitions can be found in G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, <u>Theologisches Wortenbuch Zum Neuen Testament</u> (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1927), <u>Interpreter's Bible Dictionary</u>, and <u>Encyclopedia Judaica</u>.

[16] Ibid. and Paul Fiebig, <u>The Parables of Jesus in the Light of the Rabbinic Parables of the New Testament Period</u> and <u>Ancient Jewish Parables and the Parables of Jesus</u>.

expression by which a person or nation was held in derision or contempt: "Behold everyone who uses proverbs will use this proverb about you, "Like mother, like daughter." (Ezek. 16:14); "Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all nations" (Kings 9:7); "Thou hast made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples where the Lord will lead you away." (Deut. 28:37). Occasionally, mashal means a profound discourse upon a difficult problem: "And Job took up his discourse and said" (Job 27:29); "I will incline my ear to a proverb: I will solve my riddle to the music of the lyre." (Ps. 49:4); "I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old." (Ps.78:2). Sometimes the association of mashal is with hidah, a dark saying or riddle. The author of Proverbs states that the purpose of the book is in part that the man of understanding acquire a skill "to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles." (Prov.1:5-5); "The word of the Lord came to me: Son of Man, propound a riddle, and speak an allegory to the House of Israel." (Ezek.17: 1-2). Mashal signifies as well an oracular utterance, a blessing or curse: "And Balaam took up his discourse and said" (Numbers 23: 7;18;24:3,15;20-21), and in its more developed forms assumed an allegorical character. (Ezek.17:1-10,11-20).

There are, moreover, extended meshalim which are much more like parabolic sayings as they occur in the New Testament (Prov. 6:6-11 and 24:30-33), illustrations, partly anecdotal or based on observations of nature leading to the final, explanatory statement: "So shall thy poverty come as a robber and thy want as an armed man." This resembles in form the New Testament parable, the image leading to a comparison such as "The Kingdom of Heaven is like . .

. " (Poverty is like a situation in which . . .)

There are passages in the Old Testament which are usually included in discussions of the parable, although they are not called meshalim. A few of them closely resemble the parables of the Gospels. (Samuel II 12:1-6; Sam.II 14:5-7; Kings 20:39-41). The three above-mentioned are alike in structure and function: all consist of a fictitious story which the hearer takes to be true; a judgement is educed from him, then he is told that the story applies to himself.

The veiled utterances and sometimes even the maxims, semi-riddles and paradoxical aphorisms have explanatory verses which are less an accurate exposition than an elaboration or expression of a thought altogether different. Their meaning, then, is not intended to be perceived immediately but to be reflected upon. There is little, however, with the exception of Nathan's Parable of the Ewe Lamb (Sam.II 12:1-6) that can be recognized as belonging to the same "genre" as the Synoptic parables as they are defined by Jülicher--a setting aside for the sake of comparison.

Proverbial speech in the Old Testament appears to be but the germ of the kind of parabolic discourse employed in the Gospels. For a clearer exposition of the Semitic background of Jesus' parables and for examples of their direct formal antecedents, we must turn to the Rabbinic writings.

Paul Fiebig, in two extensive volumes, aimed to correct Jülicher's incomplete study of parables. He compared the Gospel parables to those from the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, the Midrash, Toseftah and Mishnah and found striking formal resemblances. Of immediate importance, Fiebig asserts, is to take

account of characteristic forms of expression idiomatic to Jewish thought: the use of brief, proverbial images, allegories, similitudes, and mixtures of allegory and similitude. The rabbinic parables also use parallelism, ellipsis, individual concretization rather than generalized statement, and extensive use of "see" as an introduction.[17]

The signifiance of Fiebig's work, which examines the Jewish background of the Synoptic parables and their common repertoire of motifs and images, lies in identifying the flavor, if not the character, of such forms of expression and in emphasizing the oral against the written tradition as the main factor in the transmission of the parables. Since the Hebrew conception of mashal encompassed parable, allegory, similitude, fable and variations of these modes, there is no reason to assume that Jesus self-consciously differentiated between them.

According to Fiebig, the chief difference between the rabbinic and Synoptic parables is found in their content. However, Gunther Borkhamm's view is that they serve different purposes, the rabbis relating parables in order to clarify an ethical point or expound on a passage, but always as an aid to the teaching and an instrument in the exegesis of an authoritatively prescribed text. Though Jesus makes use of traditional and familiar topics, images and symbols, here the parables are the teaching itself and are not merely serving the purpose of a lesson which is quite independent of them.[18]

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[17]A point of interest: the rabbinic term פשט also means the allegorical interpretation of Scripture; it is the 26th of the 32 modes of interpretation developed by Rabbi Eliezer. (ca. 200 AD)

[18]Gunther Borkhamm, Jesus of Nazareth (New York: [cont.]

While it is generally agreed that, unlike the Gospel parables, the rabbinic parables are for the most part exegetical and do not originate in any particular situation, the methods of exposition are fundamentally the same:

> First, the background and occasion are provided by the narrator. Then the story begins:
>
> "I will tell you a mashal. What is the matter like? For example, the matter is like a man who . . . "
> Finally, commentary and explanation of the story.

Distinguishing between parable and allegory in the manner of Jülicher and his successors is not merely a question of formal classification. What is at stake here are matters of truth, faith, and dogma, and it is to these issues that the theologian directs his or her concern. In neglecting the Semitic origins of the parable, to the end of severely limiting its functions, Jülicher has deprived it of an essential aspect: its power as mysterious, evocative speech. As will be seen, it is not the ambiguity of the term mashal which makes the form so elusive, but the phenomenon itself which transcends those hard and fast categories to which scholars have tried to reduce it.

When they have attended to the importance of the Semitic tradition for an understanding of Jesus' use of parabolic speech, it is almost exclusively to the Wisdom literature that the scholars defer. This is not because the ancient analogues are necessarily best discernible there but in order to identify the parable with

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Harper & Row, 1960), p. 69; Birger Gerhardsson also affirms the signifiance of the Semitic tradition in the Gospel parables and of Jesus' utilization of well-known rabbinic techniques in his teaching. In his view, this supports the contention that the parable be understood as allegory. He maintains that in the Parable of the Sower the interpretation is perfectly consistent with the parable and that either both parable and interpretation are authentic or both are secondary.

those forms of speech that say what they are and do what they say they do. But equally predominant in the Hebrew literature with the discourse of the sage is the proclamation of the prophet: in the Apocalyptic and Intertestamental writings mahal means a visionary disclosure.[19] Here wisdom and prophecy are merged. The mashal is as linked to dark sayings, prophetic pronouncement and esoteric revelation as it is to homiletic-aphoristic-proverbial expression and to Scriptural commentary.

The notion of divine mysteries, revealed to privileged persons, occurs frequently in these books. Raymond Brown has examined the many references to "mystery" in Sirach and Enoch, and its intimate connection to mashal. In Sirach, there are secrets concerning what is to come in the future. (42:19;48:25) These mysteries can be learned by studying the law, the writings of the prophets and also by meditating on the parables of the scribes, which are regarded by Sirach as obscure sayings. (39:1,2,3) In Enoch, the term mystery, among several senses, refers to God's judgement, in particular to the Elect or the Son of Man, who has been hidden, but who will be revealed on the last day to the chosen. (61:5;68:5;48:6-7;62:1) While for Sirach the mysteries could be learned by studying the Scriptures and the sayings of the scribes, here they are revealed in visions and explained by an angel to Enoch. These visions are called parables. (37:1;39:1;45:1;60:1) Most extensive in Apocalyptic writings, mystery is used to refer to God's plan for the unfolding of history and for the final events,

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[19]See Raymond E. Brown, "The Pre-Christian Semitic Concept of Mystery," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 20/4, Oct. 1958, pp. 417-443 and "The Semitic Background of the New Testament Mysteries I & II," Biblica 39- 1948, pp. 426-428 and Biblica 40-1959, pp. 70-87, and Amos Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric (London: SCM Press, [cont.]

when not even the prophets knew "when time would come to an end." Indeed, this double function of revealing and concealing is operative in both prophetic and parabolic discourse. The parable is yet more complex, for while originally an oral mode, it contains the problematic of writing.

To assert the primacy of one tradition over another in the interpretation of parables is neither historically nor methodologically justifiable. The alliance of mystery and parable is a natural one, which no amount of doctrinal rigidity can repress. And because individual parables may be enigmatic and require interpretation does not perforce make them allegories! This fundamental component of parabolic discourse--its inscrutability--will prove significant as this study progresses. As Paul Ricoeur has stated, "Enigma does not block understanding but provokes it."

Continuing along the lines set by Jülicher was A. T. Cadoux, who supplemented Jülicher's work and widened its perspective, while not basically changing his interpretations of individual parables. He applied an additional method, analytical form criticism,[20] which can be briefly defined as a method of tracing the history and development of a passage from what may be assumed to be its original form. It is now generally asserted in theological circles that the contextual problem is paramount in any interpretation of the parables, this context determining the form and meaning most crucial to their "proper" understanding. Long among the most prominent types of New Testament scholarship until hermeneutics subsumed it, form

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1964), p. 87.

[20]A. T. Cadoux, The Parables of Jesus: Their Art and Their Use (N.Y.: 1931).

criticism's historical paradigm now appears too restrictive.

For our interests, what is most interesting is Cadoux's notice of the polemical dimension of parables. He has argued that "almost all the parables, of whose occasion we are fairly sure, were spoken in attack or defense."[21] Concluding that the parable is characteristically "a weapon of controversy,"[22] he emphasizes a rhetorical function heretofore ignored, one which while pointing to certainty of intention often results in obscurity of message:

> It will be noted that here too the parable is never merely illustrative: it is always something of an argument . . . emotional persuasion, argument from analogy, allurement of the hearer to self-conviction, the clothing of new or different thought in form more easy of assimilation than direct statement, expression of what is incapable of definition.[23]

When Cadoux speaks of the function of parables he sounds remarkably like Angus Fletcher discussing allegory:

> Considered as a non-metaphysical semantic device, whether leading to an apocalypse or not, allegory likewise appears to express conflict between rival authorities . . . [24]

> In short, though allegory may be intended to reveal, it does so only after veiling a delayed message which it would rather keep far from any very ready or facile interpretation.[25]

In seeking to recover the precise historical situation in which the parables were spoken, Cadoux considers them to be rooted in political confrontation. This view is also taken by several

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[21]Ibid., p. 12.

[22]Ibid., p. 138.

[23]Ibid., p. 197.

[24]Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 3rd ed. 1970), p. 22.

[25]Ibid., p. 330.

scholars to be the explanation for the existence of different versions of the same parables; modifications and variations are attributed to the diversity of Jesus' audiences as well as to the inevitable transformation from oral to written forms.[26]

C. H. Dodd and Joachim Jeremias, who along with Jülicher constitute the representative line of parable interpretation, were equally concerned with the particularization of the original intent of Jesus' parables. They underplayed the parables' earthly character (be it ethical or political) and stressed their eschatological import. For both Dodd[27] and Jeremias[28] the parables are a piece of real life from which a single point or idea is to be drawn, but this point is not a general principle. Rather it is made with reference to a particular situation within the ministry of Jesus. This view is regarded as an important criticism of Jülicher's thesis, but in fact, all that has changed is that Jülicher's moral point of broadest application has become the eschatological point of particular historical application. (We recall that in Jülicher's definition, the allegory has as many pints of correspondence as it has metaphors and that the parable has but one point. The single thought derived is always a general, universally applicable, religious or moral principle.)

Robert Funk, in an excellent book, Language, Hermeneutics and Word of God, has shown that both Dodd and Jeremias have restored

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[26]Geraint Jones, The Art and Truth of the Parables (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 4.

[27]C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: SCM Press, 1935), pp. 18f, 24ff, 26-33.

[28]Jeremias, pp. 19, 21.

the eschatological orientation of Jesus' message[29] that was missed by Jülicher, but that their formulation remains essentially the same:

> Like Jülicher, Dodd and Jeremias derive a set of ideas from the parables, a set historically oriented to be sure, and not a set of general moral maxims, but nonetheless a set of ideas. The ideational point of Jülicher remains ideational.[30]
>
> (author's underlines)

This formulation, to recapitulate, classifies the parable, similitude and example story together, as utilizing the same figures of speech. As extended comparisons, they differ only in degree not in kind. The parable is not concerned with what everyone typically does, but narrates a particular situation in which some persons were involved. The similitude, instead, derives its force from the appeal to the universally acknowledged, the parable by making the particular credible and probable. The example story is differentiated by the absence of the symbolic or indirect element intrinsic to the parable and similitude. Whereas in a parable the story points to, but is not identical with, a situation or world of thought outside the narrative, the meaning of an example story is present in the narrative itself: the story is and needs only to be universalized.[31]

Needless to say by this time, Jülicher's radical separation

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[29]For a discussion of the major views on eschatology, consequent, realized and progressive, see Dominic Grossan, In Parables, (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 24-27.

[30]Robert Funk, Language,Hermeneutic and Word of God (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 149.

[31]Rudolf Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, trans. by John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 170-176, Eta Linnemann, Jesus of the Parables (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 4-16 and Dan. O. Via, The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 11-12.

of simile and metaphor and the definitions of parable and allegory which are so based, are from a literary point of view, naive. This categorical distinction may have a grammatical function, but it is superficial in any other sense. Both belong to the same spectrum, and the essential test is "not any rule of grammatical form, but rather the quality of semantic transformation that is brought about."[32]

As I have implied throughout this chapter, no methodological decision is without its ideological underpinnings. By making the parable exclusive of interpretation, Jülicher and his successors have relegated it to the most minor of mimetic functions. That the multiplicity of interpretative responses to the parable constitutes a real challenge to doctrinal authority is no surprise, but the transfer of this potentially subversive power to allegory is a strange manipulation of the problem. For both the form and function of allegory, while more abstract, are at the same time more direct and clear-cut; either allegory communicates what one already knows or it remains opaque if one lacks the necessary knowledge to decipher it. Certainly, the parable also does both of these things, but without the comforting guarantee of an external code.

How the parable and allegory relate differently to an outside referent is perhaps that factor which best distinguishes them. This is the contention of Dan. O. Via, whose aesthetic orientation is a refreshing departure from the main current of New Testament scholarship. The following characterization of the example story aids in situating the parable as well:

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[32]Philip Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1962), p. 70.

> . . . an example story is like a parable in that the meaning is present in the story itself and need not be read in the light of another frame of reference in order to be understood, but it is like an allegory in that comparison or analogy tends to have given way to identity and the intended meaning completely shapes the story.[33]

Concerned with the autonomy of the parable as literary object and its extential significance, Via fully defines the parable thus:

> There is more than one important element in a parable, and all of these features must be given consideration, but they do not relate primarily and in the first place to an event, events, or ideas outside of the parable. They relate first of all to each other within the parable, and the structure of connections of these elements is not determined by events or ideas outside of the parable but by the author's creative composition. Even though the parable may contain images which have inescapable symbolic significance which they bring from another world of thought, this is made secondary to their fusion into the internal coherence of the parabolic story. Neither one nor many of the elements point directly and individually out of the story. That is why the one-point approach is only less allegorizing in degree than the old pre-critical allegorizing: it breaks the internal coherence of the story. The many elements of the parable <u>within</u> their pattern of connections as <u>whole</u> do imply an understanding of existence which may be related in some way both to the world of ideas outside of the parable and to the historical situation in which it arose.[34] (author's emphasis)

The critical relation, as we shall see, is that between parable and metaphor. In metaphor, the connection between the two terms is discovered, not supplied or assumed. In view of our understanding of the parable, that it discloses rather than forecloses meaning, metaphor and parable unquestionably partake of the same mode of cognition. The constellation of meaning created by the mode, is of course, dependent upon the revelatory power of the

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[33]Via, p. 21.

[34]Ibid., p. 25.

image(s) or narrative and on the perceptive power of the mind which encounters them. The parable, comprised of two concomitant levels of meaning (to use Owen Barfield's distinction between metaphor as substituted and concomitant meaning[35]), while conveying a second, figurative meaning, still retains a measure of the primary or literal one. The transposition of meaning from one level to the other implies that the parabolic mode is poised somewhere between the two.

Paul Ricoeur calls this kind of metaphorical operation a "semantic impertinence" and pursues further the difference between substitutive and concomitant meaning posited by Barfield. His theory of tension, opposed to that of mere substitution, is operative not between two terms of a word or even of a statement, but between two complete interpretations, literal and metaphorical, of that statement. Creative of meaning by resolving a certain semantic dissonance between the two interpretations--imposing a meaning where a literal one is impossible--(ex. green night) the metaphor is not just a figure of style but a total strategy of discourse. Ricoeur emphasizes that the information or meaning imparted could not be communicated any other way; the true (i.e., tensive) metaphor is not translatable; it cannot be reduced to propositional or descriptive statement, as Richards demands of any metaphor that calls itself meaningful.[36]

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[35]Owen Barfield, The Rediscovery of Meaning (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), p. 32.

[36]Paul Ricoeur, Semeia 4- 1975, pp. 78-80. The tension theory of metaphor is not the invention of Ricoeur or Barfield, of course. It has been developed over the last twenty years by a combination of literary critics and philosophers (Richards, Black and Wheelwright, respectively). The re-casting of the notion of metaphor as a process instead of leaving the term as a static [cont.]

What Ricoeur calls myth in the following excerpt he has elsewhere called parable and in this context the two are interchangeable:

> An allegory can always be translated into a text that can be understood by itself; once this latter text has been made out, the allegory falls away like a useless garment. What the allegory showed, while concealing it, can be said in direct discourse that replaces the allegory. By its triple function of concrete universality, temporal orientation and finally ontological exploration, the myth has a way of revealing things that is not reducible from a language in cipher to a clear language.[37]

The parabolic form literally demonstrates the simultaneity of two worlds connected not so much by analogy as by affinity. Its quality of "immediate realistic authenticity" (Amos Wilder) is what makes this possible. Yet its realism is not a device but is fundamental to its operation as metaphor. Epiphor and diaphor, as elucidated by Philip Wheelwright,[38] identify the two interrelated aspects of metaphor so described. Epiphor achieves its meaning by expressing experience that is analogous to that of the hearer; the response is one of recognition and eventual confirmation: "Yes, that is a way of looking at things that I had not considered before, but it is certainly right." Diaphor suggests possible meanings or new experiences, producing surprise and tension, provocation, speculation, transcendence. How the parable retains its authority, by not being reducible to ordinary discourse or mere representation, and by not being subsumed by its epiphoric content, is described

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category, moves far beyond Aristotle's (and consequently Jülicher's) understanding of metahpor as the use of one word to stand for another.

[37] Ricoeur, Semeia 4, p. 115.

[38] Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality, pp. 72-86.

by Funk as a frustrating but ultimately exciting experience for the hearer:

> Its initial plausibility . . . tempts the hearer or reader to substitute another meaning, i.e., to disregard the literal thus and to allegorize. The temptation is in force because the hearer/reader assumes that the literal subject matter could not posssibly be the real subject matter. In the Parable of the Sower, for example, the equations seed=word and soils=people can be made and the literal quietly abandoned. In the parables characterized as example stories, on the other hand, the opposite temptation is in force: the reader is tempted to find the meaning in the literal sense. Classical examples are the Good Samaritan and the Pharisee and the Publican . . . But to accede to either temptation is to overlook another characteristic--that it is not merely credible.[39]

What is not "merely credible" is what Ricoeur calls the parable's "element of extravagance," that which delivers the openness of the metaphorical process from the closure of the narrative form, and vice versa.[40] It is the interplay, the tension between two ordinarily incompatible levels that makes them reciprocally revelatory. The world of the parable, as Funk says, is one where "everydayness is framed by the ultimate."

But this tension can be otherwise described as the struggle within the figurative motive itself: between what Nietzsche calls the will to power ("that impulse towards the formation of metaphor, that fundamental impulse of man, which we cannot reason away for one moment, for thereby we should reason away man himself")[41] as the

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[39]Funk, p. 158.

[40]Albert Cook describes the same dynamic in his essay from Myth and Language, publication forthcoming, "Being so dependent on a dialectical manipulation of context over against figurative signification, the parable tends at once to resist and to suggest closure."

[41]Frederich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in their [cont.]

controlling drive of metaphorizing and the digressive, undercutting movement of metonymy. Gleich machen, to make equal or like, invites a kind of sacralization, seeking to make the text or the world a totalizing, closed act asserting shared essences (Joyce, Proust). The temptation toward totalization would have us assume that the Biblical episodes in both Testaments are only so many different illustrations, all pointing to a distinct eschatology. This edifice of corresponding narratives, each one anticipating what is to come and referring back to what has already been read/said ("Thus it is written"; "You have heard it said . . . but I say unto you") subordinates the individual event to the greater pattern of eternity. Leaving micro-cosmic clues in every structure, the world (or text) need only be properly read to predict future events, the series of interlocking structures implying one another.

But is eschatology actually equivalent to such a cosmology where continuity is self-affirmation throughout all realms of existence, where nothing is fortuitous or meaningless? Certainly, even divine determination in the Bible does not exist without free play. If anything, new designs, new articulations constantly emerge; Yahweh erupts into history, creates and transforms; his presence incarnate is manifested by the very default inherent in all redundancies and by the impossibility of grasping the significance of a divine act.[42] Metonymy, identified by Louis Marin

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Ultramoral Sense," The Complete Works of Nietzsche, ed. Oscar Levy (N.Y., 1964), p. 188.

[42]This view clearly contrasts with Leach's characterization of myth, where redundancy reassures "the believer that, even when the details vary, each alternative version of a myth confirms his understanding and reinforces the essential meaning of all the others." Edmund Leach, "Genesis as Myth" from European Literary Theory and Practice, ed. Vernon Gras (New York: Delta, 1973), [cont.]

as the unique Hebrew contribution to New Testament symbolic practice,[43] displays contingency, arbitrariness, ambiguity, and association by contiguity. And although word, event and meaning all coincide in the kerygma as in some ideal act of language, interpretation is apparent from the beginning, not as compensation for any defect in the message, yet somehow intrinsic to the act all the same. For the message is no more self-evident than it was predictable. That there are those who hear/read and do not understand, in fact do not even recognize the Word, is what preserves the purpose of the parabolic message--to both reveal and obscure the incursion of the Divine into History.

That the parable <u>is</u>, however, supremely metaphorical is really the point. This can be seen not only in the way that the parable serves as a metaphor for another narrative already patently offered and designated as the literal text, but in the more profound sense that it is a narrative about metaphoricity. That of which it speaks, its object of reference, is communication, and particularly metaphorical speech. Parables describe the rules by which metaphor functions and its properties. Moreover, as we shall see, this meta-communication, of which metaphor is the vehicle, is itself metaphorized.

The penetration of the strange and the arbitrary into the commonplace of the text render it significant. The aesthetic and metaphysical effects of such strangeness are essential to the parabolic mode. "It must be felt as arising from a different plane <u>or mode of consciousness</u> . . . it must be a strangeness of meaning," pp. 317-318.

[43]Louis Marin and Claude Chabrol, <u>Le Reçit Evangelique</u> (Aubier Montaigne, Editions du Cerf, Delachaux & Niestle, [cont.]

states Barfield.[45] The wondrous unexpectedness of the parable takes many forms, sometimes overtly as a surprising development in the narrative, an extravagant exaggeration or paradox; or it may operate in a subterranean "call to judgement." The decision inherent is the choice between worlds; the parable is not the revelation of a certain mysterious content; it is above all a mode of speech where what is said counts less than how it is heard. "I will open my mouth in a parable:" rarely presented as an object of hearing and comprehension but rather as a modality of the Word. Significantly, the parable is offered as something to be heard and understood to those who are chosen (how they are chosen is a question still remaining) and who are willing to situate themselves as hearers. This dialogical context is fundamental: the narrative is not complete until the hearer is drawn into it as participant, inviting, compelling him/her to respond. The parable is implicitly dialectical, demanding both questioner and answerer. Is this parable the revealed meaning of an original Parable? If anything, it is yet another parable, offering no more than its own enunciation. The encompassing of this enunciation exceeds all expectation. No better is this expressed than in the parabolic rendering of Franz Kafka on parables:

> Many complain that the words of the wise are always merely parables and of no use in daily life, which is the only life we have. When the sage says: "Go over," he does not mean that we should cross to some actual place, which we could do anyhow if the labor were worth it; he means some fabulous yonder, something unknown to us, something too that he cannot designate more precisely, and therefore

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Deslée du Brauwer, 1974).

[25]Barfield, Poetic Diction (London: Faber & Faber, 1928), p. 171.

cannot help us here in the very least. All these parables really set out to say merely that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible, and we know that already. But the cares we have to struggle with every day: that is a different matter.

Concerning this a man once said: Why such reluctance? If you only followed the parables you yourselves would become parables and with that rid of all your daily cares.

Another said: I bet that is also a parable.

The first said: You have won.

The second said: But unfortunately only in parable.

The first said: No, in reality: in parable you have lost."

(Parables and Paradoxes)

Chapter II

INTERPRETATION

> "Quelque chose de la nature de l'interrogation passe dans la réponse." (Merleau-Ponty, Eloge de la Philosophie)

The Prologue to the Gospel of St. John fulfills the imperative that the Creation story be re-written from a new--christological--perspective, that the pre-existence of Christ as Logos be posited:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; and all things were made through Him and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was Life, and the Life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1-5)

The new perspective includes not only the creation of the world through divine speech but innovatively regards the transcendental origin of language as coexistent with being. Unlike the exposition in Genesis where the Beginning lies at Creation, the Johannine conception of Logos precedes creation and time itself. In such a meta-historical context God's self-disclosure is implicit in his very Being. He was never without self-expression and this self-expression (Logos), while distinguishable from God can never be separated from him. Creation is the primordial form of divine self-expression: the word is poesis.

Logos here is the union of light and life, illumination and revelation; its function is the that of mediator in the creation of the world, at once divine, personal, and absolute. This con-

ception of Logos identifies the pristine relation between thought and utterance and conflates two notions: 1) the Old Testament's understanding of the Word as both Word of God and Divine Wisdom as it is concretely manifested in Creation and 2) the pre-Socratic conception of Logos as immanent and transcendent meaning, as formed Eternal Mind projected into objectivity, the Rational Principle permeating all Reality.[1] But the fundamental character of this Logos has been transformed.

The point of transition in the Prologue is verse 14 ("The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us") where cosmic Logos becomes Logos incarnate: the creativity of the Father reflected in the Word of the Son. This is no radical ontological leap but the realization of that explicit teleology which motivates the structure of the Gospel and constitutes the very message of the New Testament. The Gospel of John reads differently from the Synoptics even at first glance. It is not a chronicle of the events of Jesus' life. The author himself articulates another purpose for his narration: to interpret, for his readers, Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. It is perhaps the earliest proclamation of the Christian faith. The Prologue serves a kind of hermeneutical function by situating God, History and Word in transparent relation and naming it the Primordial Event. What is described here and thus interpreted is the quest for the Word, for its articualted and manifest meaning, now fully realized in Christ. Christ, as the Word, is God's interpretation, and henceforth His absolute referent.

The Word, thus understood, is primordial and performative. As such, it bespeaks an original unity where the "what" is subor-

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[1]C. H. Dodd, The Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

dinate to the "that," the event of the Word spoken. No intellectual apprehension will facilitate hearing and responding to this primal language event: it must be experienced. But what mode of language hereafter can embody the spiritual, articulate the ineffable, incarnate meaning and not be representative or derivative of the self-expressive presence that is Logos? And how indeed is it to be understood? If we allow the Prologue to function symbolically (in order to have our theological wafer and eat it too), an awareness of such a problematic is already evident in the language of the text itself. Metaphor, intrinsic to the nature of language, is "first" treated not as a technical device or rhetorical ornament but as the means and object of metaphysical reflection. It speaks of what remains absent, gesturing towards what transcends language. It implies lack.[2]

Kenneth Burke explores this analogical relationship between logology ("words about words") and theology ("words about God"), or between words and the Word in The Rhetoric of Religion. Human speculation on the nature of the divine is an extension of the quest for "the motive of language" and both remain impenetrable mysteries. That we must seek to grasp these mysteries in terms of speech is the meta-linguistic prisonhouse of existence.

> In so far as man is the symbol-using animal, his world is necessarily imparted with the quality of the symbol, the word, the Logos, through which he conceives it.[3]

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[2]Two articles, recently published, tie in quite well with the views of this chapter regarding theology's use of metaphor. See now Kirsten Harris, "Metaphor and Transcendence," pp. 73-90 and David Tracy, "Metaphor and Religion: The Test Case of Christian Texts," pp. 91-106 in Critical Inquiry, Autumn 1978, Vol. 5, No. 1.

[3]Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 55.

Logology, as defined by Burke, is the dialectical and metaphysical realm of language, or the symbolic. In what is necessarily a hierarchical system in his view, verbal signification moves via substitution (words being the signs of things in terms of what they are not) and negativism (the making present of things that are not)[4] towards the Beyond, that which transcends the system. The dialectical progression "to ever and ever higher orders of generalization" finds its ultimate point in the God-term. Farthest removed from nature (where words name physical things), it symbolizes infusing the fragmentary with the unitary, the dialectical movement of symbolicity and all within it. At this level of signification symbolic reference is reversed: things become the sign of words, and the symbolic/transcendent realm is regarded as logically prior to all others, indeed it becomes their ground. Burke's study is engaged in the rhetorical nature of religious language and in our relationship to the word "God"; and here there is much to learn, for even the most trivial and empirical uses of language are infused with the radical and ultimate forms that constitute religious expression.

If, for Burke, language tends toward the sublime, for Heidegger it serves to mark "the ontological difference." This is the distinction between beings and Being and is the preliminary conception of phenomenology. Tracing the inner relationship between the two terms phenomenon and logos, Heidegger's meaning is "to let that which shows itself [to] be seen from itself in the

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[4]Kenneth Burke, The Rhetoric of Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 14-23.

very way it shows itself from itself."[5] The phenomenological method, necessarily descriptive, is to allow Being to manifest itself as it is, to penetrate beyond the facade of everydayness and ordinary appearance in order to lay bare, in appropriate language, that which lies concealed within the ordinary, i.e., to find Being in the midst of beings.

Initially, Husserl's phenomenology is freely used for the purpose of retrieving the foundational experience of thought and language. Since Heidegger's reflections on language have a direct bearing on the concerns of this chapter, it is well at this point to briefly present some of those ideas.[6]

Heidegger's meditation (for it is not in any rigorous sense a philosophy "of") on language aims to understand and return to the nature of language as event. His project is "to overcome metaphysics,"[7] that is, to dismantle the Western philosophical tradition and its rationalist discourse, which he regards as a

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[5]Martin Heidegger, Being and Time trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 58.

[6]Reading Heidegger is a unique experience and paraphrasing him entails complex textual questions about the nature of philosophical and poetic discourse. The reader of the Heideggerian text is confronted with obstacles at every turn. If the "how" and the "what" of his ideas do not totally cohere in a systematic way, there are profound intuitive resonances which provoke sure response. The language is densely textured; because of this I do not quote extensively but aim to provide some indicators of his thoughts on the function of language.

[7]Heidegger's relationship to this tradition is profoundly ambivalent. His denunciation of metaphysics is rather a rejection of its claim to ultimacy and regret that it has not developed its possibilities. Whether Heidegger's desire to re-appropriate the tradition is substantially different from those speculative philosophers who are his spiritual precursors is highly questionable. It is the nature of the history of philosophy that each philosopher perceive his position as a new beginning; the "anxiety of influence," if anywhere valid, is operative in philosophy.

long sequence of variations and reformulations of one basic distorted schema. He reproaches the West for its "forgetfulness" and for having, through its language, reified understanding and diverted itself from the essential philosophical question: What is Being?

It is emphasized throughout his work that Being must not be construed as a Divine Absolute nor as the sum total of beings; Being is that process by which beings unveil themselves, and it is through language that this occurs. Thus the inquiry into the essence of Being is nullified unless it renounces the language of metaphysics in which its representation is crystallized. Traditional metaphysical categories have been determined by a specific sense of Being as objective presence. Humanity, says Heidegger, must be conceived not in terms of substantial categories but in terms of existence. What is the "substance" of life is existence, the mode or modes in which human beings exist; and the task of philosophy is to find the language (we would call it parabolic) which can articulate with illumination, the ontological and existential spheres of the possible.

In a way reminiscent of the procedure in parable, thinking is not thought's expression, but thinking itself, its movement and its chant.[8] Reading Heidegger is a veritable re-cognition of words. Indeed this is our challenge and his quest: to rediscover and restore to words their potency. For Heidegger, language and thought are so close as to be almost one; the project of thinking merges into linguistic composition and both together create the

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[8]Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, and Thought trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

not yet known and evoke the long forgotten. As compared with the writings of his early phase where language is still in some measure within the confines of conventional philosophical idiom, Heidegger's later writing approaches that of oracular utterance. This is philosophy become poetry with all the problematics of translation profoundly intact.

The Heideggerian venture is pervasively etymological--a true act of deconstruction[9]--whereby words are taken apart and their root meanings attended to, a sense prior to and embedded in the particular meanings a word acquires in actual usage in varied historical contexts.

In An Introduction to Metaphysics Heidegger traces the evolution of the logos, seeking to name that point in history when its meaning was changed and its bond with being broken. Christianity is held responsible for the misinterpretation of the term, first by translating it as word from the Septuagint and secondly by investing it with those properties associated with law, commandment, judgement and doctrine. Most importantly, logos became the personal designation of Jesus Christ and was forever fixed there.

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[9]Derrida acknowledges his debt to Heidegger for the formulation of his deconstructive strategy, essentially the unmaking of a construct. Related to the philosophical exigency of having to use the resources of the heritage one questions, the practice of "sous rature" as termed by Derrida, consists of writing a word, crossing it out, and then printing both word and deletion. Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out, since it is necessary, it remains legible. Heidegger first wrote Being in this fashion in his essay "On the Question of Being": "That the transformation of the language which contemplates the essence of Being is subject to other demands than the exchanging of an old terminology for a new one, seems to be clear." (pp. 72-73) The total endeavor of deconstruction is syntactic and semantic, aiming to coax the text into betraying its own intentionality. The interpreter looks for the moment in the text when it seems to transgress its own system of values; the historical implications of such moments are more significant than the particular texts themselves.

The underlying transformation of the nature of truth from disclosure (aleithea) to adequation (the adjustment of the entity "judgement" to the entity "object") is manifested in the change of physis to idea and Logos to statement. Heidegger defines Logos as "the articulated openness within which everything is gathered";[10] "it signifies here neither meaning nor word, nor doctrine, nor the spirit of the letter, but the permanent, self-abiding, original collection of gathered . . . togetherness."[11] It would appear that the conception of logos as collection or gathering has nothing to do with its later interpretations as word, speech, reason or cosmic order, in fact little to do with speech or language at all as it is usually understood. Whether Heidegger's historical analysis can be "objectively supported" is not the question at hand; his basic premise is. Language, for Heidegger, is possibility; it is that ever-renewed event which disposes the supreme possibilities of human existence and as such grants reality truth. Logos is vested in language, it makes authentic language possible.

> The Word, the Name, restores the emerging essent from the immediate overpowering surge to its being and maintains it in its openness, delimitation and permanence. Naming does not come afterward, providing an already manifest essent with a designation and a hallmark known as a word; it is the other way around: originally an act of violence that discloses being, the word sinks from its height to become mere sign, and this sign proceeds to thrust itself before the essent. Pristine speech opens up the being of the essent in the structure of its collectedness. And this opening is collected in a second sense: the word preserves what was originally collected and so administers the overpowering power . . . Language, speech, is at the same time idle talk, a concealment rather than disclosure of being, dispersion, disorder, mis-

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[10] Martin Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 130.

[11] Ibid., p. 128.

> chief . . . All by itself the logos does not make language.[12]

For Heidegger, our greatest abuse of language, both in everyday usage and in philosophical discourse, is the setting up of propositional categories as the ultimate arbiter of truth. His departure from the traditional understanding of philosophy as the pursuit of rational knowledge is well elucidated by his interpretation of the designation "metaphorical" and its contrary "literal" and the kinds of language each is intended to represent. The literal/metaphorical opposition is but one example of the oppressive dualism through which metaphysics operates: spiritual/material, abstract/concrete, perceptual/sensible, nature/history, time/space, and so on. Yet the distinction between metaphorical and literal points to those assumptions about language and meaning most cherished by metaphysics; hence Heidegger's charge that the history of Western philosophy has, from its origins posited as ideal and proper and true a certain type of meaning and expression (literal) and opposed it to oblique or transferred sense. To extend somewhat my earlier discussion of the literal/metaphorical distinction,[13] the spectrum of thought on metaphorical language can be described in broad terms in the following way:

1) The literal meaning of metaphorical expression is non-sensical. Therefore metaphor has no cognitive but only emotive value. (positivists, e.g., Richards)

2) Metaphorical expression can be interpreted or translated as having literal meaning in one form or another, usually as an implied comparison or analogy. (in its extended versions, like parable, as well.) It thus has cognitive value, but this is emotively enhanced, not constituted, by the device of transferrence. (Aristotle)

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[12] Ibid., p. 173.

[13] See Chapter I, pp. 25-28.

3) The metaphorical does indeed have cognitive value, but not because it can be reduced to literal statement. On the contrary, its cognitive import and force lies in contravening the norms of literal statement. Metaphor is meaningful as a unique form of language because of the tension produced by a recognition in it of incompatability with literal meanings, or because it provokes a new application of words against their normal, literal use. In either case, the metaphor reveals a new way of perceiving reality; it is creative and seminal. (Ricoeur, Wheelwright, Barfield, Black)

4) Metaphor is the elemental form of language; all language is metaphorical. Literal meaning is really metaphorical under another guise, or forgotten as such.

All these theories, including the last one, depend upon the concept of the literal.[14] Only because there is an a priori notion of a literally meaningful language is there an understanding of metaphor as something other than that; and even where metaphor is accorded a kind of privileged status, as expressed in the last two points, it is conceptually derivative nonetheless. Rational thought, aiming for clear differentiation of meaning, naturally perceives its own expression as just that, direct and "proper"; and thus, depending upon the point of view, metaphor is either honorably exiled to the domaine of poetry or romanticized as a primitive moment in the history of language, one which can never be recaptured or reappropriated, only longingly referred to. Derrida, like Heidegger, believes that the history of metaphor constitutes the history of philosophy and that the very distinction between metaphorical and literal is a self-perpetuating metaphysical category. Somewhat differently than Heidegger, Derrida claims that the nostalgia for archaic speech is, in fact, not a desire

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[14]Ronald Bruzina, "Heidegger on the Metaphor and Philosophy," in Heidegger and Modern Philosophy, ed. Michael Murray (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 192-93.

for the originally metaphorical in langauge but for the literal:

> Le sens primitif, la figure originelle, toujours sensible et materiélle . . . n'est pas exactement une métaphore. C'est une sorte de figure transparent, équivalent à un sense propre. Elle devient métaphore quand le discours philosophique la met en circulation. On oublie, alors, si simultanément, le premier sens et le premier déplacement. On ne remarque plus la métaphore et on la prend pour le sens propre. Double éffacement. La philosophie serait le procés de métaphorisation qui s'importe. Par constitution, la philosophie aura toujours été fruste.[15]

The quasi-economic metaphor "fruste" is more than apt. Metaphorical language, its origins effaced, has shaped philosophical discourse. All the philosophical determinations of truth and value, and even those "outside" metaphysics (or economics), are posited as inseparable from the instance, the immediacy of Logos. Between being and thought is a relationship of conventional symbolization. The fall from the Voice of Being, universal, transparent, and eternally present to itself, in other words--Absolute Value--and the subsequent degradation and effacement of language (where there is no equivalence between signifier and signified) is that necessary process by which the "literal" is metaphorized and differentiated. Implicated in Derrida's analysis of the historical subordination of writing to speech is the distinction within language (in all of its manifestations) of which I speak above. History (and its theological version Creation) begins with the only kind of language we know, one which, whether we call it literal or metaphorical, is inferior to a logically prior one wherein truth and plenitude adhere in perfect correspondence. Literal, transparent, univocal meaning, like the moment of pure living speech, is a conceptual

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[15]Jacques Derrida, "La Mythologie Blanche" in Marges de la Philosophie (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972), p. 251.

ideal.

Heidegger's statement that "only within metaphysics is there the metaphorical"[16] is not an exclusive indictment. For in this regard, we are all metaphysicians, substance-centered and subject-dominated, pursuing meaning and knowledge through the structures made possible within our theological, ideological and philosophical systems. This is exemplified in the language we hear and speak. In his own writing, Heidegger attempts to actualize a kind of meaningful articulation that philosophy nonetheless implicitly suggests within the very category of the metaphorical. Meaningful language, says Heidegger, is beyond the metaphorical/literal distinction. It is immanent possibility, non-determinate, multivalent, projective.

The following poem by Rilke evokes the striving for such language; although not recognized by Heidegger as such, he is this philosopher's poet:

> Ein Gott vermags. Wie, aber, sag mir, soll
> ein Mann ihm folgen durch die schmale Leier?
> Sein Sinn ist Zwiespalt. An der Kreuzung zweier
> Herzwege steht kein Tempel fur Apoll.
>
> Gesang, wie du ihn lehrst, ist nicht Begehr,
> nicht Werbung um ein endlich noch Erreichtes;
> Gesang ist Dasein. Für den Gott ein Leichtes.
> Wann aber sind wir? Und wann wendet er
>
> an unser Sein die Erde und die Sterne?
> Dies ists nicht, Jüngling, dass du liebst, wenn auch
> die Stimme dann den Mund dir aufstösst,-lerne
>
> vergessen dass du aufsängst. Das verrinnt.
> In Wahrheit singen, ist ein andrer Hauch.
> Ein Hauch um nichts. Ein Wehn im Gott. Ein Wind.[17]

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[16]Martin Heidegger, Der Satz Vom Grund (Tubingen: 1957).

[17]Rainer Maria Rilke, Sonnets to Orpheus pt. 1, no. 3 (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1942).

Thinking and poetizing, for Heidegger, represent two modes of Saying, the only two that remain at the soruce of what he calls Sprache or Wort.[18] Thought has a hidden poetic character, engaging in dialogue with itself. Heidegger's vision is the retrieval of primordial questions and it is from here, in the kinship between thinking and poetry, that such movements are generated. Thus he commences from "within thought" and from "within poetry" in their established separate realms toward overcoming this dichotomy, toward a kind of enunciation that is simply such and no longer exposition, explication or definition, but language as the Saying. Yet as I have suggested, despite Heidegger's own effort to proceed otherwise, he still must depart from within the subject/object distinctions he intends to negate.

When Heidegger says that "existence is fundamentally poetic"[19] he is describing a mode and not a function. Poetry is the foundation of all art, encompassing the art of language. (Sprachkunst)[20] His reflections on poetry gradually narrow from this broad embrace to poetry in the narrow sense. Heidegger's essays on language are remarkable examples of deference: toward poetry and the poet. It is no wonder that the poet holds such a preeminent place in the philosopher's thought, for a more kindred

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[18]Sprache means in French parole as well as langage; Wort means mot as well as parole or Verbe. Heidegger's conjunction of Sprache and Wort avoids a semantic, phonetic or linguistic conception of language. In this way, the word (mot) freed from every other relation exception with itself, recovers a certain solitary splendor; and language (parole), equally liberated, recovers its "original" non-verbal and non-categorical force.

[19]Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, and Thought.

[20]Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in Poetry, Language, and Thought, p. 72.

spirit he could not find. What has often been described (usually pejoratively) as a view of language as mythical or mystical communion is Heidegger's belief that language is the "relationship of relationships," that the foundation of human existence is conversation. Conversation, the actualization of language, is not what names the gods or the world (that is the privilege of poetry) but it participates in the experience all the same.

Intrinsic to conversation, of course, is speaking, but the nature of speaking is profoundly hearing--listening to the language we speak. To understand is to hear, and the significance of hearing marks the fundamental relation of speech as overture to the world and to the other. If it is true that language can create understanding, it is all the more so in that only where such understanding already exists can language function at all. This point, it will be seen, is what the hermeneutical process is based on and what marks the special quality of parabolic speech.

Saying is of a higher value than speaking; it is the "house of Being"[21] in the sense that it protects and cherishes Being; and it is there that silence emerges into speech. The language at humanity's disposal, which it did not choose or originate, is more than a tool of expression or representation. Indeed such attitudes toward language are totally inappropriate for understanding what happens in language and only attests to the inauthenticity of which Heidegger warns us. It is not human beings who speak but language speaking through us; language is an invocation of the "between," that realm that lies between the gods and

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[21]Martin Heidegger, On the Way to Language trans. Heitz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

humanity. We speak in so far as we co-respond to language; to co-respond is to hear the call of the silent (die Stille). Our relation to langauge is not that we produce it but that we receive it and hear what it does not say. This, however, is not an elegy to silence, to the ineffable profundity of thought that lies outside of language. Heidegger maintains, unlike Wittgenstein, for example, that everything can be expressed and that we must stretch the powers of language as far as they can go. Not to retreat from elliptical or figurative language or that kind of speech which stands at the threshold of silence, but to welcome the unsayable, to point to it. Language itself--as language--is inexpressible; we must use language to transmute world[22] into word, but we cannot put language into words. Language per se transcends any single instance of itself; it remains hidden, silent, as what must be said gets said.

The quintessential conversation is poetry, for it is here that something enduring in "ravenous time" is taken hold of and fixed in the word. The nature of poetry is to name, the establishment of being by means of the word--meditative, projective, reminiscent thought. It is poetry which first makes language possible, poetic language being none other than the articulation of the primordial pre-conceptual awareness of existence. The poet, chosen to name the gods, is "involved in the most dangerous work and the most innocent of all occupations."[23] This pristine

[22]World here is not meant in the conventional sense as the aggregation of discrete objects, but phenomenologically, referring to the fundamental horizon or nexus within which consciousness apprehends and being is apprehended. This structure called "world" is there before anyone has observed or ascertained it, i.e., it is there primordially.

[23]Martin Heidegger, "Holderin and the Essence of [cont.]

and privileged notion of poetry is borrowed from Hölderlin, the poet himself. It is this aboriginal level of language that, Heidegger insists, science and metaphysics in their present preoccupations cannot reach.

And for good reason. The values which serve consumption and conquest in all of its forms are antithetical to the entire movement of Heidegger's thought. Here two significant notions must be made more explicit for they have implications not only for the scientific-technological concept of progress to which Heidegger addresses himself, but to those concomitant assumptions which underlie our acts of interpretation. The dialectical interconnection between revelation and concealment, absence and presence are intrinsic to the work of art, to language, to being. The analysis of the work of art provides the empirical basis for which Heidegger says is being's hostility to its own presentations. What we respect and revere, if you will, in the work of art is precisely its quality of self-preservation, containment, its standing-in-itself--that which resists all our attempts to represent, objectify, use and control. What we narrowly call "aesthetic contemplation" is this reserve before the mysterious. In the realm of knowledge and praxis, of course, we apply a different epistemological model. It is the nature of being and language to likewise withhold themselves against the total disclosure which is the goal of universal objectification; here, instead, we exercise domination, strive toward conceptual mastery. "As

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Poetry" in Existence and Being (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1949), p. 284.

unhidden, truth has in itself an inner tension and ambiguity";[24] the violation of this, in Heidegger's view, is history's gravest error.

This notion is directly related to radical subjectivity, that concept of self-hood which Heidegger claims must be driven from its imperious position in Western philosophy. Not only is the human not the measure of all things, it is not primary in its relation to being; the human is only in so far as it is addressed by being, and through thought and language, participates in its event. Hence for Heidegger the fundamental relation is not that of the human to itself (i.e., its self-consciousness, its subjectivity, its cogito) but its relation to and immersion in the recurrent happening of being in which the world manifests itself. Thinking has an ontological status which transcends human intentionality and purpose. Our acts of interpretation are not self-founding, as the modern emphasis on methodology and manipulation implies, but rather presuppose an orientation and dependence on a language-mediated reality. As we experience in the parabolic process, this is a reality which emerges and then eludes our grasp, and is not known and conformed to rational certainty.

Word, thought and language are the inextricably related structural aspects of being-in-the-world. The convergence of language and understanding is the first premise of hermeneutics. Language is not one of the means by which consciousness is mediated in the world; it is the medium, by which, through which, we understand. There is no human condition without language.

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[24] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 227.

> Language is by no means simply an instrument or a tool. For it belongs to the nature of the tool that we master its use, which is to say we take it in hand and lay it aside when it has done its service. That is not the same as when we take the words of a language, lying already in the mouth, and with their use let them sink back into the general store of words over which we dispose. Such an analogy is false because we never find ourselves as consciousness over against the world, and, as it were, grasp after a tool of understanding a wordless condition. Rather, in all our knowledge of ourselves and in all knowledge of the world, we are always already encompassed by the language which is our own.[25]

The absolute linguisticality of experience for hermeneutics cannot be emphasized enough: life itself is interpretation. In this sense we can say with Heidegger that philosophy is the interpretation of interpretations. Hermeneutics, in its traditional conception, is the art or science of interpretation, especially that of Scripture, the theory of which exegesis is the practice. From this restricted definition of providing the rules for proper interpretation has evolved the contemporary, more comprehensive, perspective of explicating the conditions for the very possiblity of understanding in all of its modes--especially those conditions "that constitute understanding as an event over which the interpreting subject does not ultimately preside."[26]

Paul Ricoeur, on the threshold of his magisterial interpretation of the symbolic via Freud, describes the polarized oppositions from which modern hermeneutics operates. He perceives the present crisis of language as the tension between two motivations, one toward restoration of meaning, the other toward its demystification.

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[25]Ibid., pp. 62-63.

[26]Ibid., editor's introduction, p. xi.

> According to one pole, hermeneutics is understood as the manifestation and restoration of a meaning addressed to me in the manner of a message, a proclamation . . . a kerygma; according to the other pole, it is understood as a demystification, as a reduction of illusion.[27]

As I initially expressed in the discussion of the Parable of the Sower in Chapter I and attempt to convey throughout this study, a recognition of this tension has always been at the heart of the interpretative effort. Not endemic to the modern period but inherent in language from its genesis, we need only examine its "simplest" forms to see that no text, no mode of discourse is exempt from ambiguity or dispossession of meaning; and that this recognition is already a demystification.

Now within Christian interpretation, the kerygma is the theological paradigm for what the living voice can accomplish. In this ideal coalescence of thought and presence, there is no difference between utterance and expectation, expectation and fulfillment. What constitutes the address as such are two salient interrelated factors: its divine Source and the totalizing presence accorded the spoken word. The Greeks acknowledged the dark side of divine communication--hence the role of Hermes and his interceptor, language. Christian theology has had to elaborate numerous strategies for the rationalization of the ambiguity inherent in God's Word. This is by no means easy since Christian dogma defines itself as the doctrine of the Word of God. Thus its primary strategy perpetuates the belief that the Word is absolutely, eternally

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[27]Paul Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 27. This is a motif running through much of Ricoeur's discussion of hermeneutics beginning with Le Conflit des Interprétations and continuing in his La Metaphore Vive.

self-Presence, but that in its transmission to the text (Scripture) it is clearly alienated from its primordial power (though not its truth) and something essential is lost. Interpretation is then charged with the crucial task of restoring to the authoritative text the immediacy of its claim to meaning. But already the first emanation of the Word is that of thought not achieved.[28]

Ricoeur's presentation of these two motivations--the salutory and the suspicious--provides an excellent entree for another conflict which functions correlatively in hermeneutic theory: that between speech and writing. These are significant oppositions and will be further explored. Ricoeur's first reference is to the kerygma, the Word proclaimed and fulfilled in its immediacy.

The "absence" which informs writing (and reading) is that which is ostensibly "present" in speech. Yet the trace of meaning always lingering, the postponement of realization, the lack of closure, the disparity between intuition and expression is no less a part of speaking and hearing than of writing and reading. Both are modes of linguistic experience, of ontological understanding, of reality as we know it. The word is already a text.

Thus "hermeneutics has its origins in breaches of inter-subjectivity":[29] this tension is what constitutes all acts of understanding and points to that "between" realm where meaning and apprehension of meaning emerge. Broaching the distance between

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[28]The hermeneutical function as defined by theology is not to compensate for a deficiency of the Word but to facilitate its understanding. There is an implied distinction between Word as promise and Word as means of communication; the stress is on the ability of the hearer to comprehend either aspect of the message. Faith supplies the missing link.

[29]Philosophical Hermeneutics, p. xii.

interpreter and text was understood by Schliermacher in the early 1800's as a psychological phenomenon, involving the reconstruction of the mental processes of the author, the concrete expression of which is the text itself. Almost a century later, Dilthey, in a monumental effort to explain the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) by formulating one methodology common to all understanding, sought the principle in the historicality of existence.[30] This is Heidegger's point of departure. His discovery of the ontological significance of understanding was a major turning point in hermeneutical theory.[31]

The implications of the Heideggerian ontology for aesthetics and textual interpretation are fully explored and illuminated by his student Georg Gadamer in his ironically titled Truth and Method.

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[30]As such it presupposed distance but also the possibility of piercing through it. [Dilthey, Pattern and Meaning in History.]

> Interpretation would be impossible if expressions of life were completely strange. It would be unnecessary if nothing strange were in them. It lies, therefore, between these two extremes. It is always required where something strange is to be grasped through the act of understanding.

That this historicism proved to be a form of idealism in itself only insured the resurgence of hermeneutics as a vital field of inquiry.

[31]A profound analysis of the decisive reversal in interpretation which took place in 18th century theology and Biblical scholarship is to be found in Hans Frei's Eclipse of Biblical Narrative. There he describes the breakdown (eclipse) of Biblical narrative in terms of realistic and historical validity and the consequent search for an extra-Biblical frame of reference. This new criteria for meaning in truth culminated in Schliermacher's view of understanding as located in the reader's communion with the author of the text. The distinction between the question of truth and that of meaning is where the historical-cultural method and Biblical hermeneutics finally parted company.

This study begins with Heidegger. To acquire a broader and deeper historical perspective of hermeneutics since Dilthey and Schliermacher see The New Hermeneutic ed. James Robinson and John Cobb. The first chapter provides an exhaustive explanation of the New Hermeneutic's roots. See also Hermeneutik-RGG, Gerhard Ebeling. (Vol. III)

What Gadamer calls "philosophical hermeneutics" is the universality of the phenomenon of understanding, designating the "basic movement of human existence, made up of its finitude and historicality."[32] This task is ontological and not methodological, hence the irony of the title: method cannot lead to truth. This ontological turn of hermeneutics leads to the dissolution of hermeneutics as a special art or methodology; the theory of understanding becomes the central philosophical problem even for hermeneutics.

What is suggested by Heidegger is carried out by Gadamer. The interpretative situation, dialogical and dialectical, is not the normally operative subject-object schema. The subject-matter of the text, in fact, poses the question to which the interpreter must respond, as in parable; and the goal is again phenomenological: to have the thing or being encountered reveal itself.

Where to start? With Heidegger's analysis of the pre-structure of understanding and the intrinsic historicality of existence. Our understanding of a given text or situation is a function of certain pre-conceptions or preliminary intentions which come into play in all such interactions. Pre-understanding (Vorverständnis) is an interpretation of a relationship which existed prior to its becoming conscious. The very structure of understanding thus presumes that wherever understanding occurs, some prior relationship to what is understood will have existed. There can be no presuppositionless interpretation and therefore no "blank" auditor of a parable.

Time, according to Gadamer, is not to be regarded as a gulf that must be bridged because it separates. On the contrary,

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[32]Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode (Tubingen: [cont.]

history is comprehended only through a consciousness rooted in the present; we have no other point of reference. The past and present are not discrete. The concept of historicality simultaneously affirms the continally operative connection of past to present. History is not an object to be assimilated and historical distance is not something that must be overcome. We inhabit neither closed horizons nor a unique one. To the extent that the fusion of horizons excludes the idea of a total and unique knowledge, the concept of historicality implies the tension between the self and the alien, and therefore the play of difference is encompassed in their coming together. History and language are interfused; whereas for a historian language is in history, one could say that for Gadamer history is in language. The fundamental category, then, is historicity--we are always temporally and historically situated. Both are essential features of the famous hermeneutic circle, not to be transcended but affirmed. The structure of interpretation is circular.

> What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way. This circle of understanding . . . is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing.[33]

The Cartesian ideal of the autonomous subject implicit in Schliermacher and Dilthey is one which posits a disentanglement of history from the situation of the interpreter, aiming for the dissolution of one's subjectivity. But for Gadamer one's prejudices are productive.

Mohr, 1960), preface, xvi.

[33]Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, pp. 194-95.

> Prejudicies are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicality of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are the biases of our openness to the world.[34]

Restoring prejudice to its positive conception, lost since the Enlightenment, is one of the most provocative, and understandably, controversial aspects of his philosophy. For Gadamer, the past has a truly pervasive power in the phenomenon of understanding, a power missed by philosophers before Heidegger. The past, conceived as both prejudice and tradition, also defines the horizon the interpreter occupies in understanding. One's own historicity must be integrated. Thus understanding is not reconstruction but mediation. It is a manifestation of our historicity that there can be no apprehension of the text "in itself," nor should we strive toward such objectivity since "reflection on a given pre-understanding brings before me something that otherwise happens behind my back."[35] An index of the dialectic of participation and distancing is "the fusion of horizons." This is Gadamer's description of the process whereby the interpreter's present situation loses its privileged status and becomes instead a moment in the life of history. This too, no matter how revelatory, will be overcome and fused with future horizons, as have all others before it. It is in the formation of a comprehensive horizon in which the limited horizons of text and interpreter are fused into a common regard for the subject matter that meaning

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[34] Philosophical Hermeneutics, p. 9.

[35] Ibid., p. 38.

converges. The past in this sense is an inexhaustible source of possibilities of meaning, not a passive object of investigation.

Thus the interpretative process more closely resembles a dialogue or game in which two players are involved than mastery of an object by a subject. The dialogical character of interpretation is subverted unless the interpreter genuinely opens him/herself to the text and responds to what it says, allowing prejudices to be challenged into a critical self-awareness. The text is an address; when the interpreter locates its question understanding begins in a dialectic of back and forth questioning between text and interpreter, again of the sort that parable quite pointedly offers. One must risk a certain vulnerability, an engagement in dialogue which can carry one beyond one's present situation. From each hermeneutical experience something new will be revealed.

> The real event of understanding goes continually beyond what can be brought to the understanding of the other person's words by methodological effort and critical self-control. It is true of every conversation that through it something different has to come to be.[36]

What is essential to interpretation, like playing a game, is the movement in which the participants are caught, not any particular goal. The real subject of playing is the game itself.[37]

All interpretation is contextually constrained, since

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[36] Ibid., p. 58.

[37] In answer to the possible objection that a mute cannot offer a dialogue, Gadamer narrows the speech/writing distinction. He maintains that the dialectic of estrangement and rapprochement operates in every linguistic encounter. Any arbitrary impositions upon the text will be exposed in the interpretative process, thus, through what amounts to dialogue.

there is no interpretation without relationship to the present, and this is never permanent or fixed. On the other hand, the text itself transcends all the varying interpretations through which it is transmitted. The interplay of past and present belongs to its ontological possibilities; the text cannot be reduced to any interpretation by author or interpreter. There is no canonical interpretation of a text or work of art; rather they remain open to ever-renewing comprehension.

> Every time will have to understand a text handed down to it in its own way, for it is subject to the whole of the tradition in which it has a material interest and in which it seeks to understand itself. The real meaning of a text as it addresses the interpreter does not depend on the occasional factors which characterize the author and his original public. For it is always co-determined by the historical situation of the interpreter and by the whole of the objective course of history . . . The meaning of a text surpasses its author not occasionally, but always. This understanding is not a reproductive procedure, but rather always also a productive one . . . It suffices to say that one understands differently when one understands at all.[38]

Consequently the concept of truth is defined historically in Gadamer. It is impossible to conceive of the "unity of truth" as the timeless identity of a given text or of its subject matter--it can be grasped only as the totality of a historical process. Gadamer's pronounced indifference to techniques and methodologies of interpretation shifts the whole hermeneutical concern to another conceptual plane. It is ultimately to the question of language again that interpretation speaks. The two are the same. Understanding is of essence linguistic, so much so that it transcends the sphere of any particular language as it

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[38] Wahrheit und Methode, p. 280.

mediates between the familiar and the strange. Gadamer's argument against the claims of linguistic relativism is that language, in its life as conversation, tests the limits of convention and moves between sedimented meanings and usages and the impulse toward new expression. Language is wholly translation, creative but not ideolectic. This is its self-preserving characteristic.

> The task of understanding and interpreting always remains meaningful. In this is demonstrated the superior universality with which reason is elevated above the limits of every given system of language. The hermeneutical experience is the corrective through which thinking reason escapes the power of the linguistic even while it is itself linguistically constituted.[39]

The strong parallels between Heidegger and Gadamer are most evident in their corollary conceptions of being and tradition: both are disclosed in language. The function of hermeneutics, as seen by Gadamer, is to bring to language the evoked but heretofore unarticulated possibilities latent in history's address. Every historical situation demands and elicits new attempts to render the world into language. The hermeneutic experience is this encounter between tradition (or heritage) in the form of a transmitted text and the horizon of the interpreter. Language, in such a context, is not a prison-house but an open field allowing infinite expansion and comprehension through history.

The transition to the New Hermeneutic is only natural when the problem of understanding Scripture is reformulated through the resources provided by Heidegger.[40] As diverse as the

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[39]Ibid., p. 58.

[40]The principle figures in the New Hermeneutic movement are Rudolf Bultmann, Ernst Fuchs, and Gerhard Ebeling. All three thinkers are dependent on Heidegger's understanding of language, but Bultmann is said to be a disciple of the early Heidegger, [cont.]

pursuits often appear, the predominant question of interpretation, the relation of language to existence and the Word of God and faith as its response, are presumed by all of Heidegger's followers. How to find valid contemporary meaning in a text considered dogma for over 2000 years? The credibility, indeed the relevance, of the Biblical basis for faith is perhaps the key question in Christian theology today. The structures of the quest may vary but what seems to be at stake is the role of history in any theological account of language and its truth value. Another configuration of this same problem as elucidated by Fuchs[41] is the question about the communicability of revelation. What that revelation is and how it can be communicated (if it can) is crucial to the New Hermeneutic; and any "secular" reflection on the mystery of language is implicitly concerned with this question as well. This, of course, is the fascination of the parable.

What, for the New Hermeneutics, is the ultimate object of interpretation and what is the point of reference? The spectrum of thought on this question from Bultmann, who conceives the role of the interpreter and his/her self-understanding as subordinate to the purpose of interpreting the text, to Fuchs is broader than one might expect. Fuchs believes that the text in turn interprets the interpreter so that the traditional heuristic function of interpretation is extended into a criticism of one's own self-understanding in terms of the text's address. In this way the interpreter's self-understanding is not merely the pre-understanding in the hermeneutical process but the goal of that process.

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whereas Fuchs and Ebeling are influenced by the later Heidegger.

[41] Hermeneutik (Stuttgart: R. Mullerschön, 1963).

He calls this concept the "hermeneutical principle";[42] it is that with which the text is confronted to call forth from itself. At this juncture, where the focus moves from interpretation of the text to the confrontation between text and interpreter another divergence is evident. Whereas for Bultmann the unique point of reference is existence, for Fuchs it is language, and to so far an extent as to call the New Hermeneutic "faith's doctrine of language." The evolution of terminology mirrors this change: the previousely termed "saving event" becomes "word event" (Ebeling) and "language event" (Fuchs). It would seem that faith is here subsumed by its expression, but the nature of word and language are understood to be less speech than act. The line is certainly blurred but the implications will become clear.

Word event is comprehensive; it embraces both linguistic tradition and encounter with reality but stresses the conditioning relation of the former upon the latter. What resonates strongly in such an evocation of "word" is, of course, God's Word. We find ourselves asking again if there is a radical distinction between word in its human form and its divine model. In present theological terms, the question finds its resolution in the Prologue to the Gospel of John. When "the Word became flesh," the word became event in so complete a sense that Word and human, in the figure of Christ, became one. That conjunction, still unrealized, between God, word, faith and future creates for Ebeling the

> urgency to search for that word which is a true, necessary, salutary, remedial, and therefore unequivocal and crystal clear word, for the word which, because it accords with man's destiny,

[42] Ibid., pp. 103-118.

> corresponds to God, that is the search for the word by means of which one man can speak God to another so that God comes to man and man comes to God.[43]

What is different in the above passage from the traditional theological explanation of the search for God is the interpretation of the Word. The "unequivocal and crystal clear" meaning sought belongs in/to language itself and not to a realm outside it or beyond it. Exegesis, defined as explanation and clarification, demanded the overcoming of the objectification of language; it is no longer considered the necessary prelude to hermeneutic. Hermeneutics is now seen to be directly possible, for language is regarded positively "as an interpretative proclamation of that meaning and hence as an indispensable access to it.[44] The word itself is mediator of understanding, it has a hermeneutical function. The interpreter is now situated in the midst of a divine action of word event still moving toward its term, rather than at the point of eschatalogical decision in response to a word already finally spoken. Rhetorically, this is not so paradoxical as it seems. Replacing Bultmann's kerygma with word event reflects a transition in historical perspective, stressing no longer a perfect point in the past but the recurrent event of language as Wordpresence. The confusion generated by this change in rhetoric continues as contemporary theology struggles toward re-definition of its aims.

Everything in the New Hermeneutic testifies that the word has precedence over the text and that faith is contained therein.

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[43]Gerhard Ebeling, "Word of God and Hermeneutic" (from Word and Faith) in The New Hermeneutic, p. 104.

[44]The New Hermeneutic, p. 7.

Faith is the central over-arching category yet never clearly defined. It seems to provide the answer to the eternally circular primordial question of the self: what is its relation to faith? Equally disturbing is the implicit assumption that language itself is not problematic, if it is properly understood. This homogenization of history, language and existence, is indeed an oversimplication. (Heidegger and Gadamer have not been utilized to their best advantage, but to theology's.) In its fervor to restore the power of immediacy to the text, the original question of hermeneutics--how are we to understand texts that do not speak directly to us--has been glossed over.

It is not that the New Testament presumes faith in the interpreter for it to be understood; if that were true, then interpretation, whose intention it is to call to faith, would not be needed. Rather in the same way that the Gospel was written for non-believers and believers alike, it is assumed that the interpreter is estranged from him/herself and that the Scripture will summon forth that faith still unrecognized within. Interpretations opens the way for the decision about the self contained in faith. This is the proclamation and together with its response forms the language event. The function of the text, finally, is to proclaim the Word, the function of interpretation to help that come to pass.

The type of discourse which epitomizes this langauge event and provides the most desirable model for hermeneutical inquiry is, not surprisingly, the parable. The most provocative problems and issues raised by the New Hermeneutic are concentrated in parabolic interpretation. This resurgence of interest in the

parable and language in interpretation within Biblical studies has also prompted adventurous theologians to look to other disciplines and methodologies for new resources. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, structuralist[45] theory's special application to myth and other forms of oral narrative, and its strong interest in genre, have provided sophisticated tools of analysis for theological investigations. Understanding parables in terms of other embedded narratives, with the aids of linguistics and anthropology, have offered a means for decoding not only the layers of a specific parabolic text but for unearthing the sedimented network which supports it.

In the introduction to the first volume of Semeia, the editors identify their pursuit as "the dynamics of human speech and communication, language modes and patterns, the apperception of hearer or reader, the social-cultural nexus of all language phenomena, and the relation of language to referent and

[45]Structuralism itself in need of new narrative models, had found Biblical texts to be prime objects of analysis. This convergence of interests has produced several exciting seminars and an experimental Biblical journal entitled Semeia [(Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1974-5). For some reason unknown to me only four issues have appeared.], among whose contributors and participants were prominent American theologians and French scholars such as Paul Ricoeur and Louis Marin. Abroad Roland Barthes, Claude Chabrol and Marin collaborated on several works as well. The experiments have been extremely interesting, but from the theological viewpoint, the analysis of parables à la Greimas or Propp has dubious long-range value. Evident in these attempts, as well, is a certain element of mauvaise foi; manipulation of a certain method or technique does not a convert make. Yet, as the reign of structuralism has passed, interest has been sustained by continuing research in semiotics. [See Semiology and Parables ed. Daniel Patte (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1976).] At basis, there is a "conflict of interpretations," one that surfaces throughout the apparent synthesis of approaches. For theologians to utilize structuralist methods is one thing, to assume the inherent ideology is quite another. While the neglect of semantics and history has long been pointed out as structuralism's lacunae, theologians have, ironically, been more accomodating in practice and uncertain in theory, struggling to keep such con- [cont.]

reality."[46] Couched in such universal terms are the essential goals of Biblical research: the structure of the reader's interaction with the text and the process of his/her efforts to find it meaningful. This is something that a phenomenology of reading is better prepared to explore. Theology cannot allow meaning to float indeterminately, to reside autonomously within a system of signs having no reference to the world nor particularly needing a subject to originate them.

In general the change of emphasis represented by theology's overture to structuralism may be described as the shift from "questions of document, composition, and kerygma to reading, text, and signification";[47] implicit is the conviction that description will lead to an understanding of function and eventuate in a clear delineation of meaning. The last is not a self-proclaimed goal of structuralist activity. Yet if a fusion of structuralist tools and hermeneutical insight is to take place, the moment may be at hand. Distinctions are fast breaking down as evidenced by a certain filiation between Derrida and Gadamer, for example, and by the work of Ricoeur[48] and Marin who are testing the classic sign/symbol antinomy which is at the heart of the structuralist-hermeneutic debate. From this intersection of interpretative theories could emerge the kind of framework that a study of the modern

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siderations separate.

[46] Semiology and Parables, p. 4.

[47] Interpretation, 28 (April 1974) no. 2.

[48] The well known controversy between Lévi-Strauss and Ricoeur over the question of "structure vs. évènement" took place in 1963 and was published as "Structure et Hermeneutique: Réponses a Quelques Questions" in Esprit 31.

parable necessitates. Such a perspective has been the concern of the present chapter.

The parable conjoins the rhetorical and poetic functions of language, demonstrating that thus considered "mystery is a major source of persuasion."[49] The mystery lies in the conjunction, in the intimation of that genuine change of heart or metanoia reminiscent of Rilke's "Du Musst dein Lebenëindern." The strategy of discourse (disorientation) implied in parabolic language is neither to further communication nor to insure univocity of belief but to question one's sense of the world by fracturing language, thus suggesting a radicalization of human possibility. The parabolic text epitomizes the collusion of the metaphorical and the metaphysical: the relation of the knowledge/faith of both narrator and interpreter to the text is crucial here.

In the parable narrative form and a specific normative content are linked through a metaphorical process. The question recurs: for what end? In traditional theological terms, the parabolic process includes moments of confrontation, doubt, even negation, but only in order to serve those moments of identity and analogy which perforce equate the discourse of the text with the discourse of the interpretation. What is rhetorically suspect in investigations of the Biblical parable will prove equally disquieting in the case of the modern literary parable. That which is communicated through the parabolic context is the experience of the revelation at the expense of what it is. For the revelation, in both Biblical and modern parable, is in no way fully compre-

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[49]Kenneth Burke, "Mysticism as a Solution to the Poet's Dilemma" in Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature (Harper & Bros., N.Y. & London: 1952), p. 105.

hensible. The power of the parable lies in the dialectical tension between a certain primordial, experiential knowledge on the one hand, and a suspension or challenge of that knowledge on the other, opening up the space of speculative thought and pushing it to a higher point of reflection. There is a joyful perversity about parabolic discourse. As extended metaphor, it assumes community as the basis for its reception but then exploits it in order to preserve difference: difference between a "simple" mode of narration and its perceptible meaning, between narrator and interpreter, and ultimately between language and reality.

Every text carries within it the configuration of a general meaning as the scene of a certain ideology made fiction, given to be understood as figure or symbol. But in the case of the parable the operation is inverted in order to posit a transcendental ideology as the possibilities or conditions of the narrative. The interpretative constraints are most powerful in the parable because the narrative is interpreted in the text by its own "explicit" discourse. But because this "explicit" discourse itself demands interpretation, and because the parable does not function in an exhaustive sense in the way that allegory does, the primary interpretative constraints are undermined and de-centered, giving way to multiple signification. Perhaps, then, it is less a question of a form or mode endowed with a great degree of interpretative latitude than of a mode which <u>is itself the figure of multiple interpretation</u>.

Coexisting here are interpretative possibilities, not as juxtaposed, already realized hermeneutics, but as options and eventual realizations of very different readings. This is why Fuchs insists

that the parable is not meant to be interpreted, but to interpret. The language of parable thinks through Metaphor but never beyond.

Chapter III

AGNON

> "'It is and is not' signifies, not that something exists, as it were, only partially, but that its existence is of exquisitely spiritual nature and cannot therefore be properly described."
>
> Gershom Scholem

A contemporary Israeli author, A. B. Yehoshua, offers an incisive commentary upon the relationship of Hebrew speakers to their langauge and its positive reflection of the world:

> Everyone here is involved with symbols. In their enthusiasm for symbols, Jerusalemites think of themselves as symbols, so they speak in symbolic fashion and in symbolic language. They walk symbolically and they meet each other symbolically. Sometimes when a bit feeble-minded they think that the sun, the wind, and the heaven over their city are nothing but symbols, demanding thought.[1]

The fictional narrator of the passage is not himself exempt from this critique; indeed he proves to be even more prone to over-symbolization than the characters he is describing. The writing self becomes the self who is written, a symbolic inhabitant of a world where words articulate fateful questions which are ultimately reflexive rather than referential. Herein lies the irony, and the real issue at hand: how to escape the inevitable, how to cast off Hebrew's inbuilt sacred meanings?

To partake of the mythical and mystical naming power latent in everyday life is to discover the nature of identity between words and world. For the Kabbalist, for example, nowhere

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[1] "Shlosha yamim v hayeled" ("Three Days and the Child"), trans. Miriam Arad (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), p. 4.

are the intimations of the secrets of the universe greater than in the mysteries of language. The Kabbalah believes in the occult meaning of the letter, the presence of God in the sign of his word. Indeed, God creates his world out of the 22 letters of the alphabet and the 10 cardinal numbers, hence making the world a text. Each written character is regarded as embodying a fragment of the universal design of creation. All human experience until the end of time is inscribed in the letters of this alphabet.

It is not to some abstract, pre-historical tongue that the divine names and the letters from which they are composed belong, but to Hebrew:

> Language in its purest form, that is, Hebrew . . . reflects the fundamental spiritual nature of the world . . . Speech reaches God because it comes from God . . . All that lives is the expression of God's language.[2]

In the Kabbalist tradition Hebrew was believed to be God's unique idiom, though human beings no longer understood its full, esoteric meaning. Throughout 3,000 years of uninterrupted written use for predominantly religious purposes, Hebrew has retained its signification as not merely a langauge (לשון) but the Holy Language (לשון הקדש). This legacy of Hebrew's divine grammar endows it with a self-conscious ontological status different from any living language that we know. According to the Kabbalah, God created Adam with the word אמת, meaning truth, inscribed on his forehead. When the initial aleph, which contains the entire mystery of God's hidden name and the speech act whereby he called the universe into being, is erased what remains is מת, or death.

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[2]Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (N.Y., 1961).

When in the late 18th Century, the movement of modern Hebrew literature arose, it was "with a turning toward the sanctified verbal formulas of ancient literary tradition, in the belief that the purity of the Biblical style was necessarily the vehicle of truth."[3] Despite its grave limitations of ornate style and rigid syntax, the language of the Bible was considered both a model of aesthetic perfection and an instrument through which the plenitude of the cosmos could be apprehended.

This is all the more interesting when it is realized that this literary resurgence was fundamentally secular and in absolute antithesis to the direction taken by European literature at that time, which tended toward narrowing the gap between literary language and the language of everyday experience. The emergence of modern Hebrew literature certainly signified a social and economic revolution (not unlike the way the rise of the novel documents a rising bourgeoisie) but the realities it had to embrace were of another order.

Generated by the European Enlightment, the movement represented progressive cosmopolitan assumptions about a radically evolving ideal of the Jewish people and its relation to modern culture as well as to its own exclusive history. For the first time putting Hebrew to literary use was an ideological act. The self-appointed name for this period which extended roughly from 1781-1881 is Haskalah, meaning understanding or education.[4]

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[3]Robert Alter, "Hebrew Literature and the Paradox of Survival" in After the Tradition (N.Y.: Dutton & Co., 1969), p. 79.

[4]For fuller explanations see the introduction to Alter's Modern Hebrew Literature (New York: Behrman House, 1975) or Simon Halkin's Modern Hebrew Literature: Trends and Values (N.Y.: [cont.]

Indeed its didactic, rhetorical character cannot be exaggerated. How can/should Jews expand their horizons, participate in and contribute to worldly life, be universally cultured and still preserve a Jewish consciousness? This was their dilemma and the nature of their crusade.

Yiddish connoted remembrances of the ghetto and a form of self-rejection; German would have meant total assimilation and renunciation of a Jewish distinctiveness that these emancipated intellectuals were yet striving to retain. The choice of Hebrew as their medium of expression--a language which had not flourished in the vernacular since Biblical days--symbolized an effort to change the social and cultural definition of a people, to shape history.

The strident optimism of this idealized definition of a modern emancipated Jew was articulated in a pastoral, effusive poetry. The prose reflected another side of the gulf which separated the visionary from the real. Biting satire was its mode; and its objects were the masses of cloistered traditional Jews who remained so, it was believed, not by circumstances, but by choice.

In general this literature was characterized far more by earnestness than by originality or artistic accomplishment. It was not until the late 19th Century that Hebrew literature really came into its own. The expansive, humanistic premises of the Haskalah were no longer relevant in the face of an increasingly prevalent doctrine of anti-Semitism in Eastern and Central Europe. Thus arose penitent, almost Romantic stirrings of identification with the Jewish people and with historical Judaism. This took

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Schocken, 1950).

the form of an incipient nationalism for some--a sort of proto-Zionism--and for others a renewed interest in folk and popular art. But this was a rather desperate retreat; for it was clear by then that no such return was possible.

The previous didactic concerns gave way to existential ones, to introspective self-confrontation, to questions of alienation and authenticity, to fears of collective dissolution. Yet this strange new context of tradition-bound Jewry, thrust onto a scene where it had no role, produced some exciting and complex experiments with literary form: the most significant was the first Hebrew novel.[5]

Into such a ferment of ideals--Zionist, Socialist, anarchist and Messiah-millenialists--was born Schmuel Yosef Czaches (later Agnon)[6] who would become Israel's most peculiarly original writer and its most insistent link with those ancestral patterns left behind. Agnon was born in 1888 in Buczacs, Galicia. The city of his birth and the world of his childhood assume symbolic significance in his work, functioning as one of the two foci of his literary powers, Jerusalem being the other. At the age of eighteen and already a prolific, published author in his hometown, he left for Palestine. Agnon was a cultural and linguistic anomaly among the labor-oriented pioneers of the Second Aliyah.[7] In spirit he belonged to the East-European intellectuals whose

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[5]Abraham Mapu, Love of Zion.

[6]He adopted the pen name "Agnon" upon the publication of his first Jaffa story, "Agunot," in 1908. He evidently perceived an inner relationshp between these doomed wanderers and himself.

[7]This wave of immigration in the early 20th Century is distinguished by its pioneer zeal.

ideals were more embodied in subjective and elusive hopes of historical fulfillment than grounded in political, economic, or religious dogma. Like those who preceded him and forged the Hebrew literary revival, he did not arrive in the new community and as a result begin to write fiction in Hebrew. Rather it was partly as a result of Hebrew literary activity in 19th Century Russia and Poland that the fantastic notion was conceived of re-establishing a Hebrew speaking culture on its native ground.

Agnon conclusively reversed that revolutionary trend of asserting Jewishness through language and universalism through content which marked the Haskalah movement and by which we first identify the influences of European modernism upon Hebrew literature. There are, of course, perceptible affinities with the creators of modernism, particularly in the way that historical change and cultural decay are experienced and communicated; but Agnon's particular intimacy with Jewish tradition informs the whole of his oeuvre to the exclusion of wider concerns.

Agnon's verbal and conceptual vision is formed from traditional and Aramaic sources: the Bible and its rabbinic commentaries, the Talmud, the Midrash, medieval Jewish philosophy, the Kabbalah and Hassidic tradition of more recent times. His "Classical" Hebrew (late Rabbinic) has a predominantly medieval flavor, strongly reminiscent of the Mishnah and Midrash (Rabbinic law and Scriptural commentary respectively), especially of the latter. The Hebrew of the Midrash, in contrast with Biblical language which was the medium of the Haskalah, has a sober and simple style, carefully understated, deliberately restrained. Distinguished by a singular stillness, by the absence of pathos

or exaltation, it is endowed with a peculiar lyric grace which suggests both an archaic purity and a familiar functionalism. Like the Midrasic collection, which is an extended narration on Biblical themes, Agnon's writings are engaged in an analogous rhetorical method of connecting symbolic themes of apparently disparate concerns, of interfusing the legal and legendary, the moral and mystical for pointed, poignant effect.

The allusive mode, while long a standard Hebrew literary practice, in Agnon provokes a kind of ironic tension that is perceived in the self-conscious discrepancy between "the reminiscence of lofty spiritual ideals in the langauge and the fallen nature of the world which the language describes."[8] And indeed language as a positive vehicle of truth often betrays the substance or content of his stories. Suggesting that everything is implicitly an intricate commentary on everything else, the mode thus assumes an eternally divined present, and glosses over temporal, spatial and generic differences. This permits Agnon to generate symbols of ambiguous purpose within a set context.

For example, two fundamental Jewish symbols, exile (גלות) and redemption (גאולה), the former a theological category as well as an historical experience, the latter endowed with messianic associations of longing and expectation, can alternately or simultaneously express serenity and rootlessness, alienation and fulfillment. The negative connotations of life in the Diaspora, of persecution and dispossession, are balanced by the wholeness and order of that sanctified collective past. Palestine (Zion), the focus and realization of hopes and dreams nurtured throughout

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[8] After the Tradition, p. 196.

thousands of years in exile, then comes to signify loss, disintegration, disillusionment, chaos. Despite Agnon's attempt to sustain a vision of universal stability and redemptive purposefulness in either world--past or present--there is a yearning and desolation that subverts the teleological serenity of a pattern of "natural" transition. Those who seek redemption still somehow live out another form of exile.

This is not to imply that a character of Agnon's is ever perceived distinct from a larger traditional or communal context; emotional as well as moral and social values are always judged against a universal concept of moral order within an implicit logic of events. This coherent world-view forms an organic part of all Jewish writing and Agnon's village panoramas fall comfortably into the schema. His fictional figures are the direct descendants of a view of life inherent in Scriptural narrative, prophetic writing and Wisdom literature:

> And even during times of adversity, Menashe Hayim and his wife did not despair of mercy, and their trust in God was very great, that He would deliver them from trouble in time. Because there is nothing that can stand against Trust, as they say in the congregation of the Hasidim.[9]

As the above passage indicates quite explicitly, the individual experience is always related to some ultimate order of events, against a background of eternity; this serves to expand fictional possibilities yet radically restricts the notion of individual consciousness. The world captured through this writing is transcendent and timeless, subject to binding covenants, divine judgement and illumination. There is no feeling or belief, how-

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[9]"Vehaya Hachov le Mishor" ("And the Crooked Shall be Made Straight").

ever private, that is not mediated by prototypical patterns, systems, or analogues. For all the tales within the tale, there is also a tale outside it, a comprehensive history, narrated, as it were, by God Himself.

Not surprisingly, the restructuring of a revered tradition for which Agnon strives through his writing demands long-neglected devices of story-telling. Agnon has resurrected Biblical phrases, Talmudic parables, Midrashic quotations, not as mannerisms used to embellish the story but as an organic part of the tale in which are reflected the norms and sanctions of traditional Jewish culture. Affection for the Hebrew language and love of the sacred are intrinsically connected for Agnon.

His treatment of this traditional culture, usually classified under the rubric "folktale" only accurately describes an external frame of reference. A broad spectrum of attitudes and perspectives is contained within his tale so that the simplicity of vision and unambiguity associated with the form is barely relevant. Agnon's context is the world of Jewish piety, overseen by an almighty divinity, identified as the God of Jewish history, and governed by Talmudic Law and a normative code of behavior. Yet the folktale the reader encounters in Hebrew literature since the 1880's is not the creation of naive, pious Jews, but rather of sophisticated writers for whom the form and context of these stories is but a nostalgic device. The folktales published by Agnon in Palestine were already part of a revived recognizable literary tradition, influenced as much by elements of German Romanticism as by realistic social satire and Hassidic moral literature. The origin or typology of these tales is of less

importance than the mode in which the material is presented.[10]

Agnon presents his "folk" material through the parable, drawing on two different but not irreconcilable conceptions of the narrative mode. The first is the Rabbinical parable: the reconstituted Midrash or traditional moral tale told against a background of wholeness and faith untainted by skepticism, betrayal or any alternative ideology. Prescribed methods of interpretation are given; the ideal referent is not some Platonic form removed from the world but a moment realized in Jewish history because revealed in the Torah and its various commentaries as a model for daily life.

The Torah as a unique source of authoritative revelation is at once perfect and perpetually incomplete. Like the universe itself, it was created to be a process, rather than a system, a method of inquiry into the right, rather than a codified collection of answers. The mode of understanding was experiential and intuitive; based solely upon metaphorical speech whose purpose it was to aid in the discovery of possible situations with which the Torah might deal and to then analyze their moral implications in the light of these teachings, was to share in a labor of divinity. Joy in the law was more than joy in the fulfillment of the commandments; it was especially joy in the discovery of new ones relating to situations never before explicitly formulated.[11]

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[10]Arnold Band, Nostalgia and Nightmare (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), p. 261. Band classifies Agnon's "folktales" into three distinct and limiting categories; in his view, parables constitute one category, those stories which offer a clear moral.

[11]Solomon Schecter, Rabbinic Theology (N.Y.: Schocken [cont.]

These parabolic narratives function as didactic, fantastic, nostalgic devices, as metaphorical constructs for a collective life poised somewhere between the past and the future, exile and redemption, the Book and the World. Agnon is a mythopoetic creator whose quest, I have said, is to restructure a revered tradition. Yet his focus is not on the substance of that culture or even on the values that inform it but on its emotional ambience--the characteristic moment of sadness, longing, communion, transcendence. That Agnon represents this life in order to both celebrate and diminish it suggests to the reader than an entire mode of consciousness, a total vision of experience is perhaps being rendered as a form of aesthetic purgation for none other than the author himself, whose attitude toward this tradition remains consistently ambivalent.

The narrative technique is the incorporation of elements of Midrashic discourse, imaginative digression, Kabbalistic sayings, Hassidic axioms, legends and dream into what is basically a faithful rendering of the phenomenal, real world. The reader senses a kind of self-motivating impulse in these stories, as if they were telling themselves, moved by arbitrary, incidental inclination to diverge at this point, return at that. Naturalistic re-creation of the empirically observed is however, alien to this enterprise. Symbolic detail is important as it yields to the internal rhythms of a "spontaneous" flow of ideas and perceptions which fuse almost indistinguishably into an overlapping of vision and reality. Yet the notion of the tale telling itself serves best to affirm the controlling presence of the narrator. For the

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Books, 1961), p. xx, 135.

more clearly the reader perceives the pattern of irony, legend, dream and reality in Agnon's writing, the more obviously does the technique, in all of its intentional force, emerge.[12]

Characteristic of these parables is an implicit deference before a Providential plan and purpose. However, for these figures the deeply sensed presence of the Divine, a theological and existential intuition, produces not serenity but a passive vulnerability. Even objects, serving as symbols of something beyond reality that cannot be precisely named, lack self-definition and are suffused with a kind of transcendent longing consonant with death.

This yearning is revealed in the title of Agnon's first published story in Palestine, "Agunot" (1908), from which he took his pen name and with which he linked his personal destiny: the vocation of writing as self-imposed isolation, as a form of exile. An agunah is a woman whose husband has disappeared and to whom she is fatally bound until he is either proven dead or sends her a divorce. Figuratively, it describes a soul doomed to wander in a state of eternal limbo. As a paradigm of the human condition, it describes yearning and thwarted desires, hopeless alienation and coercion either by an accident of human destiny or a transcendent will or law, a tragic anchoring to that which one seeks but can not obtain.

The basic motifs of the story are given at the outset, a quotation from a well-known Midrash which Agnon uses to establish

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[12]For the most accomplished analysis of the style which implicitly informs Agnon's, see Auerbach's first chapter of Mimesis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953) wherein he distinguishes between the Homeric and Genesis narrative techniques.

his desired context for the story:

> מובא בכתבים: חוט של חן נמשך והולך במעשיהם של ישראל והקדוש ברוך הוא בכבודו ובעצמו יושב ואורג היטבו יריעות יריעות טלית שכולה חן וחסד לכנסת ישראל שתתעטף בה. והיא מהוירה בזיו יופיה אפילו בגליות אלו כמו בעוריה בית אביה: במקדש מלך ועיר מלוכה: ובשעה שהוא יתברך רואה שלא נתגחלה חלילה ולא נגעלה גם בארץ אויביה: כביכול מנענע לה בראשו ומקלסה ואומר הנך יפה רעיתי הנך יפה: וזהו סוד הגדלה והעוז והרוממות ואהבת דודים: שמרגיש כל אדם מישראל. אבל פעמים יש שמכשול רחמנא ליצלן: מתרגש ובא ומפסיק חוט בתוך היריעה. נפגמה הטלית ורחשה רעות מנשבות וחודדות לתוכה ועושות אותה קרעים קרעים. ומיד רגש של בושה תוקף את הכל וידעו כי עירומים הם: נשבת שבתם: חגם תגא: ואמר להם תחת פארי: באותה שעה תרעה כנסת ישראל ביגונה ומיללת הכיני פצעוני נשאו את רדידי מעליי: ודודה המק עברי: והיא מבקשת אותו ומנהמת ואומרת אם תמצאו את דודי מה תגידו לו. שחולת אהבה אניי. חשלי זה של אהבה אינו מביא אלא לידי מרה שחורה רחמנא ליצלן. עד אשר יערה עלינו רוח ממרום: לחזור ולעסוק מעשים טובים שתפארת הם לעושיהם: ומתחילים שוב אותו חוט של חן וחסד לפני המקום. [13]

The meaning of the Midrash is the relationship between divine grace and justice and human destiny. The metaphorical relation is drawn from the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs, wherein Solomon is the Lord, and Shulamite his lover, is the Congregation of Israel. From this Midrashic image of the prayer shawl of grace woven from the threads/deeds of Israel, Agnon weaves a narrative that functions for dual purpose. Firstly, the story is endowed with a cosmic dimension by establishing a correlation between human action and divine intention; secondly, it transmutes a specific situation--the love story of two individuals Dina and Ben Uri--into a commentary on the universal condition of Agunot: tragic separation as endemic to human life.

Both as a method of homiletic expansion and as a reservoir of thematic material, the Midrash provides Agnon with a model for fictional technique. Metaphors turn into literal fact and

[13] S. Y. Agnon, Sipurim Ketanim (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1971), p. 93.

abstractions are rendered through concrete objects, and conversely, the tangible is infused with transcendent significance.

The governing mode of the Midrash introduces the story on the paralleled notes of divine harmony and euphoric young love. But the haunting and melancholic theme of the entire narrative--the gap between desire and achievement--soon puts this traditional context of faith into question. The weaving of the prayer shawl and the unravelling of its thread becomes a recurrent motif whose ultimate expression is of grave pain and loss, of something torn asunder: the fatal error. Indeed echoes of Genesis are found in the frame, the prototypical transgression, Adam and Eve's first sin which determined human destiny thereafter as one of shame and ignorance:

> Then the prayer shawl is damaged: evil spirits hover about it, enter into it, and tear it to shreds. At once a sense of shame assails all Israel, and they know they are naked.[14]

Adam's sin was perpetually repeated in every other sin; hence the notion of the fatal error was an everyday reality. The world, in this conception, was precariously balanced between good and evil, creation and destruction. To make a wrong decision was to imperil more than one's own salvation, it was to imperil all humanity. An error in addressing an invitation, the Talmud holds, was the immediate cause of the destruction of Jerusalem.[15]

The unravelling of the prayer shawl is the first in a series of inversions of idyllic harmony into disruption, of love and betrothal into death and mourning, of union into separation

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[14]S. Y. Agnon, Twenty-one Stories (N.Y.: Schocken, 1971), p. 30.

[15]Schecter, p. xiv.

and exile. Betrothal is an extensive motif in Biblical literature and carries fundamental symbolic import. For example, it is said that the day of revelation is considered to be the day on which the earth was wedded to heaven. In mystical poetic imagery, the Torah becomes the bride adorned with heavenly virtues, at whose wedding with Israel the whole universe bears witness and rejoices. In this story, the final inversion is the Divine Presence itself, the Shekhina, appearing as a beautiful widow (agunah), guiding through dream the eternally wandering Rabbi Nissim through the "world of confusion":

> ובאותו הלילה בשעה שישב הרב ולמד נתנמנם על גבי הגמרא
> ראה בחלומו שנגזר עליו גלות. בבוקר היטיב את חלומו וישב
> בתענית כל היום. לאחר שטעם קמעה וחזר למשנתו שמע כמין
> קול. הגביה ריסי עיניו וראה את השכינה בדמות אשה נאה
> כשהיא עטופה שחורים ועדיה אין עליה והיא מנידה עליו את
> ראשה בצער. נגער הרב משנתו וקרעי ובכה וחזר והיטיב את
> חלומו וישב בתענית כל היום וכל הלילה ובלילה עשה שאילת
> חלום. הראוהו מן השמים כמה דברים המכוסים מן העין, נשמות
> תהות ומגששות מתוך עצמת נפש ומחזרות אחר זיווגן. [16]

As both Woman and Soul, Shekhina incorporates two notions essential to Agnon's theme of agunah: ambivalence and exile. The Shekhina is considered to have moon-like alternating phases; at times she is the primordial, merciful mother of Israel, at others she is dark, bitter, demonic. Her destructive phase is reflected in her Exile and linked to Adam's sin whereafter it is said that the tree of life was forever separated from the tree of knowledge, masculine from feminine, life from death.

The exile of the Shekhina can be found in both the Talmud and the Kabbalah. In the former, it means that God's presence is always with Israel in its exiles. In the Kabbalah it is taken

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[16] Sipurim Ketanim, p. 103.

to mean that a part of God himself is exiled from God. These two ideas, the exile of the Congregation of Israel in the Midrash and the exile of the soul from its original home fuse in the Kabbalistic myth of the exile of the Shekhina. That there is a direct relation between human guilt and the exile of the Shekhina stresses the role of human responsibility and religious action in bringing an end to this period of desolation. Indeed Agnon supports this mythical apparatus with the same betrothal imagery: the reunion of God with his Shekhina, however long it is deferred, will signify redemption.

Yet where the ultimate responsibility for human action rests is left here purposefully ambiguious. Is divine justice operative in the world and in this story? Agnon's mediators allow him to equivocate on this issue. It is not Dinah who pushes the ark out of the window but the devil who comes and pours a potion of vengeance into her heart. Her unrequited love for the craftsman who is consumed by love for his art when she is promised by her father to Ezekiel, whose heart is bound to Friedele, is only the individual manifestation of cosmic order gone awry. In this divine tragedy every object of love is eluded or destroyed.

The ark, concretized into a metaphor of loss, is deployed for traditional parabolic purpose:

> למה היה הארון דומה באותה שעה? לאשה שמורשת כפים בתפילה ושני שדיה אלו שני לוחות הברית• מתנשאים עם לבה בתפילה לפני אביה שבשמים. רבונו של עולם נשמה זו שנפחת בו הוצאת מקרבו ועכשיו הרי הוא מושל לפניך כגוף בלי נשמה. ושם דינה נשמה כשרה זו אולא ערטילאי. עד מתי תעגינה הנשמות שבעולמך ושידת היכלך חזגה נכאים?[17]

This cumulative sense of melancholy is reinforced by the ending:

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[17]Ibid., p. 98.

מכאן ואילך התחילו הרבה מספרים שאותו רב סובב הולך
בעולם התוהו רחמנא ליצלן. ושמענו כמה מעשיות נוראות
ונפלאות בענין זה. ושמענו מפי ר׳ נסים זכרונו לברכה שסבב
כמה שנים בכל הארצות שהיה אומר אראה בנחמה׳ אם לא
ראיתי אותו כשהוא מפליג בים הגדול על פאטשייל״עי אדומה
ותינוק בחיקו. ואף על פי שאותה שעה שראיתיו בין השמשות
היתה נשבע אני בנקיטת חפץ׳ שהוא הוא ולא אחר, אלא אותו
תינוק איני יודע מי הוא.
כעת יאמר שהוא סובב הולך בארץ הקדושה. הגדולים
מפקפקים בדבר ויש מהם שמלגלגים. אבל תינוקות של בית
רבן אומרים שפעמים בערבין מזדמן להם זקן אחד, מתקרב
להם ומציץ לתוך עיניהם והולך לו. ומי שיודע אותו המעשה
שסיפרנו לעיל אומר שזקן זה אינו אלא אותו הרב.
ולאלקים פתרונים. 18

In this world the narrator may know as well. A figure firmly set within the tradition from which he addresses his sympathetic audience, he is both fabulist and preacher: a medieval דרשן. His rhetorical strategies are overt and unabashed: "this is the theme of the tale recounted here, a great tale and terrible," wondrous yet credible, supporting assumptions of belief in supernatural events, sin and retribution, wandering spirits, lurking demonic presences. His resources of expression are exploited in a manner no conventional, modern narrator could achieve without loss of authorial control. Suspension of belief is not a problem, however. To the contrary, Agnon's utilization of Midrashic technique--the setting of a parable or maxim in a new narrative context--works precisely to enhance the truth and power of the ideology shared by writer and audience. Conversely, it provides a way of finding in an existing narrative the potential of more narrative,[19] the suggestion of on-going possibility through the continuously unfolding and unending process of interpretation.

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[18] Ibid., p. 104.

[19] Frank Kermode, The Genesis of Secrecy (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 81-83.

In the story "Agadat Hasofer" ("The Legend of the Scribe") Agnon leaves not a didactic stone unturned. An ironic statement on the relation between spiritual and erotic love, it is usually read as a simple, reverent tale whose moral message is clear. Sharing many of the same thematic concerns as "Agunot," it presents the same symbolic triad of love, sanctity, and death. Here it is the absence of a fervently desired child that suggests how love for the Torah and love for a woman are mutually exclusive devotions, that absolute dedication to the Law may preclude fulfillment of more earthly needs. The narrator himself implies in the very beginning that excessive sanctity is the basis for the couple's tragedy:

בנים לא היו להם מפני שהקדוש
ברוך הוא מתאוה לתפילתם של צדיקים עצר את רחמה.[20]

Agnon is suggesting as well the power of eroticism, of pleasure derived from the act of writing. The first part of the story delivers its greatest irony: "This is the story of Raphael the scribe . . . " Raphael's holy vocation is the transcription of the Law; in particular he undertakes commissions to copy Torah scrolls for men whose wives are barren. Sofer has a double meaning in Hebrew, scribe and author; the absolute perfectionism demanded of the former finds its secular analogue in the exclusivity of the latter. The relationship between the religious and the aesthetic is of paramount significance for Agnon. Almost every story deals, in one way or the other, with the point at which they meet.

The sense of pervasive irony in the tale is conveyed through the narrator's exhaustive descriptions of the couple's

[20]S. Y. Agnon, Collected Works, Vol. III, (first edition: Berlin, 1931), p. ר .

piety and through the narrator's fatalistic delivery of maxims whose folk wisdom seems illogically juxtaposed with the larger narrative:

ודבר בעתו מה טוב. הואיל ומיפרנו דרך עבודתו בקודש נזכיר מקום עבודתו בקודש:

אך לא לעולם חוסן. את אשר יאהב ה' יוכיח.[21]

The narrator's method of formulaic introduction preceding his parables, as in the traditional form of exposition in Jewish literature, serves to establish an analogous, but ultimately tenuous relationship to the structure and texture of the tale. Often these parables offer essential information, but just as often they are intended to simulate the atmosphere of a certain type of story. For example, the narrator explains the purpose of having a Torah scroll written and inscribed in the couple's name, by providing a situation in which the need for a surrogate for their denied posterity would be understood. Another example explains how both scribes and gardeners sometimes must do for themselves what they usually offer for others.

אף כך, אדם בא לעולם
האמת פוגעים בו מלאכי חבלה ושואלים אותו מי אתה ומהיכן
אתה? אם היה ישר ותמים והשאיר אחריו מעשים טובים או
בנים עוסקים בתורה ובמצוות ודאי פרקליטים טובים הם לו.
ואם שלש אלה לא יהיו לו ויצא וידיו על ראשו. אבל כיון שישראל
נכנסין לבית הכנסת להתפלל ומוציאים ספר תורה מן ההיכל
וקוראים בו והספר כתוב למעלת נשמתו מיד יודעים שפלוני בן
פלוני מישבי מקום פלוני היה וזה כתבו ואומרים לו יבוא שלום
ינוח על משכבו.

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[21] Ibid., p. 11, 17.

משל למה הדבר דומה, לאחד שנתרחק מעירו והלך למקום
שאין מכירין אותו, מצאוהו השומרים הסובבים בעיר, שאלוהו
מי אתה והיכן אתה דר? אם עשיר הוא ובעל בית הגון כיון
שאומר פלוני בן פלוני אני וממקום פלוני אני פותחים פנקסאות
דפתראות ומעיינים בהם ומוצאים כמה מסים הכניס לגנזי
המלך כמה ארנוניות שלם מיד מסבירים לו פנים ואומרים לו
בא ברוך ה׳, הנה הארץ לפניך, בטוב בעיניך שב. 22
משל למה הדבר דומה לגנן גדול שהיה נוטע נטיעות נאות
בתוך גנו והיו כל השרים הרואים את פני המלך משכימים לגנו
ונוטלים אצלו פרחים נאים בבואם לפני המלך. פעם אחת הלכה
אשתו של הגנן אל המלך, אמר הגנן כל מי שרואה את פני
המלך נוטל שושנים מגני, עכשיו שאשתי הולכת אל המלך
לא דין הוא שארד לגני ללקוט לה שושנים. והנמשל מובן. 23

The relationship between the couple Raphael and Miriam is conducted by a set of highly formalized, ceremonious rules. The forms signify mutual concern, love and respect; but the reader perceives that even intimate communication between them is carried on by a code of glances or gazes of longing, desire, or acknowledgement, though rarely by words exchanged or minimal physical contact. The explicit is to be avoided in this relationship where the slightest intimation of intimacy outside its appropriate context is suspect:

וכשחוזר רפאל מן התפילה ורואה את אשתו בעצם יפיה עומדת
במראה מיד היא נושאת חן לפניו והריהו מתקרב אצלה לומר
לה דברי ריצוי. כיון שהוא מגיע אצלה מנצנץ לפניו שמו יתברך
מתוך המראה והריהו קורא בדביקות קדושה שויתי ה׳ לנגדי
תמיד ועוצם עיניו מפני כבוד השם ויראתו. ושניהם פורשים
בשתיקה. פעמים באה מרים בחשאי לפנים מן המחיצה
ועומדת שם ומשרה שתי עיניה הטהורות על בעלה היושב
בקדושה ובטהרה. וכשרפאל מתבטל מעבודה ורואה אותה
עומדת מיד אזיל בה חיורא ואתי סומקא והיא מתנצלת לפניו
שלא באה לכאן אלא ליטול מנורות השבת לשפשפן לכבוד
שבת. 24

[22] Ibid., p. רכו, רכח.

[23] Ibid., p. רלג, רלו.

[24] Ibid., p. רלב, רלד, רלח.

Raphael, who is implicitly faulted for taking the letter of the law too literally, discovers after his wife's premature death, the meaning of the divine secret:

> באותה שעה זכה רפאל הסופר להכיר את סוד ה' שקודם שבא אדם לידבק בגופם הדביקות הרי עליו להיות בבחינת אדם שעומד בטי קרח ביום השלג.[25]

Not one to extrapolate from an analogy, he follows these directions exactly. Apparently he attains Understanding, but the reader can not be sure.

The metaphors of weaving and inscribing proliferate as they do in "Agunot" until Miriam's white wedding dress becomes her burial shroud and a dance of death becomes a dance of Hassidic ecstasy. The last passage, an hallucinatory image of restorative communion, is almost pure metaphor:

> הקדוש ברוך הוא פשם מליוט של אורה והעולם עומד בתפילת לחש של ערבית. העששית דעכה]התפילה שקעה בתוך קבעת השמן. פתאום קפצה לשון של אש והאירה את החדר. ואורה גלמה את פניו של רפאל הסופר שענת עם מפרו. ושמלת חופתה של אשתו פרושה עליו ועל מפרו.[26]

The privileged state of childhood is explored in a Proustian tale which fuses nostalgic memoir and loss of innocence through the eyes of a now-mature narrator. In "Ha Mitpachat" ("The Kerchief") the narrator's evocation of childhood memories is set against the background of his father's annual trip to the regional fair. The father's absence from the family is associated with the destruction of the two Temples. This analogy is more than the metaphysical as perceived by a child; it serves as the first in a series of analogous structures in the story which reveal the

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[25] Ibid., p. 64.

[26] Ibid., p. 347.

themes of Messiah and redemption. The mother, presented in the same context, suffers the father's absence as did the widow Jerusalem in the Book of Lamentations:

> לימים כשקראתי במגילת
> איכה היתה כאלמנה ושרש רש"י ז"ל כאשה שהלך בעלה
> למדינת הים ודעתו לחזור אצלה. נזכרה לפני אמא עליה השלום
> בשעה שהיתה יושבת בחלון ודמעתה על לחייה.[27]

The arrival of the Messiah is the focus of many of the boy's long meditations on his father's absence. Restoration of peace and harmony in his version would mean the final return of both father and Redeemer:

> כיבים היו הלילות הללו שבהם הייתי שוכב על משכבי והגה
> במלך המשיח שיתגלה מתאום בעולם ויוליך אותנו לארץ
> ישראל ונשב איש תחת גפנו ותחת תאנתו. ואבא לא יסע
> לירידים. ואני לא אלך לבית הספר. אלא אתהלך לפני ה'
> בחצרות בית אלקינו.[28]

More important in parabolic terms is a central image consisting of the Messiah sitting among beggars in rags, tormented by those who don't recognize him as the King. This glorious irony becomes a real nightmare for the boy; in the dream itself he is saved from a vision of terror by his father's salvatory appearance on the scene:

> פעמים הרבה הרהרתי בלבי ושחקתי
> שחוק גדול על אותה התמיהה שעתידה להיות בעולם ביום
> שיתגלה משיח צדקנו. אתמול היה אומר ומתיר את מציעותי
> והיום הוא מלך. אתמול היה יושב עם העניים והם לא הרגישו
> בו ויש שהקילו בכבודו ונתנו בו ביזיון. פתאום נזכר הקדוש
> ברוך הוא שבועה שנשבע לגאול את ישראל ונתן לו רשות
> שיתגלה בעולם. אחר במקומי היה מתרעם על העניים שלא
> נהגו כבוד במלך המשיח. אבל אני הגיתי להם היבת. מאחר
> שנתאוה המלך המשיח לישב במחיצתם. אחר במקומי מיקל
> בכבודם של עניים. שהם אוכלים מתקיבורי אפילו בשבת ולובשים
> בגדים מטונפים. אבל אני מחבב אותם. שיש מהם שזכו לישב
> במחיצתו של משיח.

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[27] Sipurim Ketanim, p. 19.

[28] Ibid., p. 20.

עד שלבי שמח בא עוף
גדול וניקר באור. פעם אחת נטלתי את ציציותי וקשרתי עצמי
בכנפיו ואמרתי, עוף עוף תביאני אצל אבא. פירש העוף את
כנפיו ושם עמי והביאני לעיר אחת ורמי שמה. נסתכלתי למטה
וראיתי כת של עניים יושבים בשערי העיר ועני אחד יושב
ביניהם ומתיר ואומר את מצעיו. כבשתי את עיני ממנו בכדי
שלא אביט ביסודים. כיון שכבשתי עיני ממנו גבה זר גדול
מלא קוצים וברקנים וחיות רעות ויעות בזר ועופות טמאים
פורחים ושקצים ורמשים מרחיעים ובאים. נישבה פתאום רוח
גדולה וחדקה אותי על הגר. התחיל הזר מתמוטט ועמדו איברי
להתמזר. ביקשתי לצעוק ולא צעקתי כי ידאתי שאם אפתח פי
יבואו עופות טמאים וינקרו בלשוני. בא אבא וצידני בטליתו
והביאני על מטתי. פקחתי עיני להסתכל בשנין וראיתי שהאיר
היום. מיד ידעתי שקימס הקדוש ברוך הוא לילה מלילותיו של
זמירה. נטלתי את ציציותי ועשיתי קשר חדש.[29]

This dream assumes crucial significance in the larger narrative. Until now the reader is wondering what bearing the title "the kerchief" has on the tale. A provocative reference is made to it in a passage in Chapter 5, but Agnon coyly refrains from mentioning its name:

אבל פתנה אחת שהביא אבא לאמא נתקיימה שנים הרבה.
ואפילו לאחר שנאבדה לא נאבדה מלבי. ועליין אני הוגה בה
כאילו היא קיימת.[30]

When the kerchief finally does appear more than halfway through the story, it is integrated into a symbolic context of familial unity and love, maternal beauty, paternal protection, idyllic contentment. As the narrative progresses the significance of the kerchief accrues. It appears to possess mystical powers, making it impervious to taints physical or spiritual until the boy first intimates his fatal role in its destruction:

ברוך המקום שמסר עולמו לשומרים. אפילו שמץ ליכלוך לא
נמצא במטפחת כרם כבר נחתם דינה של המטפחת שתאבד
ממני. מטפחת זו שהגיתי בה כל הימים קיפחתי אני בידי.[31]

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[29]Ibid., pp. 19-2.

[30]Ibid., p. 21.

[31]Ibid., p. 27.

Once the connection is established between the loss of the kerchief and the loss of childhood innocence, the narrator begins a digressive anecdote concerning the arrival of a wretched pauper to town. Using language which reinforces the relation between the real pauper and the legendary rejected Messiah as he was rendered in the boy's dream, he guides the story to its quite essential conclusion: the climactic confrontation between the boy and the beggar and the inevitable moment of revelation. He will give the beggar his mother's beloved handkerchief to bind his wounds.

> ועמדתי כאדם שרואה בהקיץ מה שהראוהו בחלום. וכך הייתי עומד ומסתכל כנגדי. והחמה עמדה באמצע הרקיע ושום בריה לא נראתה בחוץ. אלא הוא ברחמיו יתברך ישב בשמים והביט לארץ והבהיק מזיו על מצעיו של העני. והתחלתי מושך במטפחתי כדי להרחיב לי. מפני שדמעותי היו מתנקות את גרוני. לא הספקתי להתיר את המטפחת עד שנתרעש לבי מחמת התפעלות. ואותה המחיקות הוכפלה כפלי כפלים. עמדתי ושטחתי את מטפחתי ונתתי לו לעני. נטל העני את המטפחת וכרך בה את מצעיו. באותה שעה באה החמה והזהיקה על צוארי.
>
> הבטתי אילך ואילך. שום בריה לא היתה בשוק אלא קופה של אבנים היתה מונחת והחמה זרחה מתוך האבנים. עמדתי ולא חשבתי כלום. אחר כך נטלתי את רגלי והלכתי לביתי. [32]

Though the boy suffers a certain guilt upon return home to his mother, the certainty of knowledge expressed through this visionary encounter convinces the reader that this was no transgression, but a good deed. The note of joy upon which the parable ends celebrates an elusive rite de passage: understanding of the truly moral act.

The comprehensive system of values that dictates decisions in a world nurtured by a vital relation to the divine appears to sustain all aspects of this universe. If romantic affirmation in Agnon gives way to demonic destruction, as in "Agunot" and

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[32] Ibid., pp. 28-29.

"Agadat Hasofer," the frame of spiritual reference nonetheless remains intact. Beggars, wanderers, poets and widows may not know or possess even a provisional home, but radical, eternal isolation--the disenfranchisement from anything substantial beyond themselves--is not part of Agnon's traditional presentation of the parable.

Although this vision of life is a double one, implicitly accepting and rejecting simultaneously the world it renders, Agnon's ambivalence is not derived from lack of faith in the aesthetic enterprise of safeguarding this sphere of sanctity. Rather it is because such an interpretative project is subject to all the vagaries of the historical process: as time passes, the connections between the modern world now inhabited and the past recreated become more and more precarious. The three easily demarcated periods of Agnon's career,[33] each representing a distinct stage of development and shifting perspective on his work, no longer pertain after 1931 when an increased discomfort with myth-making is perceptible in his writings.

The cycle of stories entitled "Sefer Hama'asim" ("The Book of Deeds") written between 1931-45, reflects a writer who is far more than a mere modern proponent of the traditional folktale. The emergent image is of a figure struggling with a provocative narrative technique, whose irony does not mask agony or spiritual anguish but now offers it starkly, relentlessly. No longer interspersed with folkloristic detail and naturalistic descriptions of events, these nameless first person narratives operate on

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[33]Buczacz, from his birth, 1888 to 1907; Jaffa, from 1907 to 1913; Germany, from 1913 to 1924.

another symbolic level. Symbols mediate against understanding rather than promote it. Yet at the same time, they provide another kind of understanding, an access to the ineffable source of meaning, evoked by the parabolic event. In an examination of Kabbalistic linguistic mysticism, Scholem consummately articulates what such discourse can be:

> If allegory can be defined as the representation of an expressible something by another expressible something, the mystical symbol is an expressible representation of something which lies beyond the sphere of expression and communication, something which comes from a sphere whose face is, as it were, turned inward and away from us . . . The symbol signifies nothing and communicates nothing, but makes something transparent which is beyond all expression.[34]

This conception of the parable, one where mystery is a motivating force of language, is reminiscent of Kafka's work.[35] Life is portrayed as radical regression, unwilled solitude, disorientation, futility. Hence the bitter irony of the title of this collection of parables: the book of deeds or happenings is actually an account of non-events, of non-accomplishment. The more deliberate the struggle for control, the more devastating is the inevitable outcome of passivity and deracination. If the themes that inform 20th Century literature most insistently address the problem of alienation--loss of ethnic identity, loosening of the bonds of community, and the absence of transcendental sanctions for existence

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[34] Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, pp. 244-255.

[35] Much has been made of Kafka's influence upon Agnon. This is historically impossible since Agnon wrote "Kafkaesque" parables before the "concept" was known. Thus in the spirit of Borges I prefer to say that Kafka has created his precursor Agnon. Moreover a crucial, substantial difference between the two writers remains: Agnon's frame of reference is fixed, traditional, and normative. Kafka's symbolism is at once universal and utterly his own.

--if the dominant modern perspective is from that of the outsider, the exiled, then this mode which ineluctably refers back to a Judaic frame of reference provides a proto-Kafkan paradigm of modernism: the paradigmatic exile is the Jew, arrived in the Promised Land, who doesn't remember his address and can not find his way home.

The most characteristic of this collection, the parable "Pat Shlema" ("The Whole Loaf"), solicits the application of a range of interpretative systems which extend from the schematically allegorical to the existential, the metaphysical to the psychoanalytic. The spareness of the prose endows the narrative with ominous shadows of meanings; any exclusive reading loses crucial ambiguities which are integral to the mode. The reader of this text, like the hungry narrator, wants "the whole loaf" that forever eludes him.

The anonymous narrator is an identifiable type yet strangely lacking in definable personal qualities: a representative Orthodox Jew whose world is the specific religious ambience of new Jerusalem. All objects, characters, and situations are rendered through his consciousness and are perceived in relation to him. The difference between the passive peculiarities of the narrating "I" and the stable religious patterns to which he must conform produces the parable's haunting ambivalence: he knows what his moral and spiritual obligations are, yet they necessitate tortuous interpretation:

> קל לחבין שמחתו של אדם שהיו לפניו שני דרכים. הטה לשל זה נדמה לו שהוא צריך לילך בזה, הטה לשל זה נדמה לו שהוא צריך לילך בזה, לטוף הלך בדרך שצריך היה לילך בה. וכיון שהלכתי עמדתי תמיה, אפשר שהייתי מפקפק שעה אחת וביקשתי להקדים את ענייני הקלים לפני ענייניו של דוקטור נאמן. לא יצתה שעה קלה עד שנמצאתי עומד אצל בית הדואר. 36

The anguished meditations expressed in the conflict between eating and mailing Dr. Ne'eman's letters are part of a greater struggle: between satisfying a basic desire and fulfilling an obligation, between a binding, well-determined life according to the Law and the yearning for totality and spiritual contentment which finds no direct reflection in the commandments and proscriptions. Indeed the traditions of normative Judaism are like the familiar Jerusalem street signs and landmarks; they don't point the way, they only highlight the dilemma of which way to go, raise new questions, suggest new possibilities, leaving him bereft of signposts for positive self-orientation.

The narrator's quest is an apparently simple one: to find a meal at the close of the Sabbath since his family is away and he had not made the necessary preparations the day before. The opening passage immediately announces deviation from the traditional Sabbath situation as it is symbolized in the title "Pat Shlema": a spiritual wholeness, familial and religious harmony expressed in the communal observance of the day. To be deprived of family and its sustenance on the Sabbath is to be exiled from grace, security and satisfaction, cut off from one's origins:

> כל אותו היום לא טעמתי כלום. לא מרחתי בערב שבת ולא היה לי מה אוכל בשבת. אדם בודד הייתי באותו פרק. אשתי וילדי יצאו לחוצה לארץ ואני נשתיירתי יחידי בביתי וכל מרחת מזונותי היתה מושלכת עלי[37]

Actually a veiled reference to a Talmudic saying, "He who has

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[36] Collected Works, Vol. VIII, p. 9'7.

[37] Ibid., p. 67.

made preparations on Friday shall eat on the Shabbat," the theological implications of "Pat Shlema" become clear: he who makes preparations in this world can expect rewards in the next.[38] That the narrator is responsible in some way for his undesirable situation is first suggested here and then again quite overtly:

> אמר חזא עקב
> עקוב עיכוב. התחיל מוביחני בדברים. אמר לי עצלות שיש
> בך, שלא נתת את נפשך להעלותם, היא גורמת לך שאשתך
> ובניך מתגלגלים בלא אב ובלא בעל ואתה מתגלגל בלא אשה
> ובלא ילדים.[39]

Dr. Ne'eman's judgement encompasses a subtle and profound indictment of the narrator's failings: he lacks sincerity of purpose, authentic devotion to the Law.

Endless distractions and obstacles occur to prevent him from both appropriate religious conduct and the satisfaction of his hunger, all signifying the narrator's internal frustration and unceasing vacillation:

> לא הלכתי לסעוד מחמת כת
> המדמה ולא חלכתי לבית חדראר מחמת השכל.[40]

The nature of his tormented rationalizations is moral and not legal; not as pure and rigorous as Dr. Ne'eman (whose name means faithful), nor as crass and wordly as Gressler, it is precisely the narrator's inability to be either of these men which maintains his state of spiritual limbo. He has ordered a whole loaf in pursuit of total contentment, but it escapes his grasp just when he is closest to it.

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[38] Nostalgia and Nightmare, p. 191.

[39] Collected Works, Vol. VIII, p. ז'.

[40] Ibid., p. ז'.

By the time he has realized that he has sacrificed a more easily acquired small slice for the totality of experience associated with the whole loaf, it is too late. He has risked all for it, and it is beyond his reach. The gate is closed to him. Thus the story ends as it began, come full circle. The following day the narrator starts out again in his agonized quest for a meal:

אדם בודד הייתי באותו פרק, אשתי וילדי ישבו בחוץ
לארץ וכל מרחת מזונותי היתה מושלכת עלי.[41]

The very notions of passage and access which are intrinsic to the parable's structure and theme are what also prevent accomplishment of the goal: the character's sense of precariousness, suspension and homelessness dominate all possibilities of arrival at a better place. Ambivalence toward figures of authority personalizes the conflict: not only is the narrator unsure of how to proceed to where he is going, but from whence he has come is not clear either. Sources of tradition (paternity), as symbolized in father, rabbi, doctor, scholar, never present unequivocal models for action, but stand as obstacles or temptations--not to indicate some divergent course but to yield to vacillation and inevitable passivity. Nostalgia, doubt, fear, dependence all simultaneously cloud the character's perceptions of what he must do and what it will require of him to do so.

Thus in the story "Lebayit Aba" ("To Father's House") the narrator makes complicated arrangements to return to his hometown and his father's house for the Passover holiday and once arrived can not remember where he lives. A small girl knows without being

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[41]Ibid., p. ٤٥٦.

asked where he wants to go. In "El Harofe" ("To the Doctor"). a tale with an uncanny resemblance to Kafka's "Ein Landarzt," the narrator seeks a doctor for his sick father. Though the urgency of the journey is unquestionable, signs of trouble and distraction prevent sure accomplishment of the goal. Not only does it remain ambiguous whether the narrator will ever reach the doctor but it can not be assumed that he will cure the patient once he is reached. Both parables deal with the question of responsibility toward parents and the nature of moral obligations. As in "Pat Shlema," Agnon's ambivalence toward authority is revealed as a life-long struggle between the desire for personal freedom and the constraints of a collective consciousness.

In what critics call Agnon's "modernist tales" his characters are not acted upon but are agents of their own destiny. They assume responsibility for their relation to the world and choose the mode and extent of their engagement with it. The parables "Ad Olam" ("Forevermore") and "Ido vEnam" ("Ido and Enam") examine the connection between art and life, art and sexuality, art and disease. In particular they deal with the powerful and peculiar isolation of artists who pursue esoteric knowledge at the expense of the outside world, often at their own. That self-destruction is the condition for "true" art appears to be Agnon's message; moreover, that self-abnegation carries a higher truth than that contained within the quest itself. Indeed in both cases the protagonists are consumed by their pursuits.

The historian, Adiel Amzeh, of "Ad Olam," has been studying the secret story of Gumlidata, a Gothic city which was destroyed by the Huns over 1000 years ago. After twenty years of

worldly renunciation worldly recognition is an imminent possibility. The detached scholar is gratified by this prospective change of status.

The implicit analogy between the aesthetic and the sacred vocation is again suggested in the double resonances of the word sofer meaning both scribe and author. Hence the correspondence between devotion to the Torah and its attendant sacrifices and the extraordinary demands of Amzeh's esoteric dedication. Once implied, the analogy is quickly undermined: the Sacred Book becomes a revolting, infected object whose inscription is not illuminated by divine inspiration but rather whose parchment resembles the skin, and the ink the pus of the countless lepers who had touched the manuscript throughout the years. Neither is Eden paradise but the realm of untouchable dread and disease, and the price Amzeh pays for wisdom. What truth does he learn?

ובשהגיע עדיאל עמזה לסיפור זה ולגו עיניו דמעות. כמה
גדולים מעשי סופרים שמשילו הרב חזדה מונחת על צואדם
אינם מניחים את עבודתם ונוטלים מדמם וכ'
ממה שראו עיניהם.[42]

Agnon's description of aesthetic truth--writing in one's very blood, the soul's own script, what one's eyes have seen--is a reflection of his own methodical quest to render historical experience through the lived life. Juxtaposed with the detached objectivity of the scholar's stance is a preferred mode of knowledge: that of total communion with one's object or field of inquiry and understanding, of absolute submission to one's task. Until Amzeh's entrance to the leper hospital to gain access to the

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[42]Collected Works, Vol. VIII (second edition: Tel Aviv), p. נ/ה.

manuscript, his knowledge of the archaic Gumlidata civilization, however exclusively his in the world's version, was derivative and incomplete. Indeed the earthier aspects of this history were wholly unknown to him: paganism, violence, incest, sodomy, all beyond his capacity for objective classification. Amzeh only became a truth seeker when experiential knowledge, and as a result self-sacrifice, presented a possibility to discover the last remaining part of the enigma; this he could not refuse.

At this point Agnon reveals his persistent ambivalence: the female figure of Wisdom, the same image of Proverbs and Greek mythology, is a seducer, an enslaver of the mind with questionable motives. Knowledge is a temptress, so what does this make her pupil?

> הוא אמר מה לי ליגע עצמי ? והיא החזיקה בו ואמרה לו שב אהובי שב ואל תניחני. היה יושב ומגלה צפונות שהיו מכוסים מכל חכמי הדורות. עד שבא הוא וגילה אותם. ולפי שהדברים מרובים והחכמה ארוכה ויש בה הרבה לחקור ולדרוש ולהבין, לא הניח את עבודתו ולא זז ממקומו וישב שם עד עולם.[43]

The reader is struck by the recurrent appearance of Agnon's letters ת and ע which begin virtually all proper names in this story and in the one to follow. The etymological significance of his design has long intrigued critics. More than a mere private signature, it functions as one more device to lead the reader into an allegorical interpretation, only to then deny through ambiguity and contradiction those very possibilities of resolution.

This is Agnon's strategy in "Ido vEnam." Attempts to decipher this mysterious demonic tale have resulted in incredulous explications: Dr. Ginat, the scholar who discovered the forgotten

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[43]Ibid., p. 316.

secret language "Ido" and its grammar "Enam," has been identified as Gershom Scholem and even Theodore Herzl.

The reader recognizes the Agnonic motifs immediately. The narrating "I," through whom we understand the story, is as the "Pat Shlema," alone without his wife and children throughout its events. He is thus as homeless as the characters described; and indeed it is his vulnerability, this accessibility to the outside that makes the story possible, that allows it to happen. There is an inverse relation between his degree of involvement in the story's events and the absence of other ties in his life. When he is engaged, they are gone; when he is removed from the story's action, his family has returned.

It is the narrator's intense ambivalence in regard to the deepest issues in the tale that informs the reader's own cautious enchantment, and maintains the necessary tension between event and ideology. The conflict of the two triangles, the ideological superimposed upon the erotic, is fully revealed in the sixth chapter. Gemula, Ginat and Gamzu compose the infelicitous love triangle. Gemula adores Ginat with such passionate abandon that she is willing to die with him in order to possess him. Gamzu's love for Gemula is that as defined by Rabbinic law and Jewish tradition: with propriety, respect, devotion. Ginat's interest in Gemula is purely academic, yet at the moment of crucial confrontation, he realizes his moral responibilities and insists that she return to her husband. Of course this also absolves him of responsibility at the same time. The conflicting notions of love and marriage are clear: for Gemula, as the incarnation of the songs of the lost tribe of Gad and closer to both nature and a

real ethos of love, Gamzu is not her real husband since he has "never seen her flesh," that is, had sexual relations with her. Gemula fulfills many of the suggested potential qualities of the Shekhina as she was first expressed in "Agunot." She is literally a soul who wanders the night in search of her lost mate as well as her homeland, of demented spirit and frustrated eroticism. A lunatic who sings her song when the moon is full, she can be controlled by incantations written in her lost tongue, contained in the leaves of an old manuscript. Agnon's brilliant reversal is that she loses her inspiration to sing and speak in her own language precisely when she leaves the land of exile. Jerusalem does not save her; it constitutes her bondage.

The ideological conflict is more complex than the romantic. Ginat is a modern European scholar dedicated to philological research; the type who, according to Gamzu, desecrates the spirit of the Torah through two kinds of objectification, science and folklore, and by an immodest desire for publicity:

> אוי הפולקלור הפולקלור.
> כל שאינו ענין לחקירה משמש להם פולקלור. ובי את תורתנו הקדושה לא עשו ענין לחקירה או לפולקלור. אנשים חיים חיים של תורה ומוסרים נפשם על מסורת אבות. באים להם החוקרים ועושים את התורה חקירות ומסורת אבות — פולקלור.[44]

Gamzu is a traditional Jew, described by the narrator as having "the face of a Jew out of the Middle Ages, reincarnated in this generation in order to procure manuscripts and early prints for scholars and investigators . . . " This astute reading reveals a great irony: it is Gamzu who provides these denigrated scholars with the precious texts and then complains of their treatment of

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[44] Collected Works, Vol. VII (first edition: Berlin), p. כב.

them. The narrator himself appears to agree with Gamzu that there is something sacrilegious in the aesthetic or scholarly treatment of ancient texts, but it is also clear that he can not escape their charm. The narrator ends his story with this significant statement, a direct reference to his enduring appreciation of Ginat's discovery and Gamzu's blindness:

> כל זמן שהחכם חי רוצים
> רואים את חכמתו אין רוצים אין רואים את חכמתו, כיון שמת
> נשמתו מאירה והולכת מספריו וכל שאינו סומא ויכול לראות
> ניאות לאורו.[45]

After Gemula and Ginat reach their tragic finale together and the contents of Ginat's room are examined, two baskets full of ashes are found together with a letter rescinding the rights of his publishers to his books. The 99 words of the Ido language, the grammar of Ido and the Enam hymns are never to be printed again (though they will be, nevertheless). The questions posed by the narrator at this point bear on all the mysterious quests of this tale; and to such mysteries there are no answers:

> מה גרם לו לגינת שחיבל את מעשה ידו וביער בשעה קלה
> דברים שיגע עליהם שנים הרבה. כמו שנהוג במקרה שכזה
> פוטרים את השאלה בתשובה קלה ואומרים, דכדוך נפש היה
> כאן, ספיקות קשות הביאו אותו לידי כך. ואילו מה הביא
> את נפשו לידי דכאון ומה היו ספיקותיו, על שאלות אלו אין
> תשובה, ועדיין השאלה במקומה עומדת, שבאמת אין חכמת
> ודעת והבנה במעשה שכזה, כל שכן לגבי נפש משכלת כגינת
> ולעניני חכמה ושירה שכאלו, ואין המעשה מתחלף בפירושים
> ואינו משתנה בביאור הטעמים, שאינם אלא סברות, שנוהגים
> להשיב כדי להתחכם בדיבורים בעולם על המקרים שאין
> להם פתרון ועל המעשים שאין להם מנחם, ואפילו נאמר
> גזירה קדומה יש כאן, כלום על ידי כך באנו לסוף כל העילות
> וכלום על ידי כך מתיישב הדבר, וכלום ידיעת הסיבה מסלקת
> את הרוגז.[46]

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[45] Ibid., p. נפה.

[46] Ibid., p. נפו, נפז.

The narrator's sense of wonder is a form of resignation before the elusiveness of meaning. We are reminded that knowledge and wisdom give us no means for understanding such matters and that we must respect the incomprehensible, the awesome, the inviolable in life. This acknowledgement of the inaccessible and irrecoverable is Agnon's answer to all those who would read his symbols as able to articulate something beyond the capacity of language: there are truths but we do not know them. We can only bask in their light.

In his novels Agnon's omniscient narrator performs another function, becoming almost a second hero, remaining detached from the tale while patently exploiting all possibilities to suit his purposes: directing the story toward its pre-arranged realization. The reader's perception of irony arises from the distance between the narrator's design and the apparent self-determining quality of a psychologically realistic narrative.

The marriage of myth and everyday realism is, of course, a property of all parabolic discourse and is especially typical of Jewish writing. In two of his three novels., Haknasat Kala (The Bridal Canopy) and Oreach Nata Lalun (A Guest Tarries the Night), Agnon integrates the folklore of the early tales with the mystic symbolism of the modernist parables. In the last, Tmol Shilshom (Only Yesterday), his stylistic device of Talmudic questioning and answering by which he had moved from realism to messianic vision to existentialism, is conspicuously absent.

This is a trilogy neither in intention nor chronology but in the articulation of a cumulative artistic vision to which each novel contributes an increasingly clearer perspective. From

such a panoramic exposition of various epochs and changing conditions of Jewish history, Agnon has derived his reputation as an epic novelist. It is as if the reader is witness to the deep psychic transformations of the entire Jewish people, manifested in regression and self-betrayal, culminating in the failure of the Zionist reality to live up to the dream.

The dissolution of the collective dream of self-assertion, self-renewal, and self-fulfillment is rendered through the bitter, tragic experience of Yitzhak Kummer, a pioneer who emigrates to Palestine in the central years of the Second Aliyah (not unlike his creator, Agnon), Itzhak's typicality is significant; he is devoid of any special virtues or vices. His flaws are the flaws of a generation. Not the conventional Bildungsroman which follows the passage from innocence to experience, Tmol Shilshom traces a life which begins in innocence and ends in failure: a violent death, bereft of dignity and community, literally a dog's death. The novel opens with the evocation of the dream:

> כשאר אחינו אנשי גאולתנו בני העליה השניה הניח יצחק קומר את ארצו ואת מולדתו ואת עירו ועלה לארץ ישראל לבנות אותה מחורבנה ולהבנות ממנה.[47]

Itzhak will neither build nor be built, although the ideology of spiritual regeneration through cultivation of the land is at the outset his goal. That degeneration will be the result is already here suggested, continuing throughout the passage to such an extreme that such Biblical idealism can only be interpreted as idiocy:

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[47] Collected Works, Vol. IX (first edition: Berlin), p. 7.

מיום שעמד יצחק
חברנו על דעתו לא עבר עליו יום שלא הגה בה. כנוה ברכה
נראתה לו כל הארץ וישביה כברוכי אלקים. מושבותיה חבויות
בצלם של כרמים וזיתים וכל השדות מעוטפות בתבואה
האילנות מעוטרים בפירות והעמקים מעלים סרחים ועצי יער
מתנוססים והרקיע כולו תכלת וכל הבתים מלאים רנה. כשהוא
יום חורשים וזורעים ונוטעים וקוצרים ובוצרים ומוסקים,
חובטים חטים ודורכים גתות, ולעתותי ערב כל אחד ואחד
יושב לו איש תחת גפנו ואיש תחת תאנתו, כשאשתו ובניו
ובנותיו יושבים עמו, שמחים על עבודתם וששים בישיבתם,
ומעלים על לבם ימים שעברו בחוצה לארץ, כבני אדם שזוכרים
בשעת שמחה ימים של צרה וניהנים כמליים מן הטובה. בעל
דמיונות היה יצחק, ממקום שלבו חפץ היה מדמה לו
דמיונותיו.[48]

The lush beatific imagery only stresses the pathos, absurdity, barrenness and corruption of what is to come.

It is the parable of Balak, a portion of the novel which has been printed separately both in parts and as a whole book, which functions as the referent for the larger narrative. This episode and its reverberations possess an expressionistic force which endows the novel with its structural cohesion and its expansive range of interpretations. It is a deceptively complex device.

The tragic destinies of Itzhak and Balak are fatefully sealed one day by an unwitting linguistic act: Itzhak's flippant dribbling* of the words כלב משוגע or mad dog, on the back of a neighborhood stray. Balak, now branded by this tainted nomination, roams the streets of Jerusalem, haunted and tormented by the town's people, and is, indeed, eventually driven mad. The misadventures of the poor creature are intertwined with Itzhak's story, reflecting his weaknesses and the mediocrity of his experience and symbolizing aspects of his psyche. Balak is introspective and articulate and a far more interesting character than Itzhak; he contemplates the mystery of his existence, and seeks to understand

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*Itzhak, no builder of the Land, becomes a house painter.

[48]Ibid., p. 7.

the truth about his condition.

Through Balak Agnon can satirize radical orthodoxy on the one hand, and secular intellectualism on the other. No segment or faction of the community can resist interpreting the phenomenon in its own idiom. Elaborate systems of signification are attached to him by journalists, politicians, theologicans, historians, anthropologists, logicians, and poets. Even Balak advances an hypothesis: humans and dogs are so similar that it is often difficult to tell them apart. That Balak symbolizes the bestial aspects of human behavior is unquestionable, but that he possesses qualities that many humans lack is Agnon's real point. Yet in evoking so many possibilities of interpretation, however absurd some may be, Agnon is not clearing space for the postulation of a single meaning to affix to the parable of Balak. Rather he is demonstrating the futility of just such an effort in a world where any meaning is as valid as any other. Even for those who have faith, who believe that there is order and meaning in language and history, Balak offers only the meaning of madness as an interpretation of his own event. Tortured by his inexplicable persecution, Balak questions divine justice. Itzhak never will; oblivious to the repercussions of his act, he encounters Balak long after that first significant incident. Though the crowd flees at the sight of the "mad dog," Itzhak has no fear, "knowing" that the dog is not really dangerous at all. Balak bites him and Itzhak dies an agonizing, pathetic death, now the victim of his victim. Agnon meditates on the reason for Itzhak's brutal end:

> ועתה, חברים טובים, כשאנו מתבוננים במאורעותיו של יצחק אנו עומדים מרעידים ומשתוממים. יצחק זה שאינו גרוע משאר כל אדם, מפני מה נענש כל כך וכי בשביל שנתגרה בכלבו הרי לא נתכוין אלא לשם שחוק, זאת ועוד אחרת, אף טופו של

יצחק קומר אינו מותנה בתחילתו. לפי טיבו ולפי הכשרתו.
צריך היה יצחק לעמוד על הקרקע ולראות חיים על האדמה
ולהעלות את אביו ואת אחיו ואת אחיותיו. עלובים אלו שלא
ראו שעה טובה מימיהם, כמה דבקים היו בארץ.[49]

Can we determine Agnon's attitude toward cosmic purpose in the novel? What is the moral justification for meting out such a gratuitous punishment for so whimsical an act? Itzhak's meaningless death is followed by the restoration of natural harmony; the long draught is broken, rain soaks the parched earth. Does this endow his death with expiative power? Only if Agnon's ironic technique is overlooked, if the reader ignores the reversion to the rhetoric with which he begins his novel:

וכל שיח וכל עשב העלה ריח טוב.
ואין צריך לומר תפוחי הזהב. כנוה ברכה היתה כל הארץ
וישביה כברוכי אלקים. ואתם אחינו אנשי סגולתנו שבכנרת
ושבמרחביה, שבעין גנים ושבאום גוני היא דגניה יצאתם
לעבודתכם בשדות ובגנים, זו העבודה שיצחק חברנו לא זכה
לה. יצחק חברנו לא זכה לעמוד על הקרקע לתרוש ולזרוע,
אבל זכה כרי יהיל חסיד זקנו וכשאר כמה צדיקים וחסידים
שניתנה לו אחוזת קבר באדמת הקדש. יתאבלו כל המתאבלים
על מעונה זה שמת בעגין רע, ואנחנו נספר מעשי אחינו
ואחיותינו בני אל חי עם ה' העובדים את אדמת ישראל לשם
ולתהלה ולתפארת.

נשלמו מעשיו של יצחק
מעשיהם של שאר חבורינו וחבורותינו יבואו
בספר חלקת השדה [50]

Moreover, it must be remembered that Itzhak is, after all, representative of a generation, a generation indicted by the fiery Rabbi as having the face of a mad dog. The nihilistic implications of Balak's exile and Itzhak's death are disturbing. The reader can not assume that Balak ever learns what he so ardently seeks from that fateful, vengeful bite. Itzhak, we know, due to charac-

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[49] Ibid., p. 604.

[50] Ibid., p. 607.

ter and circumstance, has been oblivious to all. Agnon may be addressing the question of the Zionist enterprise in light of historical necessity and finding it wanting. It may be no act of historical fulfillment, but like Balak's appellation, an accident; and divine governance may be neither benign nor malevolent, but indifferent. If Agnon's perception of the movement of Jewish history is pursued to its logical devastating conclusion, then the self-limiting nature of such ideals as the Messianic return to the Land demands dissolution into the void. Balak is the central metaphor of desolation amidst infinite possibilities of fulfillment: the provocative image of truth chasing after its own tail.

Chapter IV

KAFKA

"The imminence of a revelation which does not occur, is, perhaps the aesthetic phenomenon."
(Borges)

Questions of interpretation are always already theological ones. For Kafka, the parabolist, the exigencies of these questions are inscribed in the texture of daily experience: the world is a parable, an hermetic text replete with signification, where every gesture points to something, every passageway leads somewhere, but where each sign inevitably turns back to itself. In as logocentric a universe as Kafka's, where die Schrift is part of a metaphorically engendered network of meanings, interpretation is all. One's very life depends on it.

For the writer who incessantly deciphered but at the same time "despaired of metaphor" the parabolic form is singularly appropriate. Not because it illumines the truth but because it expresses the impossibility of articulating it. Thus while he rejected metaphor as a stylistic device it became the very foundation of his narrative method. Yet this quest for truth in language reveals more strategy than substance; and this is where Kafka's mode of metaphysical orientation becomes fictional technique. Not only do Kafka's characters find themselves existentially situated amidst an endless proliferation of metaphors (which they hopelessly attempt to interpret literally), but the reader, in analogous fashion, is confronted with a multiplicity of narrative possibili-

ties, none of which ultimately function as figurative devices but rather support the same ontological structure: "being in parable." Metaphor is authentically deceptive for Kafka because mediation is an illusion; though ironically, if truth can be approached at all it must be by allusion (Andeutung).

This propensity for indirect--parabolic--communication was shared by Kierkegaard whose theoretical premise is that truth is subjectivity, or becoming one's self ("the truth exists only in the process of becoming, in the process of appropriation").[1] This, of course, stands in contrast to objective or propositional truth, in particular to Hegel's non-experiential logic. As we know, Heidegger pursued the same goal even more radically by attempting to incorporate oblique expression into philosophical discourse itself.

For Kierkegaard, communication "requires a double reflection." On the one hand, the communicator is imaginatively presenting alternative possibilities of self-understanding that call for decision ("either/or") by the reader; on the other, the communicator is intensely concerned with the "appropriation process," that is, the means by which the reader grasps his or her own human possibilities.[2] In Kierkegaard's conception, it is the responsibility of the parabolist to be himself exemplary; Kafka has no such moral pretensions. Despite many joint religious preoccupations and even similar life experiences, their use of the parable

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[1]These references to Kierkegaard are drawn from the fascinating recently published collection of his parables. Soren Kierkegaard, Parables of Kierkegaard, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. xii.

[2]Ibid., Introduction.

served divergent purposes. It is the Semitic strain of the interpretative mystical tradition, as both wisdom and prophecy, with which Kafka is identified, whereas for Kierkegaard it is the Gospel and its test of faith which contains the message of salvation.

Kafka's parabolic point of departure is the accepted notion of an open-ended comparison. Because the absolute bond between sign and referent, literal and metaphorical, does not hold in the parable, the ubiquitous message it yields will be intrinsically paradoxical: "the essence of a secret code is that it remain a mystery."[3] Hence that "fabulous yonder" of which Kafka speaks in his parable on parables[4] is a transcendent idea whose form yet remains fixated in language. Therein lies the insoluble problem: how to express through the limits of writing (and thereby posit the inexpressible, since the truth has no need of words) the meaning that only exists in the self.

> One cannot express what one is, for this is precisely what one is: one can communicate only what one is not, that is to say, the lie.[5]

Endowed with such an interpretative intelligence and deprived of community, Kafka sought to give form to the "true universal," to articulate that whose only designation is its very resistance to fixed conceptualization. The universal resides in that space between Being and the abstract patterns of human life and thought.[6] This summative procedure is what we recognize as the parabolic: the

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[3]Franz Kafka, "Zurfrage der Gesetze" in Parables and Paradoxes (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), pp. 155, 157.

[4]Ibid., p. 11.

[5]Franz Kafka, "Dearest Father" (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), p. 308.

[6]Wilhelm Emrich, Franz Kafka (Bonn, 1958).

attempt to sustain all possibilities of perception and thought simultaneously even as we know the inherent deception of the enterprise. This necessitates, for Kafka, the precise but always inconclusive description of all phenomena. In this he adopts a mode that surprisingly resembles naturalism, but the motives of his procedure are radically different. The austerity of the Kafkan utterance reveals the futility of just such putatively representational language; the beauty of his language intensifies our perception of the discrepancy between image and meaning, underscoring the ominous quality of what is not said, of the connections that are never completed. The parabolic mode is not the articulation of the universal contained in the particular, but of the overabiding infusion of the universal throughout the endless reflections of the human imagination.

But these reflections cannot cohere in a single self, and especially in those moments when totality of consciousness counts most does the conflict of mind and voice become most acute:

> He is thirsty and cut off from a spring by a mere clump of trees. But he is divided against himself: one part overlooks the whole, sees that he is standing here and that the spring is just beside him; but another part notices nothing, has at most a divination that the first part sees all. But as he notices nothing he cannot drink.[7]

The problem of "access" is not only the writer's greatest preoccupation; it becomes the reader's as well. But if anything characterizes Kafka's emblematic quest, it is the ambivalence which attends the desire. This tension itself compels interpretation, and so the process goes, alternating between extension and

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[7]Franz Kafka, Tagebücher, ed. Max Brod (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1970), p. 47.

retreat, the hope of freedom and the fear of paralysis, completion and suspension.

How did Kafka appropriate the parabolic form to articulate a private vision? It should be kept in mind that the parable, both Biblical and modern, is not concerned with what everyone typically does, but narrates a particular situation making it credible, probable, and above all finally typifiable. Three other distinctive features follow from this. The first is the irruption of the extraordinary into the ordinary, "the everyday framed by the ultimate" (with all its metaphysical connotations). To read a text as a parable is to recognize the "natural" as a category impossible to define and uncertainty as a possible function of language. By a singular but evident inversion, the more extraordinary the events of the characters' experience, the more perceptible will be the "naturalness" of the narrative. This is proportional to the disparity between the strangeness of an individual's life and the implications with which he/she accepts it.

Another feature is a logical development of this phenomenon: the relative unimportance of the particular character in comparison to the narrative event. The event or situation is universal; therefore, the individual character is an abstract human being, indeed "a man without qualities," but not a humanized abstraction, as in allegory.[8] As will be seen, in Kafka's parabolic reversal manipulation and captivation are meant to arrest the reader and expose the game of deception with no redemptive catharsis. Because

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[8]My comments on individuation and abstraction are informed by the terse and incisive opening of Albert Cook's chapter "Person." Albert Cook, Prisms (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1967).

the parable tends to deceive the hearer into the truth, the relation between character and hearer must be one of analogy and not identification. Were instantaneous and total identification to take place and distance obliterated, no response--the dialogical nexus of the encounter--would be possible. "Being in parable" would be a solipsistic notion.

The parable is endowed with universality by its indefinite spatio-temporal perspective, its concrete imagery and general narrative context, the abstract personality of its characters and by the authority of its narrator. To repeat what was said in Chapter 1 concerning Gospel narratives, a Scriptural parable's authorial truth is never doubted. Certainly this is because its implied author is the Parabolist Himself or a representative who participates derivatively of the same authority. A Kafkan parable derives its claim precisely from its usurped, contingent authority, which seems to nullify the truth in order that the truth might emerge more fully later. Thus the parable becomes the ironic disclosure of a higher truth, a truth however, that cannot be achieved.

In Sokel's analysis of the literary conventions absent in Kafka's fiction, he explains the method by which even in third person narratives "Kafka replaces independent authorial comment by his protagonist's interpretation of the action . . . Instead of giving us a single authoritative explanation, the author states his ignorance of his fictional world."[9] This is not all; he then undermines "the reader's fictional superiority over the protagonist."[10] The result, then, is to force the hearer/reader to

[9]Walter Sokel, Franz Kafka (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 10.

[10]Ibid.

operate under the same interpretative (i.e., existential) constraints as the character, "to infer but never to know, the external world."[11] "Einsinnigkeit," the congruence of narrative consciousness and medium, is a strategy of rhetorical intent that signals a departure from traditional modes of story-telling and reception.[12] Here there is no dialectic between the experiencing "I" and the narrating "I," but the reduction of a narrative persona to an observing entity who perceives events at the very moment of their origination.

Thus the fundamental uncertainty of the human condition becomes the reader's point of reference, as the epistemological implications of Kafka's linguistic anomalies constitute the protagonist's distinctive world-view. Kafka's vocabulary of inference and conjecture, his preference for the subjunctive, and the characteristic "aber" and "oder," demonstrates Sokel, are "grammatical correlatives" of his narrative form. Rather than derive insight from the protagonist's experience of surprise and discovery, in Kafka the function of indeterminacy is to "reveal the discrepancy between the protagonist's consciousness and the truth underlying the story."[13]

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Martin Walser, Beschreibung einer Form (Munich: Hanser, 1961) and Frederich Beissner, Der Erzahler Franz Kafka (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1952).

[13] Sokel, p. 11. Sokel's conception of the "truth underlying the story" is not entirely clear to me. I assume that he is speaking of "a negative truth," one whose absolute content is negative, and which when inverted, becomes a positive one. To my mind, it is the mode of revelation which determines its negativity (it comes at the expense of life). It is perceived as the difference between the character's interpretation of the events and the reader's. Anders makes a similar point when discussing Kafka's religious attitude: " . . . but this insuperable gulf between God [cont.]

It is a negative revelation of truth that emerges through the perspective of a character whose invariant experience of language and life is duplicity and defeat. Ironically, it is the very maze of minute detail which frustrates the obsession for completion and truth; and this deconstruction of totality ultimately leads to the fragmentation of truth. The world is rendered unintelligible and truth out of reach.

Any intimations of success in the interpretative process, therefore, come through the annihilation of self. Truth in Kafka is not communicated content but the ontological relation realized by the act of writing; perhaps the textual is the only space where human integrity can really be established. Kafka provides an image of what experience is like when all interpretations are put into question, hence undermining as well what may be experience's sole confirmation.

Two parables, read together, "Das Ziel" and "Gibs Auf!," illustrate the double movement of Kafka's quest and function as its best meta-commentary. The first serves as a kind of prelude to the second. Expressed in both parables, ultimately, is the intimate bond between faith and knowledge and the inherent constraints each operates on the other. More strongly operative in "Das Ziel" is faith. The dream-like, opaque atmosphere emphasizes the singularity of response by a narrator who is unable to communicate with the only other human presence in the tale. "Der Diener

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and man for Kafka is not only a negation of religious truth but a negative religious truth. He is always ready to convert the coins of his despair into the currency of positive belief by means of . . . logical and emotional artistry." Franz Kafka (London: [cont.]

verstand mich nicht . . . In der Ferne hörte ich eine Trompete blasen, ich fragte ihn, was das bedeute. Er wusste nichts und hatte nichts gehört."[14] Indeterminacy is further stressed by the narrator's negative definition of his goal: "weg von hier." First mention of the destination indicates the movement of the text, the impulse toward flight; no precise coordinates are given. Repetition endows it with renewed signification: "Weg-von-hier," as if it were now an aim with a termination point. But the narrator claims no need for provisions even as he explains that deprivation along the way will ensure his death. "Kein Essvorat kann mich retten. Es ist ja zum Glück eine wahrhaft ungeheure Reise." This paradox is for Kafka unusually affirmative.

In fact, the certitude which underlies this pronouncement approximates that of mystical revelation. What is integral to the structure of all parables is here manifest: an explicit distinction between those who know and those who do not. The procedure used to maintain the distinction is the enigma itself, which is accessible to some, yet remains impenetrable to others. In Kafka not knowing may be fatal but the inverse promises nothing. Shattered is the assumption that the possibility of gaining access is crucially contingent upon a successful reading. Were this an allegory this would certainly be so. Instead the continuum between sign and outside referent is put into question, and the reader finds symbolic functions obfuscated rather than defined. The result is a kind of hermeneutic free-for-all, where interpretative constraints are so loosened that even "negligible" details are transformed into

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Bowes and Bowes, 1960).

[14] Parables and Paradoxes, p. 188.

signs, and correspondingly, referential or conative signs are over-determined, inflated with symbolic signification. On another level, patent figurative devices are divested of immanent meaning, do not "deliver." The call of the bugle,* heard only by the narrator, both conveys no message and signifies that the message is destined only for him.

While pointing to no positive content, the self-referential function of the parable does more than merely attest to its own parabolicity. That is, not to direct the reader in the deciphering of determinate meanings, but to obliterate the notion of two discrete levels operating in the text, and thus to posit something else. Though the world is endlessly open to signification, we can only really know the sign without the signified. To suggest the resemblance of the two terms and then to efface it, is not however, to destroy it. Rather by systematically suppressing what Marthe Robert calls the "as-ifs,"[15] Kafka actually emphasizes the relation all the more. To act as if the call of the bugle represents "something" is to be committed to and deluded by the signifying process at the same time, to generate not just a special kind of sign system, but a posture, at once eschatological and emotional, of possibility, desire, and wonder.

Thus while the parable "Das Ziel" is constructed around two loci, "hier" and "weg von hier," there is no direct correspondence between them. The narrator's present situation and the one to which he desires transport (this is meta-phora!) are tenuously though

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*The summons is a pervasive theme in itself; one is always called but why or by whom is never known.

[15]Marthe Robert, Kafka (Paris: Gallimard), 1960.

essentially linked. The parable's meanings--the metaphorical process itself--are derived from the distance set between them. For Kafka, the metaphor does not transport significance from vehicle to tenor; it resides in the between-space separating these most dissimilar pairings.

To leave deliberately vague the criteria used for passage of the elect to the other realm is as familiar a component of the parabolic event as the injunction itself to "go over." Go over: both narrator and reader alike are seduced by the double-edged nature of the solicitation, by the temptations of the incomprehensible. But if understanding, in all of its Kafkan permutations, imbues the participant with inward exaltation, it proceeds only by the renunciation of life.[16] It is this negative condition of writing (and as it follows, interpretation) that renders the aspirations for power and freedom in the Kafkan text ultimately futile. The journey is described as infinitely long; and nothing of material or earthly value will sustain one along the way.[17] Left purposefully vague is whether indeed, the destination is akin to redemption; the other possibility is death, of course, with or without salvation. But since the goal cannot be named except in differential terms, it is still contained within the world of the parable, though beyond articulation.

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[16]Maurice Blanchot, L'Espace Littérarire (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1955), pp. 71-72. Of the plethora of criticism on Kafka, Blanchot provides rare insights. He doesn't attack his subject, he talks to it.

[17]The hunger motif is pervasive in Kafka's work. Consonant with the need for spiritual nourishment is the world's inability to provide it. One never has the sense, however, that the world is to blame for denied expectations. Rather Kafka presents hunger as a given and then explores the nature of those expectations themselves.

The metaphorical tension between "here" and "away from here" is a part of the metaphoric principle which is the ontological basis of Kafka's universe. But the desire for radical change is neither consistent nor absolute. At times, in the Aphorisms, Kafka does express belief in some miraculous transformation of evil into good. At others, he insists that there can be no such phenomenon, that to seek it is to contradict the notion of infinite suffering and endurance that constitutes faith. Faith is the ultimate expectation of change; it is also the firm conviction that no change can take place. Thus the acquiescence of the sad, young spectator in "Auf der Galerie" implies both this poignant insight into the impossibility of change and its inescapable reality. Where transfiguration does take place is not in the world to come but in this one: we are already in Paradise, we merely do not know it.

> Die Vertreibung aus dem Paradies is in ihrem Hauptteil ewig: Es ist also zwar die vertreibung aus dem Paradies endgültig, das Leben in der welt unausweichlich, die Ewigkeit des Vorganges aber (oder zeitlich ausgedrückt: die ewige Wiederholung des Vorgangs) macht es trotzdem möglich, das wir nicht nur dauernd im Paradiese bleiben Könnten, sondern tatsächlich dort dauernd sind, gleichgultig ob wir es hier wissen oder nicht.[18]

The concept of metamorphosis is, of course, inextricably linked with personal identity. But in Kafka personal identity is a state never to be taken for granted. And this problem, involving a profound ambivalence, puts both "here" and "away from here" into question. The "metamorphosis" (as in the story of that title) never takes place. One is both man and bug, executioner and victim, dead and alive. This ambivalence is well reflected in his anguish

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[18]Franz Kafka, Betrachtungen und Gedanken 64/65 (Bibliothek Suhrkamp, 1963), p. 202.

when choosing a narrative voice between first and third persons. The voice always hovers somewhere between the two. In "Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande," a story which prefigures "Die Verwandlung" in its image of man transformed into beetle, the narrator says:

> . . . ist man allein, gänzlich fremd und nur Gegenstand der Neugierde. Und solange du man sagst an Stelle von ich, ist es nichts und man kann diese Geschicte aufsagen, sobald du aber dir eingestelist, dass du selbst es bist, steht dann wirst du förmlich durchbohrt und bist entsetzt.[19]

The reader knows, of course, that the "one" of which Kafka speaks signifies the "I" that is named K. The "story" can now be told because universalized is both character and event, with the stress placed on the latter. In Kafka, the other side of the human desire for self-transformation is "the attempt to falsify the fact of knowledge and turn it into the goal."[20] As we see in "Das Ziel," the wish "to rest for a moment," to accept one's knowledge of the world as ultimate and real, and therefore false, is tantamount to self-extinction. Thus endless interpretation is the protagonist's only recourse, a defensive strategy to avoid self-condemnation.

The hopeful ambiguity expressed in "Das Ziel" is significant but momentary. The fatalism of the exhortatory principle derived from "Gibs Auf!" is what reverberates throughout the Kafkan enterprise. It is as if the narrator of the former parable had indeed arrived at his unknown destination only to find a greater profusion of signs in a world disclosing still less meaning. In this narrative, the implicit quest for pure expression gives way to absolute

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[19]Franz Kafka, "Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande" (New York: Schocken, 1953), p. 8.

[20]Betrachtungen und Gedanken 86, p. 205.

impenetrability. The compulsion to interpret and the need for orientation is in direct proportion to the text's nightmarish refusal to yield meaning, to its joy in frustrating all hermeneutic efforts.

There is, then, a radical difference (or so it would seem) between one who knows to go even if he doesn't know where, and one who must ask where he is. Thus the sense of darkness and absence at the heart of experience is most bitterly expressed in the policeman's sardonic response to the narrator's request for directions: "Von mir willst du denn Weg erfahren?" The Kafkan character, forever seeking access, is always on the threshold, but never "there." Arrival at his destination is destined to failure; either he never reaches the intended place or he arrives too late. As for Joseph K. in "Vor dem Gesetz," what is most proximate is also the most elusive.

The pervasive theme, then, of the parables is the message that is never delivered. "Eine Kaiserliche Botschaft" begins:

> Der Kaiser--so heisst es--hat dir, dem Einzelnen, dem jämmerlichen Untertanen, dem winzig vor der Kaiserlichen Sonne in die fernste Ferne geflüchteten Schatten, gerade dir hat der Kaiser von seinem Sterbebett aus eine Botschaft gesendet.[21]

Exemplified here is Kafka's method of "literalizing metaphor," as it has been described by many critics (Sokel, Corngold, Anders, Greenberg). This is Nietzsche's proclamation "God is dead" become image: the Emperor has sent a message to you alone, but he is dying. Typically, Kafka posits a connection and qualifies it simultaneously. Such a strategy, earlier discussed, serves to assert something and question it at the same time. One acknowledges one's member-

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[21] Parables and Paradoxes, p. 12.

ship in the human (linguistic) community even as one struggles to be free of it. The rhetorical implications of this technique are important. Far from eradicating the category of the divine, by putting it in suspense one's awareness of it is strengthened, and as it becomes more elusive it also becomes more desirable. To announce that "God is dead" is not only not to kill him but to interpret in his mysterious absence, a proof of his existence. For Kafka "perhaps, perhaps not" is a kind of metaphysical insurance. Unlike Nietzsche he is not willing to risk the prospects of liberation from divine sanction; for him there is no "joyful wisdom" in divorcing morality from metaphysics. Kafka reveals time after time that there is no faith like skepticism.

Incarnated in this parabolic event is all the ambivalence of such a notion. A message was articulated but its revelation is forever deferred. With exquisite precision Kafka describes the travails of the messenger. All his familiar motifs are interwoven: emperors and their subjects, castles, labyrinths, courts, messengers, journeys. The immensity of space separating the dead emperor and we who await the message cannot be traversed; there is always another obstacle preventing fulfillment of the goal. "Immer noch zwängt er sich durch die Gemächer des innersten Palastes; niemals wird er sie uberwinden; und gelänge ihm dies, nichts ware gewonnen."[22] An imminent disclosure, both universal and unique, turns into a subjective fantasy told from the reflective stance of a narrator telling his tale from the closest perspective possible.

Like "Vor dem Gesetz," this parable is a story within a frame (Rahmenerzählung), the centerpiece of a longer narrative,

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[22]Ibid.

"Beim Bau der Chinesichen Mauer," and was published out of context. Reading the parable as part of an embedded structure both illuminates and obscures. The purpose of the parable becomes evident even if its content remains opaque; the technique of exposition ("There is a parable which describes this situation very well . . .") distinguishes the "literal" text from its parabolic referent and suggests the interpretative possibilities of both narratives. In this story, the narrator sets a limit for over-zealous decoders of divine (or aesthetic) constructions: "Suche mit allen deinen Kräften die Anordnungen der Führerschaft zu verstehen, aber nur bis zu einer bestimmten Grenze, dann höre mit dem Nachdenken auf."[23]

The mystery of the Chinese Wall is like the piecemeal construction of our edifices of truth. Surely it represents, as well, the narrative process which proceeded in much the same manner throughout Kafka's life. To examine the structure is to look for a fundamental defect, "heisst nicht an unserem Gewissen, sondern, was viel ärger ist, an unseren Beinen rütteln."[24] The scholar-narrator, distinguished from the people who never questioned but believed that human thought corresponded to a higher order, eventually comes, himself, to believe that the high command has existed from all eternity, and the desire to build the wall likewise.

The tacit collective contract is, naturally, to act as if the Emperor is alive, to live as if there were some transcendent logic which supports the construction of the Great Wall. For to seek the justifications of our origins is to discover the truth, that is, the lack of any possibility of truth inherent in human

[23]Franz Kafka, Beschreibung eines Kampfes (Prague: Verlag Heinr. Mercy Sohn, 1936), p. 73.

[24]Ibid., p. 82.

endeavor. Self-recognition requires one of two responses: either to never begin, for which it is always too late or to end one's life and, therefore, one's projects. The latter was a possibility Kafka seriously considered. In a letter to Max Brod he admits having contemplated suicide until he realized that "by staying alive (he) should interrrupt (his) writing less, even if one does nothing, nothing but talk of interruptions."[25] The narrative process is like the construction of The Great Wall, by nature discontinuous with life. Thus the third response is literary production: the kind of writing which, in essence, may mean anything but what it says.

If Kafka wants to preserve the possibility of the Emperor's existence even as he infinitely defers the arrival of his message, he also wants to posit the Coming of the Messiah, even if too late. In "Das Kommen des Messias," he crystallizes the sardonic spirit of the Jewish Messianic tradition through a perfect paradox:

> Der Messias wird erst kommen, wenn er nicht mehr nötig sein wird, er wird erst einen Tag nach seiner Ankunft kommen, er wird nicht am letzten Tag kommen, sondern am allerletzten.[26]

We will be saved only when we are able to save ourselves. An unlikely prospect, given the lessons of history. Kafka's own ambivalence toward authority is expressed in the parable "Kuriere" where being a courier brings privilege: it means bearing the message. "Deshalb gibt es lauter Kuriere, sie jagen durch die Welt und rufen, da es keine Könige gibt, einander selbst die sinnlos gewordenen Meldungen zu."[27]

[25] Max Brod, Franz Kafka (New York: Schocken Books, 1960), p. 73.

[26] Parables and Paradoxes, p. 80.

[27] Ibid., p. 174.

The witholding of knowledge is not only the form of the parabolic process, but it is the theme of these parables. There is something of the infinite and the inevitable in the consent of the governed as it is justified in Kafka's writings. Thus since the beginning of time, it seems, "they" have chosen to be couriers who serve absent kings; just as "the problem of our laws" is less that they are inaccessible or even unjust, than that their very existence is in endless dispute. All these hypotheses prove that the laws do exist, however, through a social structure that the people themselves acknowledge and perpetuate. "Was der Adel tut, ist Gesetz."[28] For Kafka, the Law, and all its various forms of paternal authority, is not an external imposition, but a fundamental need, indeed a kind of nostalgia for a lost covenant. The theological and political implications of this "universal" condition can not be lost on any reader from "Das Urteil" to Das Schloss.

Law and myth, like fiction, are elaborated from within. They are originating metaphors successful at camouflaging an original arbitrariness. The metaphor generates its own necessity; at its source is enigma. In the parable "Prometheus" we find a critique of the metaphorical process: when forgotten, the original terms of the comparison lose their meaning and their justification. But duplicity and necessity are not mutually exclusive, as Kafka's succession of interpretations of the legend indicates. Like Prometheus and the rock to which he is attached, then united with and ultimately absorbed into and forgotten, the text and its interpretation merge to become indistinguishable one from the other. The origin of the legend was an effort to explain the inexplicable.

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[28] Ibid., p. 156.

"Das sie aus einem Wahrheitsgrund kommt, muss sie wieder im Unerklärlichen enden."[29] What was mysterious will remain so. A similar process is seen in the incorporation into the sacred of the everyday. In "Leoparden in Tempel" the inner sanctum is systematically profaned and eventually encompasses it so that what was profane becomes holy. What is intrinsic to ritual is repetition, but unlike Kierkegaard's or Nietzsche's category of repetition or eternal return, no value is accrued in the process.

Kafka's vocation as a writer can be said to have been inaugurated the night of September 22-23, 1912, when in a burst of creative ecstasy, he wrote "Das Urteil." It was the first work of which he was truly proud and it generated a series of narratives which include "Die Verwandlung," Amerika, "In der Strafkolonie," and Der Prozess. The volume, "Ein Landarzt," to which the parables belong, followed. The biographical details surrounding the genesis of "Das Urteil"--his fateful meeting with Felice Bauer--are common knowledge, as are the overt parallels between the figures in the narrative and events of his life at that time. Kafka, himself, contributed to the critical controversy by "explaining" it in a diary entry several months later:

> Der Freund ist die Verbindung zwischen Voter und Sohn, er ist ihre grösste Gemeinsamkeit . . . Georg hat nichts . . . Georg hat so viel Buchstaben wie Franz. Freida hat ebensoviel Buchstaben wie F . . .[30]

This hardly suffices as an explanation, not only because the author is not a reliable source, and Kafka is one who never says

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[29] Ibid., p. 82.

[30] Tagebücher, pp. 296-97.

all he means, but for a still profounder reason. Kafka's retrospective reading is an attempt, like all others, to "naturalize" a narrative which deviates from any such logic of human actions.

The elusive mode of "Das Urteil" refutes conventional psychological motivations for its characters' behavior; the realistic interface of what is essentially a seamless narrative cannot be discerned. No efforts to "translate" its enigmatic texture into dream (or nightmare), allegory, or any other symbolic system will render to the interpreter what the text conceals. For Tauber, who analyzes the story in terms of religious symbolism, and sees "the father . . . as an aspect of God" and the countless critics who have found abundant psychoanalytic material in Kafka's Oedipal drama, the configuration of the patriarch is self-evident. Indeed it is. But certainly it is more than a "primitive fantasy" (Sokel) or a "danse macabre" (Heller). These assume that Kafka's radical vision is expressed in a private idiom, that once deciphered, will leave a residue of meaning which exists independently of its mysterious context. This is an exercise in impoverishment and ultimately proves as futile as trying to make the text into a literal transcription of insanity.

Kate Flores'[31] entree into the text is an illuminating one: the friend functions as Kafka's other--writing--self. The art/life dichotomy is thus represented in the conflict between his wordly, social, marriageable self (Georg) and his lonely, exiled bachelor self (the friend in Russia). For Kafka to marry is, of course, to betray his writing, and ultimately to abandon an ideal of artistic fulfillment and self-sufficiency. The irony of the

[31]Kate Flores, Franz Kafka Today (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958).

situation as it is exemplified in the story is the role reversal: in reality, the struggle to write had to be achieved at the expense of the "conventional" Kafka, the son his father wanted him to be. In the narrative, it is the absent friend who triumphs, and in implicit conjunction with the father, sentences the engaged Georg to death.

The father's judgement is Kafka's universal (self) condemnation. In order to absolve himself of double guilt--guilt for desiring to marry and guilt for being unable to follow through with it--he projects his conscience onto the feared father and makes him executioner.

But we know that the writing on this night was nothing if not an act of self-affirmation. As an account of the process of gaining self-knowledge through writing, the writer emerges and the word survives. The many references to paper, reading, and writing in this story, Politzer has noted, support that "like his creator, Georg Bendemann has an exaggerated respect for the written word."[32] I would add, quite significantly, for the spoken word above all. The opening of the story describes Georg as absent-mindedly gazing out over the bridge from the window in his study, having just completed a letter to his old friend in Russia with whom he had "das besonderere Korrespondenz verhälnis." The play on the word "correspondence" signifies that they stand in a relation of secret reciprocity.

The completion of the letter marks a turn of events; once written, the announcement assumes new meaning. It appears to rein-

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[32]Heinz Politzer, Parable and Paradox (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 54.

force Georg's self-justification and at the same time serves to keep the friend, who is already "yellow enough to be thrown away" (consumed by writing) all the more removed from the events taking place. Such a correspondence, clearly, has not been intended to promote communication but to eclipse it.

Throughout, letters and newspapers are details endowed with privileged status. Georg enters his long-neglected father's room and finds him sitting in the dark reading a newspaper. Later, when the father/son conflict takes on mythic proportions letters become realities of their own, and threaten to displace events at hand.

> Wohl kenne ich deinen Freund. Er wäre ein Sohn nach meinem Herzen . . . Warum hast du ihn auch betrogen die ganzen Jahre lang. Warum sonst? Glaubst du, ich habe nicht um ihn geweint? . . . nur damit deine falschen Briefen nach Russland schreiben kannst. Er weiss doch alles, dummer Junge, er weiss doch alles! Ich screib ihm doch, weil du vergessen hast, mir das Schreibzug weg-zunehmen. Darum kommt er schon seit Jahren nicht, er weiss ja alles . . . deine. Briefe zerknüllt er ungelesen in der linken Hand, wahrend er in der rechten meine. Briefe zum lesen sich vorhält![33]

An exclusive relationship between father and friend has been formed and sustained through the years by letter, usurping the duplicitous relationship between Gregor and his friend as well as that between Gregor and his father. Epistolary alliances held no less importance in Kafka's own life; supplanting, evading, even correcting, when life lacked.

Then as if to consummate the power of the Word, written or spoken, the father sentences his son to death by drowning. No sooner is the judgement uttered than is the act performed, as if the act were performed to make the language real, to "live" up to it:

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[33]Franz Kafka, Erzählungen (New York: Schocken, 1946), pp. 63-66.

"Schon hielt er das Geländer fest, wie ein Hungriger die Nahrung."[34] And from the same bridge he had gazed from his window, he jumps to his death. Spouting grotesque words of love and, as it were, forgiveness, he merges with the endless stream of traffic (life) below. The last line is a jolting reminder to the reader that despite the internal perspective of the narrator, the story has been a third person narration. This subtle, but perceptible shift makes it possible for Kafka's narratives to survive their characters, however intimately bound are their fates.

Those elements which are not reducible to "ordinary language" are the constituents of parabolic discourse. This is a universe fraught with mystery, where speech is act, where there is the barest modulation of tone, nuance of intimacy, surprise, enthusiasm, indignation. There is no outrage. Perhaps there can be none in a world from which there is no appeal. The quest for enlightenment takes place through language. All the weightier, then, is what remains unexpressed in the text: the promise of redemption to which Georg absolutely responds, as does every Kafkan protagonist in his fashion.

But this is no positive injunction of "Go and do likewise"; the reader recognizes that for Kafka's protagonist, lacking "Lebenskraft," there is no act of interpretation that is not fatal. The parable manifests, through its tension, a moment when the mind grasps its own situation, a moment of pure freedom to acknowledge that no return to a realm of unambiguity is possible.

To be in parable, then, puts being in the world into question. Thus Gregor Samsa, in the characteristic Kafkan inversion

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[34]Ibid., p. 67.

of crime and punishment, "eines Morgens unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer verwandelt."[35]

With this transformation, Kafka departs from all traditional narrative by starting with the climax, and describes from that point onward Gregor's denoument, his "eternal torment of dying." The reactions to this extraordinary event are as deviant as the metamorphosis itself. Essential to the differing interpretations by Gregor and his family of the event is the ambiguity, the indeterminate quality of Gregor's state. He becomes, through a process of literalizing metaphor, one which by its nature can never be fully achieved: a human idea contained in a vermin-like form. Corngold understands "Die Verwandlung" to be paradigmatic of the process, and indeed, recasts it as the "metamorphosis of metaphor."[36] This is the transferrence of a familiar metaphor into a fictional being literally existing as this metaphor, not with the intention of creating something new but of transforming the known. The story develops as aspects of the distortion are enacted in minute detail. A radical aesthetic intention underlies such a distortion, Corngold asserts; the negative indeterminacy in the "Un" of "Ungeziefer," a designation which transcends both English words "bug" and "vermin," is virtually nameless and exists as an opaque sign.[37]

Through the metamorphosis of the metaphor "this man is a

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[35]Ibid., p. 71.

[36]Stanley Corngold, The Commentator's Despair (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1973).

[37]Ibid.

vermin" several things are signified. First is the obvious estrangement from his family. Gregor, as the playing out of this family romance discloses, cannot be accomodated once the metamorphosis takes place. He "harks back, yet defiantly resists, integration into that ordinary language"[38] of the organic unit of which he was once a functioning member. The ending of the story attests to the mythical health of the family, especially in the figure of the blooming daughter. The poignancy of Gregor's isolation is most evident in the fact, that, though he understands human language he has lost the capacity to speak; his body is his only medium of expression. Without speech or intelligible gesture, he becomes, in their terms, indecipherable. Like all metaphor, this "Ungeziefer" preserves a trace of its original state; though he cannot communicate he still possesses memory and is nostalgic. He is moved by his sister's ethereal violin playing. But this single possibility for communion through art, love, or pity is aborted as the disjunction precludes even a transcendent moment.

The empirical sense of the transformation persists, critically, as most problematic. The debasement of human essence to insect form is rendered in concrete descriptions of the insect's movements and habits. His progressive decomposition is told in scrupulous detail. Because of Kafka's characteristic emphasis on the mundane and the concrete, as is typical of parable, the reader is tempted to perceive the situation empirically, to interpret it as such. The physical dimension of Gregor's experience is integral to his phenomenological relation to the world, and is therefore, not to assume a psychological meaning; this is no

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[38] Ibid.

psychic transformation. Gregor's metamorphosis is not one of spirit, mind, or character: this is the unprecedented artistry of the story. The generic identity of this creature can not be known, it can not be pictorially represented. Kafka insisted that the insect not be drawn, in spite of, or rather because of the "realism" of this portrayal.

Gregor's metamorphosis is the self become parable, albeit one which cannot rid itself of "all its daily cares." We have no category of expression for this sphere of liberation, save the parabolic. As a distortion of nature, Gregor is excluded from the human community, and potentially from the divine natural order as well. Writing, for Kafka, is profoundly linked to this notion of displacement and disfiguration. It is a calling whose curse overpowers its privilege; hence, self-pity always lurks surreptitiously, ready to challenge the splendors of individuation. The creature of "Die Verwandlung" is "not a self speaking or keeping silent but language itself (parole), a word broken loose from the context of language (langage), fallen into a void the meaning of which it cannot signify, near others who cannot understand it."[39]

Albert Cook says in echo of Blanchot, "when Kafka really despairs, he becomes dumb,"[40] suggesting that as long as he writes, the literary act must in itself be understood as affirmation. But this is not to say that literature and life ever coalesce in the Kafkan experience, and can this be cause enough for celebration? The desire to write, for Kafka, is antithetical to all others, and

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[39]Ibid.

[40]Albert Cook, Prisms (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), p. 118.

all others betray it, except death.

Thus Gregor's sentence, issued from the family, is like "the judgement," the writer's own. Witness Gregor's scene of fictional dissolution ("In diesem Zustand leeren und friedlichen Nachdenkens blieb er, bis die Turmuhr die dritte Morgenstunde schlug. Den Anfang des allgemeinen Hellerwerdens draussen vor dem Fenster erlebte er noch. Dann sank sein Kopf ohne seinen Willen gänzlich nieder, und aus seinen Nüstern strömte sein letzer Atem schwach hervor.") and the strident earthiness of the charwoman's execution of duty and truth which immediately follows ("Sehen Sie nur mal an, es ist krepiert; da liegt es, ganz und gar krepiert!").[41]

To turn this quasi-human refuse into a justifiable sacrifice or worse, a rite of purification, is to deprive the parable of its occasional humor, but above all of its terror. By virtue of this metamorphosis, Gregor becomes event, something that his "mere" empirical self could never have attained. He becomes the message instead of the courier. But as in "Das Urteil," the transformation of life into literature, the change of the living self into a sign, however opaque, is a denigration of that life and of its discourse. Both stories represent at once self-indictment and the highest form of self-regard.

"In der Strafkolonie" resumes the negative correlation between redemption and writing. The metaphor for interpretation here is an horrific torture machine whose medium is its message: it communicates the guilt of the accused by inscribing it upon his flesh. The double connotation of "die Schrift," writing and Scripture, plays on the double function of the device which commu-

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[41] Erzählungen, p. 136.

nicates both aesthetic and religious truth, der Zeichner. The transgression is based on an ancient law which is itself inscrutable, or literally indecipherable, to anyone but he for whom the revelation is intended. (This is the parabolic motif most explicitly manifest in "Vor dem Gesetz," where the door is destined for a single individual, though the Law to which it leads is universal.) As throughout Kafka's work, guilt is never to be doubted; and here it is stated in the most unambiguous of terms, with the punishment out of any proportion to the crime. Indeed, there is no real relation between them, for this guilt is primordial and as absolute as existence itself.

The hieroglyphics and its deranged hermeneutic code are no

> Schönschrift für Schulkinder. Man muss lange darin lesen. Auch Sie wurden es schliesslich gewiss erkennen. Es darf natürlich keine einfache Schrift sein; sie soll ja nicht sofort töten, sondern durchschnittlich erst in einem Zeitraum von zwölf Stunden; für die sechste Stunde ist der Wendepunkt berechnet . . . So schreibt sie immer tiefer die zwölf Stunden lang. Die ersten sechs Studen lebt der Verurteilte fast wie früher, er leidet nur Schmerzen . . . Wie still wird dann aber der Mann um die sechste Stunde! Verstand geht dem Blödesten auf . . . Es geschieht ja we iter nichts, der Mann fangt bloss an, die Schrift zu entziffern er spizt den Mund, als horche er. Sie haben gesehen, es ist nicht leicht, die Schrift mit den Augen zu entziffern; unser Mann entziffert sie aber mit seinen Wunden.[42]

The mystery of the Word is not immediately penetrable; as transcendent knowledge, enlightenment and execution are coterminus. The moment of insight, of transfiguration, is attainable only through death, through suffering, and finally through freedom from the body.

Kafka's Strafkolonie has a distinct typological resonance.

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[42]Ibid., pp. 211-12.

It is a world divided into the divine and the human; the law of the former, though cruel, is absolute and eternal. Its scapegoat ritual provided for both public catharsis and private redemption. The new law, shallow and inefficient, is yet more humane. However morally superior it may be to its precursor, it is spiritually impoverished and smug. The totalitarian mystique of the old is not compensated by the degrading sentimentality of the new.[43]

The ideological implications of this dichotomy are fascinating and disturbing. For the explorer, the conflict is more moral than political in nature. Historical inevitability, the necessity for change in world order, and the belief in justice and progress is juxtaposed with the loss of tradition and sense of totality, and the nostalgia and fear that accompanies such a transition. The explorer, a modern exponent of scientific neutrality, is both horrified and moved by the truth of the primitive Law, by the terror and awe it inspires in its adherents. As arbiter between the two orders, he "knows" which law must prevail, but this recognition does not mediate against desiring the mystery and unity of the other.

This situation is an extreme version of the primeval need for spiritual nourishment that the world can not provide. That art and ideology are extensions, if not substitutes, for such need is Kafka's prophetic commentary on the nature of power. A torture

[43]This is strongly reminiscent of Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals. Kafka's precise imagery is what Nietzsche calls "the whole long hardly decipherable hieroglyph story of man's moral past." The disappearance of torture as a public spectacle, which we consider to be a sign of progress and civilization is analyzed by Michel Foucault in Surveiller et Punir. There he questions the justice of our so-called humanistic penal system in much the same way as Kafka in this story. Foucault, for the sake of polemics, must, however, sacrifice ambiguity.

machine as a symbol of the sublime ending?[44]

The uncharacteristic ending of the story yet reflects Kafka's ambivalence towards both orders and the kinds of worlds they represent.[45] The Covenant no longer binding, its execution machine goes to pieces, turning against itself and against its most faithful executioner: (" . . . das war ja keine Folter, wie sie der Offizier erreichen wollte, das war unmittelbarer Mord.")[46] Death no longer redeems; the officer remains fixed as he was in life. In the self-annulment of the machine is revealed a contradiction which the system can not absorb: extreme, infinite guilt and extreme, infinite innocence.

With the annihilation of the system the emergence of a new era is momentarily implied. The evangelical flavor of the sacrificial episode is further suggested by the inscription on the Commandant's tombstone, an inscription so small that the explorer must kneel to decipher it "Glaubet und wartet!" But this is no millenium. To destroy any such notion, Kafka allows the explorer, in a singular reprieve, to flee the island, callously abandoning the inhabitants to their primitive origins and apparent savage ends. This "escape" is problematic because it constitutes, both formally and thematically, a rupture in the telos of the narrative, a way back into the world (or out of it) normally denied the protagonist of a parable.

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[44]Kafka was dissatisfied with this ending, calling it "Machwerk." Several drafts exist in his diaries.

[45]In Emrich's view, the witholding of confirmation for either order has the ultimate result of demythologizing the myth of redemptive dying.

[46]Erzählungen, pp. 233-34.

But indeed who is the protagonist of this story? Is it the officer and his allegiance to the absolute doctrine, the explorer with his dispassionate rationality, or the tortured and transfigured prisoner who embodies the ambiguous message? If this is a tale about experiential knowledge or faith, then the explorer by virtue of temperament and historical situation, has no access . . . If he is to be considered the central figure in the narrative, then the reader might read his escape as a sign of power. The irony is that Kafka's outsider, for once, can remain outside by choice.

"Ein Landarzt" recalls "Das Ziel," as it concerns an urgent journey and the same metaphor of transport, of being carried away, of inspirational flight. The destination of this unearthly winter journey is an existential encounter from which there is no return, only infinite suspension between the two realms. The realm renounced is his own house, with its possibility of love and erotic fulfillment, newly discovered in his servant girl, significantly named Rose. "Man weiss nicht, was für Dinge man im eigenen Hause vorrätig hat,"[47] she says referring not only to herself but to the bestial groom and the unearthly horses, who break out from a long abandoned pig-sty and suddenly make the journey both possible and undesirable. Most of all she speaks of the submerged territory of the self. The other realm is the doctor's vocational calling, the art of healing. The two are mutually exclusive and this is his problem.

In answering the call, he sacrifices the girl to the groom's savage intentions; once arrived, he regrets the sacrifice and wants

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[47] Ibid., p. 147.

to return. This familiar Kafkan motif--the conflict between love, sensuality and comfort, and the isolating dedication to art--is expressed through its oneiric structure as the tension between a manifest content and a latent truth. The ambivalence is crystallized in the image of the naked doctor riding forever astray, denied in one realm, deluded by the other.

For Kafka, writing was literally night work because his daily job relegated it to those hours, and figuratively because it was the act of penetrating into the nocturnal regions of consciousness.[48] The crucial meeting between doctor and patient is a confrontation with the self, initially understood to be in good health but suddenly revealing its mortal wound. Unable to cure the boy (" 's ist nur ein Arzt, 's ist nur ein Arzt," the family chants), he defers to sacred necessity and lies undressed with the sick boy in the same bed. A deep malignancy is suggested, something fatally human. The doctor suffers from the same wound, and the boy knows this ("Weisst du," höre ich,mir ins Ohr gesagt, "mein Vertrauen zu dir ist sehr gering. Du bist ja auch nur irgendwo abgeschüttelt, kommst nicht auf eigenen Füssen.")[49]

These moments of trembling intimacy, of self-doubt and recognition, do not result in real communion between doctor, patient, and community. The doctor, now divested of authority and knowledge, yearns to escape to that realm he envisions as a haven. But the necessary resources fail him; he can no more return to this state then could he have initially refused the absolute demand of his calling. It is not the intrusion of other-wordly powers that

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[48]Sokel, p. 6.

[49]Erzählungen, p. 152.

make this return impossible, but those that dwell deep within him that shatter false categories and presumptuous knowledge.

In the Kafkan universe, both the desire for radical change and the possibilities for realization are fundamental questions of procedure and orientation. The situation of the mouse in "Kleine Fabel" is exemplary:

> "Ach," sagte die Maus, "die Welt wird enger mit jedem Tag. Zuerst war sie so breit, dass ich Angst hatte, ich lief weiter und war glücklich, dass ich endlich rechts und links in der Ferne Mauern sah, aber diese langen Mauern eilen so schnell aufeinander zu, dass ich schon im letzen Zimmer bin, und dort im Winkel steht die Falle, in die ich laufe." "Du musst nur die Laufrichtung ändern," sagt die Katze und frass sie.[50]

Herein lies the general problem of every Kafkan text. Even if the protagonist were to achieve understanding, does/would the world provide him the freedom to pursue another course of action? Can he change his life?

It appears that Joseph K. in Der Prozess is presented with just such a possibility, the possibility to elect change. Called upon to account for himself, to assume responsibility for his life, K attempts to recuperate the harmony he has lost since the arrest but is not interested in understanding the nature of his case or its significance. He relies on ordered patterns of experience which are no longer appropriate to his situation. That he does not or cannot transform his mode of existence becomes increasingly obvious as the novel progresses and is most poignant in the final chapter, when evasion is still his dominant relation with the world. About to be executed, he declines the offer to take the knife and kill himself thinking:

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[50]Beschreibung eines Kampfes, p. 121.

> Vollstandig konnte er sich nicht bewähren, alle Arbeit den Behörden nicht abnehmen, die Verantwortung für diesen letzen Fehler trug der, der ihm den Rest der dazu nötigen Kraft versagt halte.[51]

The reason for which he will not sanction his own death sentence is not because he is not guilty. Rather it is his refusal to admit failure and his displacement of responsibility to "someone" else for that failure that reveals the ultimate failure of the process. For the question of Der Prozess is not of guilt or innocence, but of ambivalence, of living and dying under deceptive circumstances.

It is the episode in the Cathedral--K's dialogue with the priest, the telling of the parable and its exegesis--which functions as his ontological mirror, reflecting and determining for the whole of the novel, the implications of misreading the text of his life. Thus it is indeed "Taüschen" which informs the double-faced position of the parable as frame tale, both supporting and subverting its textural and existential relevance to the larger narrative. By using the traditional method of parabolic exposition, Kafka posits immediately an analogous relation between the "Mann vom Lande"* and the particulars of K's experience. Apart from the thematic correspondences, the implicit message communicated is the actual connection of the parable to the Law: as a preface to the Law, the parable stands outside it, and yet is intimately related to it, a relationship not unlike that of the doorkeeper or the chaplain to the Law itself. Despite, or rather because of the parable's canonical origins and its placement in the mouth of a priest, it must be viewed as an instrument of irony.

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*This expression has a distinct Yiddish meaning: simpleton. Am ha'aretz comes from rabbinic Hebrew.

[51]Franz Kafka, Der Prozess (N.Y.: Schocken, 1946), p. 271.

The model, again, is not the Synoptic parable, whose authority and respect are unquestionably linked to Jesus. K's parabolic situation resembles too closely the art and method of Talmudic commentary, of which the incompleteness and imperfection of human knowledge and understanding are necessary components in an infinitely dialectical procedure. A previous discussion on the convergence of wisdom and prophecy (Chapter 1, pp. 16-17) is pertinent here. Clearly it is logos and not theos which claims superiority in the tradition of the Law from which Kafka draws. Like the divine mysteries earlier described, the interior of the Law in the parable of the doorkeeper comprises an absolutely exclusive and impenetrable domain. Like the body of legends and commentaries surrounding the Law in "Vor dem Gesetz," a textual corpus provides the only access to this mystery.

The parable is introduced as a way of explaining to K. the form of his delusion concerning the Court: "in den einleitenden Schriften zum Gesetz heisst es von dieser"Täuchung" vor dem Gesetz steht ein Türhüter."[52] The parable elicits an interpretation from K. that is based on the man's victimization. The doorkeeper deceived the man, in his view, by never advising him of the futility of his efforts and then by denying him entrance to the Law in the end. The priest's response to K.'s analysis is to forge full-force into exegetical multiplicity, providing him with contradiction, incongruity, and duplicity at every stage of the process. Throughout these rigorous meanderings, the priest preserves the distinction between the text and its interpretation:

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[52]Ibid., p. 255.

> Du hast nicht genug Achtung vor der Schrift und veränderst die Geschicte . . . Die Schrift ist unveränderlich, und die Meinungen sind oft nur ein Ausdruck der Verzweiflung darüber.[53]

After cautioning K. about limiting his interpretation of the parable to what is inscribed in the text, the Priest himself takes some rhetorical and logical liberties:

> Die Geschichte enthält über den Einlass ins Gesetz zwei wichtige Erklärungen des Türhüters, eine am Anfang, eine am Ende. Die eine Stelle lautet: dass er ihm jetzt den Eintritt nicht gewähren könne, und die andere: dieser Eingang war nur für dich bestimmt. Bestände zwischen diesen beiden Erklärungen ein Widerspruch, dann hättest du recht, und der Türhüter hätte den Mann getäuscht. Nun besteht aber kein Widerspruch. Im Gegenteil, die erstte Erklärung deutet sogar auf die zweite hin.[54]

These views of the doorkeeper are joined not by paradox but by implication. In a statement which can only be construed as a parody of Talmudic complexity, the priest says: "Die Erklarer sagen hierzu: 'Richtiges Auffassen einer Sache und Missverstehen der gleichen Sache schliessen einander nicht vollständig aus.'"[55] The priest uses K.'s superficial interpretation to make his point. At first the doorkeeper is defended as being a dutiful civil servant who recognizes both the power and the unimportance of his status; then his character defects, simplemindedness and conceit, are exposed. It is rather the doorkeeper who is deceived, says one reading; but the doorkeeper, as representative of the Law, is immune to human judgement. The ultimate interpretation, one that

[53] "Vor dem Gesetz" in Parables and Paradoxes, pp. 64, 70.

[54] Ibid., pp. 64-66.

[55] Ibid., p. 68.

encompasses and nullifies all others, says that the Law has dominion over all its interpreters and their respective commentaries. It makes no difference whether it is the man who is deluded or the doorkeeper, or both: the final referent is the text of the Law.[56] All the various possible responses to the law, all its ambiguous alternatives, are only exercises in the method of dialectical interpretation, having no bearing and no regard for existential contingency. Thus says the priests, "Man muss nicht alles für wahr halten, man muss es nur für notwendig halten. Trübselige Meinung, sagte K. Die Lüge wird zur Weltordnung gemacht."[57]

Duplicity and truth, justice and injustice are exchangeable categories, contained within an unchangeable text where such categories have no meaning. The parable does not portray or suggest a course of action. Rather it functions on the level of prophecy as an emblem of K.'s inability to penetrate its logic, enter its closed world. K.'s defeat itself is emblematic of the failure of symbolic interpretation to bridge the gap between life and literature, existence and text.

There is the implicit equation of faith and innocence in this narrative. Faith demands risk. Der Mann vom Lande does not challenge the prohibition of the doorkeeper by walking through the door intended only for him. In the same way, K. does not read

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[56]"The Torah [the Law] is an absolute and has primacy over all human interpretations, which however deep they may penetrate, can only approximate the absolute 'meaninglessness' of the divine revelation." Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah and its Symbolism (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 43.

[57]Ibid., p. 78.

the metaphor of being-on-trial as an invitation to self-analysis and to self-determination. The radiance that streams indistinguishably from the door of the Law announces the truth of enlightenment as the moment of Joseph K.'s own death.

As befitting a writer approaching the end of his life, Kafka's last works are acutely concerned with the figure of the artist from a socio-historical perspective, with the universal function of art as it can be perceived in an individual career. These meditations distinguish themselves from the early explorations of the art/life conflict by the ironic presence of a narrator now suggesting a movement of responsibility from the world to the artist him/herself. Whereas previously the locus of conflict was confined to the intimate stage of the family, the artist's horizons are extended so that the arena becomes the world-at-large. The initial portraits of the artist as haunted by his otherness (if not inhabited by it), committed to his calling yet desirous of social sanction, were symbolic of a personal struggle to reconcile mutually exclusive pursuits. Reconciliation was deemed impossible; art allowed for no accomodation.

The stories "Ein Hungerkünstler" and "Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse" tell of situations and struggles long ago mastered and resolved. Here the artist's unfitness for life is expressed less as curse or privilege than as willfull iconoclasm. Indeed in the former, the artist is he who cultivates deception, one who makes his defects his excellences and thus merits not admiration but contempt. The artist is no longer in conflict with life, but in complicity with it. Authenticity, the pursuit of one's highest inner truth, reveals itself now as mutual duplicity between

self and world. " . . . Weil ich nicht die Speise finden konnte, die mir schmeckt. Hätte ich sie gefunden, glaube mir, ich hätte kein Aufsehen gemacht und mich vollgegessen wie du und alle."[58]

Through the peculiar alliance of hunger and art, Kafka collapses the distinction between the functional and the arbitrary, the commercial and the aesthetic, the natural and the perverse, the physical and the spiritual, the public and the private. None of these spheres remain pure. There is something of the self-proclaimed showman in this aesthetic. A "star of starvation" (Politzer), the Hunger Artist thus transforms what is a profound distaste for life into a drawing-card, a pre-text for personal distinction. Yet even this unique qualification is predicated on falsity: "Er allein nämlich wusste, auch kein Eingeweihter sonst wusste das, wie leicht das Hungern war."[59] Art, then, is not what is most difficult to attain, it is what is easiest to refuse. It is as much craftiness as craft. Such a cunning exercise in self-interpretation --creating art out of the decrepitude of flesh--could only exist within a community of interpretation where the function of art is to be neither myth-making nor myth-breaking.

The compulsion to fast is the Hunger Artist's raison d'être. Hence his existence is a self-contradiction, for perfection of the art demands nothing less than self-consumption, indeed can find expression in no other form. Yet doing what comes naturally does not in itself provide gratification for the Hunger Artist. Dependent upon the approval and acclaim of a quixotic public, his own insatiable desire to starve is constrained by the limits of public

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[58] Erzählungen, p. 267.

[59] Ibid., p. 258.

tolerance for such displays. It has been calculated that forty days is all his spectators have patience for; the Biblical allusion suggests that perhaps the divine precedent had an impresario as well. Only when everywhere, as if by secret agreement, a positive revulsion from professional fasting was in evidence, is he free to indulge without restraint in unparalleled feats of self-deprivation.

Ironically, then, the Hunger Artist can only be "himself" when he has no audience, yet without an audience what function does he serve, what "is" he? Once the conditions of reception so change that he is a mere "impediment on the way to the menagerie" in a circus, even breaking self-set records is no longer important to him. The only nourishment he craved--public acknowledgement--is now absent. The artist eventually starves himself to death in solitude and oblivion, finally admitting the duplicitous origins of his art, but faithfully pursuing his goal to its end. " . . . aber noch in seinen gebrochenen Augen war die feste, wenn auch nicht mehr stolze Überzeugung, dass er weiterhungere."[60]

An unnecessary resolution to a brilliant paradox is imposed in the form of an unequivocal symbol: the panther. Life replaces Art with a too-perfect polarity reminiscent of the ending of "Die Verwandlung." Teeming with uninhibited, self-sufficient vitality, the panther embodies freedom even as he leaps wildly about his cage. And the crowds feast on the lusty sight. The panther and the artist represent respectively the dichotomy of life and art, but also life and death. The failure of the aesthetic function is seen in the figure of the artist who has pretenses toward self-expression--his body being the sign of his artistic perfection--

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[60]Ibid., p. 267.

but who in actuality is absolutely dependent upon the interpretation of others to assume meaning. The search for hidden meaning and its metaphorical absent presence is illusory. The death-confession of the artist proves this. Form, in this case progressively deteriorating, is itself the signifying act. It is metaphoric of nothing else but a significant surface which evokes hidden forces, motives, truths--higher meanings--but which dissolves at the moment of its achievement. The starving artist doesn't starve for his art, his starving body is his art; and once the body can no longer support even its insubstantial claim to signification, it must reveal itself as nothing more than the representation of lack, not of plenitude.

In "Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse" the creation and the destruction of a myth of artistic creation proceed simultaneously. Kafka considered the "oder" in his title to be significant. This suggests the unfolding of a dual history: of an individual who would not "be" without the society that defines her and of a society that is not "historical" and thus needs those moments of self-consciousness that she evokes to "be" as well. The use of "or" rather than "and" implies basic antagonism between the two conceptions.

The story reflects this through the device of a skeptical narrator who possesses enough individual traits to be almost a character, and yet must ever struggle to encompass all the elements of the situation by dialectical reasoning into a stable, totalizing view. Unlike the Hunger Artist who eventually speaks for himself, Josephine is enclosed in such a complexity of perspectives that even when she literally disappears from the story speculations about her motives still contribute to her persona.

Containing the accelerating oscillation between individual and collective is no easy narrative feat. Attesting to the success of the method is the fact that the narrator always speaks in the present tense, as if he were describing a single situation rather than a sequence of events. At certain strategic points in the narration the controlling voice inserts itself as the rhetorical opponent of the life described. The reader is reminded suddenly that this is not a self-fulfilling Hegelian dialectic but the process of fiction-making: "Schon seit langer Zeit, vielleicht schon seit Beginn ihrer Künstlerlaufbahn, kämpft Josefine darum . . ."[61] All the sources of tension are implied by the narrator even as he presents the situation as stable. The structure is based on alternating modes of disintegration and reintegration; and the narrator's own efforts to formulate his role and Josephine's at different stages of the exposition indicate the elusiveness of the enterprise. She can not be contained.

The nature of Josefine's art is even more enigmatic than the Hunger Artist's, yet her public role is more secure: " . . .wenn man vor ihr sitzt, weiss man: was sie hier pfeift, ist kein Pfeifen."[62] What it is precisely is impossible to say. Both fasting and piping exemplify ordinary life detached from its context and turned into objects of contemplation by mutual understanding between artist and public. But something separates the two artists' conceptions of their craft: one is only self-expression and the other is communication. In "Ein Hungerkunstler" art as mimesis discloses its great potential for duplicity and failure. We see

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[61]Ibid., p. 284.

[62]Ibid., p. 272.

the artistic function at worst as negation, at best as default. But in "Josefine," art is that which ultimately arouses, elevates and endures, a conferring of significance upon what is "merely there."

> Eine Nuss aufknacken ist wahrhaftig keine Kunst, deshalb wird es auch niemand wagen, ein Publikum zusammenzurufen und vor ihm, um es zu unterhalten, Nüsse knacken. Tut er es dennoch und gelingt seine Absicht, dann kann es sich eben doch nicht nur um blosses Nüsseknacken handeln. Oder es handelt sich um Nüsseknacken, aber es stellt sich heraus, dass wir über diese Kunst hinweggesehen haben, weil wir sie glatt beherrschten und dass uns dieser neue Nussknacker erst ihr eigentliches Wesen zeigt, wobei es dann für die Wirkung sogar nützlich sein könnte, wenn er etwas weniger tüchtig im Nüsseknacken ist als die Mehrzahl von uns.[63]

Kafka uses the metaphor of nut-cracking to describe his own metaphorical practices. Given his troubled attitude toward metaphorical expression, the reader recognizes in the analogy between piping and writing an aesthetic theory grounded in metaphor's realistic component. Herein lies its creative force: its resemblance to life. But it is Kafka's modest wisdom that prevents him now from stressing rather art's deviation from life. In spite of this, Josefine is transformed from mimesis to myth.

Both the Hunger Artist and Josefine are driven by boundless ambition: of Josefine it is said that "was sie anstrebt, ist also nur die öffentliche, einduetige, die Zeiten überdauernde, über alles bisher Bekannte sich weit erhebende Anerkennung ihrer Kunst."[64] Artistic perfection and public adoration are never in synchrony, however; and throughout the narrative Josefine alternates the subordination of one to the other. As something of a national heroine, her piping possesses more symbolic than actual value.

[63] Ibid., pp. 270-71.

[64] Ibid.

She is crucial to the people's identity, fulfilling a long forgotten primal need, resurrecting the spirit of their collective unconscious, providing interludes of nostalgia and support in times of crisis. It is a symbiotic bond but both sides refuse to acknowledge dependence on the other.

Josefine's function is mythopeic or parabolic: she articulates what the people can not. She is a language event.

> Dieses Pfeifen, das sich erhebt, wo allen anderen Schweigen auferlegt ist, kommt fast wie eine Botschaft des Volkes zu dem Einzelnen; das dunne Pfeifen Josefinens mitten in den schweren Entscheidungen ist fast wie die armselige Existenz unseres Volkes mitten im Tumult der feindlichen Welt.[65]

What is "almost" like a message is not a communicated content, but an experience of affirmation and transcendence qualified in the characteristic Kafkan manner.

Josefine's stubborn finale is the last of her vain attempts to reconcile contradictory responses to her social role. By the end she is incapable of compromising her art to attract and sustain attention. She disappears; and since the narrative is based on her relationship with the people, the text threatens to slip away as well into the realm of memory and illusion. Yet despite the narrator's attempts to call her whole performance into question (and thus her life), Josefine enjoys a double artistic success. As the title indicates, as artist she must forever remain outsider, separate from the people she stands for. However, the narrator implies that, because of her hubris and unlimited ambition, she will lose this mark of distinction and her power over the hearts of the people. She will, ironically, merge with the whole, and

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[65]Ibid., p. 278.

be "forgotten" (an equally ideal notion, since this would mean total acceptance, a fate that Kafka also devoutly wished for). The paradox, as the reader is well aware, is that this mouse will continue to exist by virtue of this text. The "non-historical" story-teller of a "non-historical" people will nonetheless ensure her a place in history.

In striking contrast to the tempestuous artist Josefine is the obsessive narrator of "Der Bau." This extended monologue is an extreme example of Kafka's fiction, the culmination of his exploration into the limits of metaphor. The burrow is the creation of the animal who inhabits it, an ambiguous construction above ground, a hollowing out below. In retrospective evaluation of the product of a lifetime, the author/architect concedes that it reveals the same duplicity, illusions, and impenetrability of the literary text.

The narrative's obsessive repetitions revolve around several uncontrollable duplicitous oppositions: appearance and reality, transparence and obscurity, domination and subjection, anxiety and oblivion, threat and tranquility, life and death. Indeed, not only is the construction a text, it is both womb and tomb as well. The passages of the burrow are the passages of the text. The construction and the enunciating self are one. The creature says:

> Was kümmert mich die Gefahr, jetzt, da ich bei euch bin. Ihr gehört zu mir, ich zu euch, verbunden sind wir, was kann uns geschehen.[66]

Given the absence of entities to which the narrative voice can refer save the burrow itself, the metaphor is at once both absolute-

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[66] Beschreibung eines Kampfes, p. 194.

ly openended and absolutely closed. It is an entirely self-contained subterranean enclosure whose relation to the outside is as incidental as it is unavoidable. The creature's discourse, apparently an unbroken continuum, does lack event and action, but finds its movement in the constantly shifting of speculations and hypotheses.

The animal's frenetic existence/consciousness makes the notion of serenity unlikely: it agonizes over its ever-vulnerable state. The threats posed to the peace of the abode are unknown enemies and inherent architectural flaws. The animal's paranoid reflections and accusations cause the reader to doubt the reality of the first threat: it is a figment of its imagination, that is, consciousness itself which both produces noise and provokes terror of potential invaders. The second is shown by the creature itself to be dubiously based: a linguistic construction, an edifice of words, "eine viel zu dünnwandige Spielerei."

As artists and visionaries are wont to be, the animal is either schizophrenic or omniscient. Two perspectives of its situation must be persistently maintained. It is not enough to <u>be</u>: these brief interludes of contentment must be perceived, recorded and interpreted by another consciousness in order to be confirmed, perhaps appreciated.

> Mag man es töricht nennen, es macht mir eine unsagbare Freude und es beruhigt mich. Mir ist dann, als stehe ich nicht vor meinem Haus, sondern vor mir selbst, während ich schlafe, und hätte das Glück, gleichzeitig tief zu schlafen und dabei mich scharf bewachen zu können.[67]

But, then, in self-protection it corrects: "Nein, ich beobachte

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[67]Ibid., p. 183.

doch nicht, wie ich glaubte, meinem Schlaf, vielmehr bin ich es, der schläft wahrend der Verderber wächt."[68] As the narrative continues in its relentless ratiocinations, it becomes more and more evident that the creature is very possibly a prisoner of its own consciousness, of the burrow. It has erected it against itself. Its predator, its destroyer, the cause and source of all of its frenzied, scrupulous activity is itself.

The reader begins to understand that perhaps the creature's obsessive fears and responses to them--digging, running, eating, hissing, watching--have taken their cumulative toll on the animal. In a poignant and dignified confrontation with the self, the animal's entire life is surveyed and understood as spent in pursuit of this singular labor. Once the young apprentice, now the old architect, it is still as intensely absorbed in the construction's interplay of possibilities of life and death. "Graber" is doubly meaningful, as grave and engraving once again seal the connection between death and writing for Kafka. Despite the imminent arrival of the Graber, the animal reveals another reason for construction of the burrow: not only as defense against predators, or a refuge of silence, but as a system of communication, a sign of existence to the Other, as a hoped-for encounter on mutual terrain.

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[68] Ibid., p. 185.

Chapter V

BORGES

> "But one must be careful not to see in this anything but a sign language, a semeiotic, an occasion for metaphors. It is precisely on condition that nothing he says is taken seriously that this anti-realist can speak at all." (Nietzsche)

In the preface to "El Informe de Brodie" Borges insists on the purity of his parabolic intention: "la redacción de cuentos directos." Suspended somewhere between faith and ironic comprehension, his enigmatic "ficciones" always say too much and not enough; not too differently from the way the author's retrospective glance at career and craft appears to both deride and empower his literary self at the same time. That Borges claims it is diversion and not persuasion, emotion and not ideology which are served by his parabolic narratives is only a rhetorical displacement of what motivates writing and telling. If Borges believes that anything is of value in this world it is literature only; if something is capable of producing change it is language.

> No me atrevo a afirmar que son sencillos; no hay en la tierra una sola página, una sola palabra, que lo sea, ya que todas postulan el universo, cuyo más notorio atributo es la complejidad. Sólo quiero aclarar que no soy, ni he sido jamás, lo que antes se llamaba un fabulista o un predicador de parábolas ye ahora un escritor comprometido. No aspiro a ser Esopo. Mis cuentos, como los de las Mil Y Una Noches, quieren distraer y conmover y no persuadir.[1]

Borges explicitly compares himself with Scheherezade, that

[1]Jorge Luis Borges, Obras Completas (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1974), p. 1021. Hereafter referred to as O.C.

most cunning of story-tellers and denies all affiliation with Aesop's exhortatory fables. Yet with exquisite Kabbalistic strategy, he invokes the "predicador de parabolas" while never naming him, and calls attention to the paradox at the heart of the prologue by entitling his best story "El Evangelio Según Marcos." This narrative is arguably Borges' own parable on parables, a parable about the telling of parables, a testimony to the secret power of poetic discourse.

The parable's protagonist, not unlike Jesus, is first noted for nothing more than "esa facultad oratoria . . . y que una casi ilimitado bondad." He is also, at the time of narration, thirty-three years of age. Such initial character descriptions are not intended to contribute to the reader's understanding of the personality of Balthasar Espinosa; ideas not psychological development are Borges' concern. As parabolic convention demands, the contingencies of character remain subordinate to event, in this case, the Paradigmatic Event: the Crucifixion. The significance of the teleological perspective for a "redemptive" reading of the Gospel is no less crucial for this tale: both the structure of the narrative and its message are motivated by interpreting the earlier parts of the parable in terms of the latter, or the total narrative in terms of its fateful conclusion. The parable, reflecting as it does the symbol-making activities of its use, is fateful speech.[2] " . . . la historia universal es una Escritura Sagrada que descifamos y escribimos inciertamente, y en la que también nos escriben."[3]

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[2]Murray Baumgarten, "Mirror of Words: Language in Agnon and Borges" in Comparative Literature 31/4, p. 360.

[3]J. L. Borges, Otras Inquisiciones, "Del Cultos de los Libres" (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1960), p. 146.

Thus "playing written against spoken words, suggesting a hidden traditional text while articulating a present action,"[4] the Borgesian version of the Gospel is intricately tied to a particular aesthetics of reading, a system of interpretation where the notion of history is only as important as the synchronic moment which by reinventing, subverts it. When Espinosa, isolated by the flood waters during a visit to the country, comes across an English Bible in the home of his illiterate Indian hosts, he begins for lack of other intellectual diversion, to read it aloud to them each night. He happens to begin at the Gospel of Mark, never able to proceed further by command from his audience.

> Concluido el Evangelio según Marcos, quiso leer otro de los tres que faltaban; el padre le pidió que repitiera el que ya había leído, para entenderlo bien. Espinosa sintió que eran como niños, a quienes la repetición les agrada más que la varación o la novedad.[5]

The nature of Borgesian fiction, in its ever-widening patterns of self-referentiality, aims for the perfect balance between allusion and text. Thus the protagonist of this parable, as much reader as character himself, is engaged in a concealed mystery of which he is unaware, but which is manifested to us in part, by such allusions. It is we who must perceive the tension between the material surface of life and its mystical undercurrents when Espinosa dreams at night of the Flood, hearing "los martillazos de la fabricación del arca." And indeed, a new storm has broken out, one which signifies both destruction and salvation. Two nights later, on Thursday, he is visited in his bed by the young girl of

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[4]Baumgarten, p. 360.

[5]J. L. Borges, "El Evangelio Según Marco" in El Informe de Brodie, O.C., p. 1071.

the house who "no lo abrazó, no dijo una sola palabra" but lies beside him, trembling.

The following day is Friday. Espinosa is asked if Christ had let himself be killed so as to save all other men on earth. Taking his parabolic responsibilities seriously, he answers"Sí. Para salvar todos del infierno." He is asked, after lunch, to read the last chapters of the Gospel over again. Later that day, toward evening, he awakens from a long but fitful nap and wanders into the gallery, saying aloud to the three around him:

> Las aguas están bajas. Ya falta poco.
> Ya falta poco--repitió Gutre, como un eco.[6]

The ending of the parable echoes the story of the Gospel's final events. He is asked for his blessing, mocked, spat upon, and pushed outside, where against a patch of sky and the song of a bird, he sees the Cross which awaits him.

The fate of Jesus, however unique an event in Christian eschatological history, has its structural precedents in myth. In its stress on the repetitious nature of events and the negation of individual significance, Borges' own conception of fiction and history acknowledges no distinction bewteen these and myth. The primitive ontology embodied in his writing, affirming both the cyclical nature of history and the archetypal personality,[7] raises again many of the crucial questions regarding Scriptural interpretation discussed earlier in this study.[8]

In the parabolic process, figures of language become <u>figures of thought.</u>

[6]Ibid., p. 1072.

[7]See Marcel Eliade, <u>Le Mythe de l'Eternel Retour</u> (Paris: 1949).

[8]See Chapter I, pp. 11-12, 26-27.

> The mark of a genuine myth is its power to impress its inventors as literal truth in the face of the strongest contrary evidence and in complete defiance of argument. It appears to be so sacred a truth that to ask in what sense it is true, or to call it a figure of speech, seems like frivolity. For it is a figure of thought, not merely of speech, and to destroy it is to destroy an idea in its pristine phase, just when it dawns on people. That is why mythic beliefs really are sacred. They are pregnant, and carry an unformulated idea.[9]

Object becomes event, and event becomes metaphor, effaced and filtered through the anonymous individual or collective memory, which, by its nature, diminishes the extraneous and emphasizes the essential. "Quizá la historia universal es la historia de la diversa entonación de algunas metáforas."[10] The parabolic compression of narrative content to its fundamental mythic form is reflected in the transmission from oral to written text. If fully pursued, Borges' predisposition to universalize results in a radical textual anonymity, where author, narrator, character, and even reader become permutations, proliferations of Borges' persona.

> . . . yo vivo, yo me dijo vivir, para que Borges pueda tramar su literatura y esa literatura me justifica . . . pero esas páginas no me pueden salvar, quizá porque lo bueno ya no es de nadie, ni siquiera del otro, sino del lenguaje o la tradición . . . No sé cuál de los dos escribe esta página.[11]

However poignant this confession of the consumptive character of the literary self, it only further obscures those distinctions upon which the history of literature has always depended. When Borges writes his "historias" and his "cuentos," exploiting

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[9]Suzanne Langer, Feeling and Form (New York: Scribners, 1953), p. 81.

[10]J. L. Borges, Otras Inquisiciones, "La Esfera de Pascal," p. 17.

[11]J. L. Borges, "Borges y yo," El Hacedor, O.C., p. 808.

the ambiguous relationship between the expository and the fictional, the critical and the artistic ("sino es verdadera como hecho, lo será como símbolo")[12], he must ironically authenticate his fictional universe by pretending to subvert it: by fictionalizing himself as both author and narrator. Were he to remain outside his stories, he would become a fixed point of reference (a transcendental signifier), and thereby contradict his own creative premise.

The echoic character of all discourse, oral or written, is implied in "El Evangelio Según Marcos." By virtue of an act's repetition--its conversion into ritual--it is immortalized, conferring as well a kind of eternity upon those who engage in it. Borges' belief in the poet's subservience to language and its function as the expression of a collective will or vision which is endlessly repeated, is cast in other terms in "El Informe de Brodie," the title story from the same collection. Therein he satirizes the Western nostalgia for romantic primitivism by describing an otherwise degenerate nation which redeems itself by its ritualistic discovery of poets. Its faith in the divine nature of poetry and a language capable of rendering such abstractions, significantly elevates the narrating missionary's opinion of the Yahoos, a tribe found in the back-lying regions of Brazil. (The name is charged with literary, if not anthropological, significance.)

The analogue is extreme but underlying its parodic thrust is a serious commentary on the function of the poet in all cultures:

> Si el poema no excita, no pasa nada; si las palabras del poeta los sobrecogen, todos se apartan de él, en silencio, bajo el mandato de un horror sagrado (under a holy dread). Sienten que lo ha tocado el espíritu; nadie

[12] J. L. Borges, "Historia del guerrero y de la Cutiva," El Aleph, O.C., p. 558.

> hablará con él ni lo mirará, ni siquiera su madre. Ya no es un hombre sina un dios y cualquiera puede matarlo.[13] (emphasis mine)

In "Parábola del Palacio," which pursues the theme of the awesome power of poetic communication, Borges inverts the Kafkan relationship between the messenger and emperor. ("Eine Kaiserliche Botshaft") Whereas for Kafka, a message was uttered by a dying divinity and is never revealed, condemning the messenger to wander interminably in search of his message, in the Borges' version the messenger is the poet. His utterance is revealed and its capacity to exhaust the very reality it is supposed to reflect (the Palace in all its infinite complexity) is too great. The Emperor cannot permit the poet or his poem to endure.

> Al pie de la penúltima torre fue que el poeta (que estaba como ajeno a los espectáculos que eran maravilla de todos) recitó la breve composición que hoy vinculamos indisolublemente a sue nombre y, que, según repiten los historiadores mas elegantes, le deparó la inmortalidad y la muerte. El texto so had perdido hay quien entiende que constaba de un verso; otros, de una sola palabra. Lo cierto, lo increíble, es que en el poema estaba entero y minucioso el palacio enorme, con cada ilustre porcelana y cada dibujo en cada porcelana y las penumbras y las luces de los crepúsclos y cada instante desdichado o feliz de las gloriosas dinastias de mortales, de dioses y de dragones que habitaron en el desde el interminable pasado. Todos callaron, pero el Emperador exclamó: !Me has arrebatado el palacio! y la espada de hierro del verdugo segó la vida del poeta.[14]

Poetry is divine and therein lies its danger. But it is the poetry which is important, and not its vessel. Borges views his work as something that is revealed to him, he serving as but

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[13] J. L. Borges, "El Informe de Brodie," El Informe de Brodie, p. 1077, O.C.

[14] J. L. Borges, "Parabola del Palacio," El Hacedor, pp. 801-2, O.C.

a momentary reader in what amounts to an infinite network of inter-textual relations.

> . . . l'auteur d'une oeuvre ne détient et n'exerce sure elle aucun privilège, qu'elle appartient dès sa naissance (et peut-être avant) du domaine public, et ne vît que de ses relations innombrables avec les autres oeuvres dans l'espace sans frontières de la lecture.[15]

In his proto-structuralist concept of literature,[16] there is no contest between the notions of derivation and originality, between literary tradition and individual production. Narratives are only appropriated by those who narrate them; they belong to a common literary repertoire whose only author is the Spirit. Literature is its universal memory.

Borges' literary enterprise is the quest to create cultural analogues to sacred texts, an attempt to produce the one work that will contain an absolute vision: the exemplary Aleph. But if this quest is the manifestation of his aesthetic and philosophical preoccupations, he nonetheless admits to the conceptual impossibility of such an absolute.

> La imposibilidad de penetrar el esquema divino del universo no puede, sin embargo, disuadirnos de planear esquemas humanos, anque nos conste que éstos son provisorios.[17]

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[15]Gerard Genette, Figures I (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), p. 130. Concordant with the concept of inter-textuality, Borges does not consider himself an authoritative translator of his own work. A translation, even his own, constitutes for him, a re-creation, an interpretation. The ambiguity of this situation (Borges, the translator of today not being Borges, the writer of yesterday) recalls Pierre Menard's re-writing Cervantes' Don Quixote in the "exact" language of the "original."

[16]Genette and Foucault appear to be the only such theorists who acknowledge this relationship. In addition to the above-cited Figures, see Foucault's Les Mots et les Choses (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966).

[17]J. L. Borges, Otras Inquisiciones, "El Idioma de John Wilkins," p. 135.

Hence in place of the multiplicity of philosophical and theological systems that express our yearning for an order unattainable to human intelligence, Borges substitutes others: all testifying with ironic and paradoxical precision, to their rigorous relativity. In the end, he tells us, all systems are ultimately vacuous and false.

He acknowledges even the theological and the metaphysical by aesthetic criteria, by what is singular and marvelous about them, rather than by any truth value they may purport to possess. Limited only by the constraints imposed upon him by language, he creates a form of speculative thought as ambiguous and provisional as that which we call fiction, but which is no more fictional than philosophy. Cassirer's formulation of this quest for structure is remarkably close in spirit to Borges':

> Consequently all schemata which science evolves in order to classify, organize, and summarize the phenomena of the real world turn out to be nothing but arbitrary schemes--airy fabrics of the mind, which express not the nature of things but the nature of the mind. So knowledge, as well as myth, language, and art has been reduced to a kind of fiction--to a fiction that recommends itself by its usefulness, but must not be measured by any strict standard of truth, if it is not to melt away into nothingness.[18]

We recognize this as the implicit tension between universalism and perspectivism, metaphor and metonymy, and have noted such figurative interplay as fundamental to the Biblical parable[19] as well as to those of Agnon and Kafka. "The central dilemma of the contingent and the absolute," in Irby's phrase,[20] is symbolized

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[18]Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth (New York, 1946), pp.7-8.

[19]See Chapter I, pp. 29-30 of this study.

[20]James Irby, "The Structure of the Stories of Jorge Luis Borges" (unpublished dissertation, University of Michigan), p. 289.

by Borges through the Zahir and the Aleph.[21] As a check on the tendency toward a sacralization or teleology, the perspectival, provisional, successive configuration of the Zahir is necessary. But it carries its own mystique and is no less a hypostasized entity than the transcendent moment achieved, the Aleph.

The parabolic tactic of multiplying alternatives synoptically (simultaneously) rather than serially[22] doesn't overcome the tension but exploits it. In attempting to behold the inaccessible through language, the mode plays with the possibilities of différence (Derrida):[23] postponement, deferral, decentering, by forming and dissolving metaphors which hover around the absences where the unnamed, unnameable reality is inferred or intuited. It is only through the distortion of memory or supplementarity (a surplus of signification) that these metaphors are present all at once--forming the comprehensive, totalizing Aleph. In Borges' view these near-moments of self-understanding or revelation constitute the aesthetic event--its fluidity, ambiguity, diversity, indefiniteness.

In the story "El Fin," Borges provides a glimpse of that moment when truth, nearly incarnated, is sacrificed to the imperfect vehicle of language:

> Hay una hora de la tarde en que la llanura está por decir algo; nunca lo dice o tal vez lo dice infinitamente y no lo entendemos, o lo entendemos pero es

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[21]For a thorough analysis of this opposition see Carter Wheelock's The Mythmaker (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969).

[22]Ben Belitt, "The Enigmatic Predicament: Some Parables of Kafka and Borges" in Prose for Borges (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 228-29.

[23]Jacques Derrida, L'Ecriture et la Difference (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967).

intraducible como una música . . . [24]

In the terse tale "Pedro Salvadores," the protagonist himself is a representation of that which cannot be formulated: "Como todos las cosas, el destino de Pedro Salvadores nos parece un símbolo de algo que estamos a punto de comprender."[25] "Inferno, I, 32" attempts to articulate the same parabolic event by suggesting that the leopard exists only for a single line of Dante's poem while Dante himself exists only in order to write it. "Sintió que había recibido y perdido una cosa infinita, algo que no podría recuperar, ni vislumbrar siquiera, porque la máquina del mundo es harton compleja para la simplicidad de los hombres."[26]

The power to articulate all potential aspects of existence, to compress both time and individuality into a single point containing all others, to hold eternity in an instant, is, in effect, to know. And it is just that vision of totality and certitude which is denied us: "Knowledge is innately mysterious, arcane, privileged, arbitrary, unknowable." And if, as the same critic observes, "to know is to be appropriated by the irreconcilable plurality of things, to be dispossessed of one's own identity,"[27] then such ambiguity is what constitutes the nature of Kafka's terror. Yet that which awes Agnon, and terrorizes Kafka, provokes Borges.

For Borges, whose melancholy is primarily metaphysical, life is a linguistic adventure, for Kafka a linguistic nightmare.

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[24] J. L. Borges, "El Fin" in Ficciones (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1956), p. 170.

[25] J. L. Borges, "Pedros Salvadores," El Elogia de la Sombra, O.C., p. 995.

[26] J. L. Borges, "Inferno, I, 32," El Hacedor, O.C., p. 807.

[27] Belitt, pp. 220, 224.

Witness the innumerable familiar fictional devices shared by both Kafka and Borges and how they function differently in each writer's work. Mystery in Kafka is symbolically rendered as impotence, impossibility, suggested but never named; in Borges mystery is the exuberant challenge posed by the idea of infinity. The Unknown is represented in all of its diversity and confronted as it never can be in reality: forking paths, circular ruins, lotteries, libraries, compasses, searches, miracles, messages, spheres, avatars, mirrors, selves. Indeed the labyrinth comes to represent the ultimate meaning of ambiguity transformed into an image of the symbolic impulses and power of language. In the story "El Jardín de Senderos que se Bifurcan," the Sinologist, Stephen Albert, studies the parable of Ts'ui Pen and understands that the latter's unfinished novel and labyrinthine construction are the same: self-referential and infinite because they realize the potential force of language as a system that can enact all meanings simultaneously.

> Me detuve, como es natural, en la frase: Dejo a los varios provenires (no a todos) mi jardín de senderos que si bifurcan. Casi en el acto comprendi; el jardin de senderos que si bifurcan era la novela caótica; la frase varios porvenires (no a todos) me sugirió la imagen de la bifurcación en el tiempo, no en el espacio. La relectura general de la obra confirmó esa teoriá. En todas las ficciones, alternativas, opta por una y elimina las otras; en la del casi inextricable Ts'ui Pên, opta--simultáneamente--por todas. Crea, así, diversos porvenires, diversos tiempos, que también proliferan y se bifurcan.[28]

The above quotation provides a definition of the Borgesian parable. Not a particular world in its finite plentitude, but a story which contains all possible variations on itself, its stra-

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[28]J. L. Borges, "El Jardin de Senderos que se Bifurcan" in Ficciones, pp. 96-97.

tegies are articulated simultaneously, indeed, endlessly repeated, through title, theme and plot. One's reading of "El Jardín de Senderos que se Bifurcan" parallels the characters' crucial act of reading: all are readers and victims in one way or the other.

Each successive bifurcation of the labyrinthine construction which is the story itself, is the point of departure for another fiction, or rather for two,* as an excerpt from Ts'ui Pên's byzantine novel reveals:

> Leyó con lenta precisión dos redacciones de un mismo capítulo épico. En la primera, un ejército marcha hacia una batalla através de una montaña desierta; el horror de las piedras y de la sombra le hace menospreciar la vida y logra con facilidad la victoria; en la segunda, el mismo ejército atraviesa un palacio en el que hay una fiesta; la resplandeciente batalla les parece una continuación de la fiesta y logran la victoria.[29]

The fictional version of Yu Tsun's narrative that we are reading ends with the transmission and decipherment of a code name Albert, which is coincident with the murder of the Sinologist and the bombing of the city Albert (indeed, the function of the narrative was to lead up to this point, by whatever route). Yet, according to the parabolic strategy offered here, any one of many ironic alternatives was/is/will forever be possible:

> Esa trama de tiempos que se aproximan, se bifurcan, se cortan o que secularmente se ignoran, abarca todas las posibilidades. No existimos en la mayoría de esos tiempos; en algunos existe usted y no yo; en otros, yo, no usted; en otros, los does. En éste, que un favorable azar me depara, usted ha llegado a mi casa; en otro, usted, al atravesar el jardín, me had encontrado muerto; en otro, yo digo estas mismas palabras, pero soy un error, un fantasma.[30]

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*Theoretically, the alternatives are infinite: all the roads not taken, all the texts not yet written, not yet read.

[29]Ibid., pp. 97-98.

[30]Ibid., pp. 99-100.

The labyrinth and the book are one and the same. A fundamental motif expressed here and elsewhere in Borges' work is the notion that these creations are onto-theological metaphors for the Universe. As facets of self-expressions, of a mind inverted upon itself, it is a universe not discovered but created. As Cassirer notes above, the objective correlative, the Universe, is an analogue of the human mind. The self seen through the labyrinthine structure of the world is revealed in the hieroglyphics of a face:

> Un hombre se propone la tarea de dibujar el mundo. A lo largo de los años puebla un espacio con imágenes de provincias, de reinos, de montañas, de bahías, de naves, de islas, de peces, de habitaciones, de instrumentos, de astros, de caballos ye de personas. Pocos antes de morir, descubre que ese paciente laberinto de líneas traza la imagen de su cara.[31]

In the essay "Del Culto de los Libros," Borges develops the double idea of the Book and the Universe as parallel creations of God. More importantly, for modern critical theory, the Book itself is conceived as an end in itself. As both literary text and physical object, the book assumes a kind of sacred importance, and is no longer a book, but the Book. And by extension, as was said in reference to "El Evangelio Según Marcos," we ourselves are inscribed within it.

With characteristic Borgesian brevity, the essay manages to encompass the Hellenistic, Moslem, Hebrew, Christian, medieval, romantic and modern views on the subject, drawing support with quotes from Galileo, Sir Thomas Browne, Carlyle, Leon Bloy, and the well-known phrase of Mallarme: "Tout au monde n'existe que pour àboutir a un livre."

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[31] J. L. Borges, Epilogue to El Hacedor, O.C., p. 854.

The world turns into words, escritura. However, the total representation of the Universe is not the Book of Life, but the Book of Books; not the mimesis of life but of convention, is the question with which he is concerned. Neither is the Library, and the consummate repository or compendium of the Book, a representation of the world outside culture or language, for there is none. This is the representation of all other representations, not the "real" universe, but the ideal universe of literature, when all has been said. The aptness of this metaphor as a substitute for rhetoric, or the totality of human discourse, is affirmed by Edward Said in a discussion of Foucault's rapport with Borges:

> A library is a total, infinitely absorptive system, infinitely self-referential (think of the catalogue, of the unlimited possibility of cross-references there and in the books), numerically vast in its elements and impersonal. So organized and complete a world is at once perfectly repetitive and perfectly actual.[32]

Like the scholar's discovery of the identification of the infinite circular book with the labyrinth in "El Jardin," the librarian-narrator of "La Bibliotéca de Babel" describes that hermetic universe "which others call the Library": vast, infinite and co-extensive with the whole of experience, a maze from which there may or may not be a way out.

In the Borgesian system, where Everyman is a Librarian, what can experience consist of, if not the prototypical quest for the nature and meaning of thatabsolute space which houses humanity's basic mysteries? Heretofore the metaphor has underscored the open-ended play of language and its uncentered labyrinthine structure;

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[32]Edward Said, Beginnings (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1975), p. 302.

now a nostalgia for the center is revealed (in the Derridean sense). "He viajado en mi juventud; he peregrinado en busca de un libro, acaso del catálogo de catálogos."[33]

The Library of Babel is a structuralist utopia: an endless activity of imitation founded not on the analogy of substances, but on the analogy of functions.[34] The books are infinite in number and absolutely uniform. Each shelf contains forty-two books of 410 pages; each page contains forty lines of eighty black letters each. In other words, a library is the product of all the possible permutations and combinations of the twenty-five orthographical symbols.

> todos los libros, por diversos que sean, constan de elementos iguales: el espacio, el punto, la coma, las veintidós letras del alfabeta . . . No hay, en la vasta Biblioteca, dos libros idénticos. De esas premisas incontrovertibles dedujo que la Biblioteca es total y que sus anaqueles registran todas las posibles combinaciones de los veintitanos símbolos ortográficos (número, anque vastísimo, no infinito) o sea todo lo que es dable expresar: en todos los idiomas.[35]

In a disconsolate parady of interpretation and intertextuality, the librarian names what is comprehended within:

> Todo: la historia minuciosa del porvenir, las autobiografías de los arcángeles, el catálogo fiel de la Biblioteca, miles y miles de catálogos falsos, la demostración de la falacia de esos catálogos, la demostración de la falacia del catálogo verdadero, el evengelio gnóstico de Basílides, el comentario de ese evangelio, el comentario del comentario de ese evangelio, la relación verídica de tu muerte, la versión de cada libro a todas las lenguas, las interpolaciones de cada libro en todos los libros.[36]

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[33] J. L. Borges, "La Biblioteca de Babel" in Ficciones, p. 76.

[34] Roland Barthes, Les Essais Critiques (Paris: Les Editions Seuil, 1966).

[35] "Biblioteca," p. 79.

[36] Ibid., pp. 79-80.

But the system is impenetrable, indecipherable, tautological: all the books are illegible. This veritable prison-house of language even perpetuates its own mystifications, religions and heresies. One is "del Hombre de Libro."

> El algún anaquel de algún hexagono (razonaron los hombres) debe existir uh libro que sea la cifra y el compendio perfecto de todos los demás: algún bibliotecario lo ha recorrido y es análogo a un dios. En el lenguaje de esta zona persisten aún vestigios del culto de ese functionario remoto. Muchos peregrinaron en busca de Él.[37]

This structuralist ideal is really a hermeneutic lament: the librarians live and die in their pursuit and their bodies are thrown down the shafts between the hexagons. Implicitly assumed in the metaphorical equation of world and textuality is that everything is a text. By virtue of the same logic, however, "nothing is a text" is an equally valid assumption. Indeed, in the Library of Babel, enclosure within a cosmic set of quotations ironically guarantees elimination of the process of inscription and interpretation: communication is absorbed by the structure. No understanding is possible. ¿"Tú, que me lees, estas seguro de entender mi lenguaje?" The conclusion is all the more devastating.

> . . . pero sospecho que la especia humana--la unica--esta por extinguirse y que la Biblioteca perdurara: iluminada, solitara, infinita, perfectamente inmovil, armada de volumenes preciosos, inutil, incorruptible, secreta.[38]

The contradiction inherent in the notion of "infinite disorder" is finally resolved through a logical turn:

> La Biblioteca es ilimitada y periódica. Si un eterno viajero la atravesara en cualquier dirección, comprobaría al cabo de los siglos que los

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[37] Ibid., p. 82.

[38] Ibid., p. 85.

> mismos volúmenes se repiten en el mismo desorden (que, repetido, sería un orden: el Orden). Mi soledad se alegra con esa elegante esperanza.[39]

Ultimately the System can satisfy no one. The temptation offered by the Absolute Book is that the unknown, the "God," the Man of the Book, will then be made manifest through an Absolute Order. Thus the library's failure, (itself being a device of language) to accede to the unknown, is a failure of language. The message of Borges and the other two parabolists treated in this study, is that language's most powerful revelation about mystery is that it cannot be disclosed.

The fragmentation of tongues is expressed through the image of Babel. "La Lotería en Babylonia" is another emblem for the chaos upon which we impose intellectual constructs in hope of comprehending it. The solipsistic nature of these systematic attempts to master the incomprehensible is revealed in the self-reversing tale:* what we learn is not the world but our own reflection of it.

In this story, the central metaphor of the all-pervading lottery subverts the traditional philosophical distinction between chance happenings and ordered events, free will vs. determination, contingency and necessity. For this narration takes place in a "país vertiginoso donde la lotería es parte principal de la realidad."[40] How the lottery evolved from a frivolous pastime to the dominant feature of this world is the material of the story. Eventually, as every aspect of life is subsumed under the "chance" control of the lottery, no means for distinguishing or separating

*Borges' technique is to present an initial polar contrast whose duality is collapsed in the course of the story.

[39] Ibid.

[40] J. L. Borges, "La Lotería en Babylonia," Ficciones, p. 58.

fiction from history, genuine from counterfeit, sovereignty from subjection is possible. The totalitarian Company administers enigmatically, absolutely.

> Esa funcionamiento silencioso, comparable al de Dios, provoca toda suerte de conjeturas. Alguna abominablemente insinúa que hace ya siglos que no existe la Compañía y que el sacro desorden de nuestras vida es puramente hereditario, tradicional; otra la juzga eterna y enseña que perdurará hasta la última noche, cuando el último dios anonade el mundo. Otro declara que la Compañía es omnipotenete, pero que sólo influye en cosas minúsculas: en el grito de unpájaro, en los matices de la herrumbre y del polvo, en los entresueños del alba. Otra, por boca de heresiarcas enmascarados, que no ha existido nunca y no existirá. Otra, no menos vil, razona que es indiferente afirmar o negar la realidad de la tenebroso corporción, porque Babilonia no es otra cosa que un infinito juego de azares.[41]

The combining of unlikely elements is the basis of metaphorical thought. Thus the opening sentence of the story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"--"Debo a la conjunción de un espejo y de una encyclopedia"--is not only an allusion to the general literary necessity of creative conjunction but is particularly self-referential, incorporating analogues for the reading of the work within its verbal texture. (The mirror image is the equivalent of a world that is only illusory, or at best, inadequately representational.) The reader confronts his/her mirror image in the activity of reading. In more patent a thematic fashion than most Borgesian parables, "Tlön . . ." conjoins the intellectual possibilities of a given cosmology with the anguishing and perplexing implications of such a hypothesis. Its projected image in the real world, indeed, eventually usurps it. Soon after describing "la primera intrusión del mundo fantástico en el mundo real," the narrator says, "lo

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[41]Ibid., p. 65.

demás está en la memoria (cuando no en la esperanza o en el temor) de todo mis lectores."[42]

As models for literature as a whole, taxonomies of actual and possible fictions, encyclopedias are like libraries: paradigms for the (intellectual) universe. Here three encyclopedias can be classified according to their ascending unreality. The first is the known Encyclopedia Britannica; the second, the apocryphal Anglo-American Cyclopedia, supposedly published in 1917, of which only two copies exist. These copies, however, are dissimilar: one contains four extra pages at the end of Volume 26 which the narrator's copy does not. The missing (or supplementary entry) describes a country somewhere in Asia Minor called Uqbar whose myths and legends describe two imaginary regions, Mlejnas and Tlön. The third encyclopedia is a First Encyclopedia of Tlön, of which only Volume 11 is known to exist. though there is said to be a set containing 40 volumes, provisionally entitled Orbis Tertius. The model on which Orbis Tertius has been based is the Encyclopedia Britannica. Thus, the series comes full circle. And just as the two copies of Volume 26 of the Anglo-American Encyclopedia differ slightly but with arbitrary significance, these are two similarly different copies of Volume 11 of Orbis Tertius.

The tertiary construction of the tale (already noted in the title) involves the relationship between an enigmatic text, a Borges-Bioy authorial partnership, and an anonymous "audience." The reader (a status no one is exempt from) is called upon to evaluate the authenticity of texts, "aided" by spurious and real names

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[42]J. L. Borges, "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," Ficciones, p. 32.

and sources of documentation, and the always-dubious credibility of the Borgesian narrator. The entire story is, in fact, a vehicle for a greater, unwritten text. The network is comprised of an intricate web of word choices and juxtapositions--textual substitutions, ambiguities, revisions, and cross-references.

The tripartite design consists of the essay by the narrator which appears initially to be the whole story; the implicit story of the narrator who is either victim, or perpetrator of the cosmis or ideological conspiracy, and the "story" "Tlön," which contains the others, and in which the reader's judgements of the narrator's reliability is the unknown factor. As each level subverts the next, both reader and narrator are engaged in interpreting the design and significance of a story whose design is only to become more and more self-referential. Ultimately, "Tlön" reveals itself to be a labyrinthine, complicitous fiction, if not an infinitely repetitive, endlessly interpretable series of fictions.

The nature of the whole hermeneutic enterprise is alluded to in the first veiled description of "Orbis Tertius," the name stamped on a leaf of silk paper that covered the color plates in Volume 11. The language becomes more and more connotative, evocative, even mystical.

> Hacía dos años que yo había descubierto en un tomo de cierta enciclopedia pirática una somera descripción de un falso país; ahora me deparaba el azar algo más precioso y más arduo. Ahora tenía en las manos un vasto fragmento metódico de la historia total de un planeta desconocido, con sus arquitecturas y sus barajas, con el pavor de sus mitologías y el rumor de sus enguas, con sus emperadores y sus mares, con sus minerales y sus pájaros y sus peces, con su álgebra y su fuego, con sy controversia teológica y metafísica. Todo ello articulado, coherente, sin visible propósito doctrinal o tono paródico.[43]

[43] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

The theoretical exposition of this second part of the story delineates what is literally an ideal world (that is, a world of ideas). In Tlön's universal philosophy, where the only heresy is materialism, the only realities are mental perceptions. Not even space exists, only a dimensionless continuum of thought. As linguistically-based a planet as our own, the character of Tlön's languages has vast epistemological implications:

> Su lenguaje y las derivaciones de su lenguaje--la religión, las letras, la metafísica--presuponen el idealismo. El mundo para ellos no es an concurso de objetos en el espacio; es una serie heterogenea de actos independientes. Es sucesivo, temporal, no espacial. No hay sustantivos en la conjetural Ursprache de Tlön . . . Hay poemas famosos compuestos de una sola enorme palabra. Esta palabra integra un objeto poético creado por el autor . . . Este monismo idealismo total invalida la cienca . . . Todo estado mental es irreducible: el mero hecho de nombrarlo--id est, de clasificarlo--importa un falseo . . . Los metafísicos de Tlön no buscan la verdad ni siquiera la verosimilitud: buscan el asombro. Juzgan que la metafísica es una rama de la literatura fantástica.[44]

Clearly, this imaginary world is only an ironic extension of some of Borges' well-articulated theories.

> No existe el concepto del plagio: se ha establecido que todas las obras son obra de un solo autor, que es intemporal y es anónimo . . . También son distintos los libros. Los de ficción abarcan un solo argumento, con todas las permutaciones imaginables. Los de naturaleza filosófica invariablemente contienen la tesis y la antítesis, el riguroso pro y el contra de una doctrina. Un libro que no encierra su contralibro es considerado incompleto.[45]

When the narrator says "siglos y siglos de idealismo no han dejado de infliur en la realidid," he is postulating what is perhaps Tlön's most fascinating aspect: objects which are products

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[44]Ibid., pp. 20, 21, 22-23.

[45]Ibid., p. 27.

of not only reason but desire--hrönir. Symbols of loss, they are simply thought into existence. Borges even goes so far as to explain how there are hrönir of hrönir, engendered in an infinite cyclical series.

Perfect rigor means the elimination of all alternatives. Tlön can only be a utopia in the realm of pure thought, a perfect dictatorship in an unreal world, an historical account of what cannot possibly have historicity.[46] Such "unique" truth can only exist in a fiction which declares itself as such:

> Como no someterse a Tlön, a la minusciosa y vasta evidencia de un planeta ordenado? Inútil responder que la realidad también está ordenada. Quizá lo esté, pero de acuerdo a leyes divinas--traduzco: a leyes inhumanas--que no acabamos nunca de percibir. Tlon será un laberinto, pero es un laberinto urdido por hombres, un laberinto destinado a que lo descrifen los hombres . . . Ya en las memorias un pasado ficticio ocupa el sitio de otro, del que nada sabemos con certidumbre--ni siquiera que es falso.[47]

The writer attacked for his political passivity (usually in the direction of conservatism) in his life as well as his art, has written a story not without its ideological message. Tlön, the spurious totalitarian utopia that has subjugated the world to its order, is not as purely ideal as critics generally assume it to be. Borges offers an explicit historical reference: "Lo cierto es que anhelaba ceder. Hace dice años bastaba cualquier simetría con apariencia de orden--el materialismo dialéctico, el antisemitismo, el nazismo--para embelesar a los hombres."[48]

These coherent fictional worlds of the intelligence,

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[46]Frances Weber, "Borges' Stories: Fiction and Philosophy," Hispanic Review 36/2, p. 127.

[47]"Tlön," p. 34.

[48]Ibid., p. 33.

diversely portrayed in the parables from the volume Ficciones, are of course, auto-critiques. Inherent in their ironic perspective on the human desire for totalization is a fatal sense of limitation, of abortive possibilities. "Las Ruinas Circulas" is another extended metaphor on the structure of thought and literary creation: "la vida es sueño." A parable about artistic purpose, it expresses devotion, aspiration, and failure. The mysterious protagonist's invincible purpose, "que lo guiaba no era imposible, aunque sí sobrenatural. Quería soñar un homber: quería soñarlo con integridad minusciosa e imponerlo a la realidad."[49]

The parable is an affirmation of the mythopoetic or metaphysical nature of art, and one which stresses the priority of form over content. The act of dreaming which may be taken for a variant of the Platonic concept of anamnesis, finds its analogue in the acquisition of knowledge as it is "remembered"in its original condition. But the knowledge gained is not only ambiguous, it is devastating. No salvation: the revelation is tantamount to self-dissolution, a pattern discernible in most of Borges' writing, but rarely presented either so poignantly or reverently. The language seems simgularly appropriate for the rendering of idea into flesh: the structure of themind is as if it were the objective universe, its contents as if they were objects in the exterior world. The opening of the narrative is stunning in the restrained negativity of its assertion,[50] in the near effacement of the metaphorical relation it posits: Life is (like) a dream. The

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[49]"Las Ruinas Circulares" in Ficciones, p. 50.

[50]See Chapter IV, pp. 120-1 of this study where a similar Kafkan technique is discussed.

aesthetic and the sacred are also likened but neither is celebrated here.

> Nadie lo vio desembarcar en la unánime noche, nadie vió la canoa de bambú sumiéndos en el fango sagrado, pero a los pocos días nadie ignoraba que el hombre taciturno venía del Sur y que su patria era una de las infinitas aldeas que están aguas arriba, en el flanco violento de la montaña, donde el idioma zend no está contaminado de griego y donde es intrecuente la lepra. Lo cierto es que el hombre gris besó el fango, reprechó la ribera sin apartar (probablemente, sin sentir) las cortaderas que le dilaceraban las carnes y se arrastró, mareado y ensangrentado, hasta el recinto circular que corona un tigre o caballo de piedra, que tuvo alguna vez el color del fuego y ahora elde la ceniza. Ese redondel es un templo que devoraron los incendios antiguos, que la selva palúdica ha profanado y cuyo dios no recibe honor de los hombres.[51]

What was once a temple is now in ashes; the priest-dreamer is no less desolate in his grayness and seeming insubstantiality. The loneliness and the difficulty of his mystical/aritstic labor only reinforces the ambiguity of his calling. As the priest of some "decayed" cult, whom does he serve? Or does he serve only himself? From whence does he derive his creative powers and knowledge? The silence is pervasive, underscoring the unconnectedness of what should be a "total universe."

> Comprendió que el empeño de modelar la materia incoherente y vertiginosa de que se componen los sueños es el más arduo que puede acometer un varón, anque penetre todos los enigmas del orden superior y del inferior: mucho más arduo que tejer una cuerda de arena o que amonedar el viento sin cara.[52]

The only voice is that of the narrator. All the systems of communication serve sameness, a kind of vague identity indistinguishable from anything else. The priest-dreamer is finally

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[51]"Las Ruinas Circulares," p. 49.

[52]Ibid., p. 52.

successful; the Creation comes to life after numerous vain attempts at achieving the authentic dream state:[53] "Luego en la tarde, se purifico en las aguas del rio, adoro los dios planetarios, pronuncio las silabas licitas de un nombre poderoso y durmio. Casi immediatemente, sono co un corazon latia."[54]

When the relation between the priest and his gods is established so is the creator's for his "son." There is strong affection for and intimacy with the dreamed one; yet there is no dialogue, as if such symbiosis precluded it. The priestmust give up his child who will serve elsewhere, oblivious of his origins. (The Platonic notion of cognition as recollection is implicitly repeated here: in order to bear existence, we must forget the mysteries of Creation, the knowledge we possessed before birth.) Finally a constellation of signs reveal to the creator what the reader may have already surmised from many subtle but significant details in the narrative. The man learns that, he, like the son he dreamt, is also impervious to flame: "Con alivio, con humillación, con terror, comprendió que él también era una apariencia, que otro estaba soñándolo."[55]

This is no elegy to the artist, but a meditation on the profound (existential) doubt coeval with the project of creating, as well as on the inevitable failure to separate the authorial

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[53]Ibid. The ritualistic prescriptions described here are probably derived from Kabbalah, especially that of uttering the syllables of an all-Powerful name. For an extensive look at Borges' use of the Kabbalah, see Jaime Alazraki's essay in Prose for Borges entitled "Borges and the Kabbalah."

[54]"Las Ruinas Circulares," p. 52.

[55]Ibid., p. 56.

from the projected self. Borges' metaphysical concern with the notion of existence as a function of perception becomes image. The world is dreamt into existence in a hierarchy of infinite regression: the creator behind the creator, the dream dreaming the dreamer dreaming. The perceiver of the idea may have been created by it. After all, "la literatura no es otra cosa qua un sueño dirigido."[56]

Borges called his tale "Funes el Memorioso" a long metaphor of insomnia. The author's obsession with time and language coalesce perfectly in this essaysistic fiction whose protagonist suffers from an overdetermined mental order:

> Me dijo: Más recuerdos tengo yo solo que los que habrán tenido todos los hombres desde que el mundo es mundo. Y también, hacia el alba: Mi memoria, es como vaciadero de basuras.[57]

The story begins with the narrator's words "lo recuerdo" and ends with Funes' death from "una conjestión pulmonar." Mediating between these two symbolic terms is a memory so highly developed that every vision, perception, and phenomenon is a discrete and integral world unto itself.

> Notaba los progressos de la muerte, de la humedad. Era el solitario y lúcido espectador de un mundo multiforme, instantáneo y case intolerablemente preciso . . . Una circunferencia en un pizarrón, un triángulo rectángulo, un rombo, son formas que podemos intuir plenamente; lo mismo le pasaba a Ireneo con las aborrascadas crines de un potro, con una punta de ganado en una cuchilla, con el fuego cambiante y con la innemerable ceniza con las muchas caras de un muerto en un largo velorio. No sé cuántas estrellas veía en el cielo.[58]

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[56] J. L. Borges, Prologue to El Informe de Brodie, O.C., p. 1022.

[57] J. L. Borges, "Funes el Memorioso," in Ficciones, p. 113.

[58] Ibid., pp. 113-14, 116.

His excessive realism is the product of an absolute memory which is incapable of ordering or distinguishing between the minutiae with which he is confronted. The world is too much with him. Clearly this "gift" is a curse. For a man who knows to excess and can forget none of it, there is no line, however subtle, between the boundaries of the self and the infinite. His is a tongue of absolute reference, a language which can only be used once: a denial that linguistic attribution of any kind is possible. The irony, of course, is that Funes is himself an abstraction. This the reader "abstracts" from a narrative that manages to convey vagueness, remoteness, and unknowability amidst a plethora of information.

What this story ultimately conveys is the elusiveness and primacy of communication. Funes, locked in his solipsism ("Dos veces lo vi atrás de la reja, que burdamente recalcaba su condición de eterno prisionero: una, inmóvil, con los ojos cerrados; otra, inmóvil también, absorto en la contemplación de un aloroso gajo de santonina."[59]), is the living paradigm of how parables don't work, of how interpretation and understanding can not take place: "Sospecho, sin embargo, que no era muy capaz de pensar. Pensar es olvidar differencias, es generalizar, abstraer. En el abbarotada mundo de Funes no había sino detalles, case inmediatos."[60]

And yet, as impossible a feat as the translation of such a hermetically closed life must be, the reader recognizes by the existence of this narrative, the wondrous tenacity of the narrating impulse.

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[59]Ibid., pp. 109-10.

[60]Ibid., pp. 113, 116.

> Arribo, ahora, al más dificil punto de mi relato. Este (bueno es que ya lo sepa el lector) no tiene otro argumento que ese diálogo de hace ya medio siglo. No trataré de reproducir sus palabras, irrecuperables ahora: Prefiero resumir con veracidad las muchas cosas que me dijo Ireneo. El estilo indirecto es remoto y débil; yo sé que sacrifico la eficacia de mi relato; que mis lectores se imaginen los entrecortados períodos que me abrumaron esa noche.[61]

The Borgesian tale which differently from any other attests to its own parabolicity is "Emma Zuna." It appears to be the author's least characteristic work. Here we witness the execution of a primal plan: the deciphering of a textual event, not by means of a Kabbalistic code, a philosophical axiom, or a Biblical allusion, but by a purely rhetorical transformation.

The explicit parabolic event is "divine justice." Emma is seeking revenge against the embezzler who had covered up his own crime by unjustly implicating her father. Lowenthal's accusation had forced Zunz to flee; despondant that his name was not cleared, he took his own life. Emma blames Lowenthal for the original injustice as well as for its ultimate result. Her desire is to guarantee the extinction of her and her father's enemy, but she decides that murder alone would not suffice. She elaborates a scheme to achieve both vengeance of her father's behalf and social justice--without impairing her own liberty or endangering her life. Only a strategem assuring these ends would be satisfying and expiatory for Emma. Thus she plots the perfect crime,[62] not as a criminal, but as the executrix of divine justice.

[61] Ibid., p. 112.

[62] The analogy of art and crime is elemental in Borges' work. It is purely formal: the primacy of the "how" over the "who," a logic of fiction which undermines psychological motivation but depends on a "mythic" or metaphysical notion of all-encompassing mystery to be successful.

> Pensó que la etapa final sería menos horrible que la primera y que le depararía, sin duda, el sabor de la victoria y de la justicia.
>
> . . . fue una herramienta para Emma como está lo fue para él, pero ella sirvió para el goce y él para la justicia.
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> . . . exponiendo la intrépida estrategema que permitiría a la Justicia de Dios triunfar de la justicia humana. (No por temor, sino por ser un instrumento de la Justicia, ella no quería ser castigada).[63]

The binary structure of the narrative reveals itself in a number of parallels and oppositions. Two discourses, the narrator's "true" story, and Emma's subsequent rendering of the "same" story, which is embodied within the first, engender a third: a multivalent, ambiguous synthesis. This is perceived during the process of reading by means of several devices. The most prominent is the use of "perhaps" in moments to establish an atmosphere of ambivalence. This ambivalence does not threaten the credibility of the narrator; it suggests the possibility of alternative interpretations for each event:

> Referir con alguna realidad los hechos ed esa tarde sería dificil y quizá improcedente. Un atributo de lo infernal es la irrealidad, un atributo que parece mitigar sus terrores y que los agrava tal vez. ¿Cómo hacer verosímil una acción en la que casi no creyó quien la ejecutaba, cómo recuperar ese brave caos que hoy la memoria de Emma Zunz repudia y confunde? Emma vivía por Almagro, en la calle Liniers; nos consta que esa tarde fue al puerto. Acaso en el infame Paseo de Julio se vio multiplicada en espejos, publicada por luces y desnudada por los ojos hammbrientos, pero más razonable es conjeturar que al principio erró, inadvertida, por la indiferente recova.[64] (emphasis mine)

The parabolic device of being elsewhere in time and place

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[63] J. L. Borges, "Emma Zunz," El Aleph, O.C., pp. 565, 566, 567.

[64] Ibid., p. 565.

is also implicitly reinforced. Within the "story time," which is composed of narrative past and future, two contrasting yet not irreconcilable conceptions of time are presented. One is a judicial-like catalogue of characteristically Borgesian details: precise location, proper names, dates, hours, and the causal connections between them. The other is the non-time of memory, chaos, vertigo, of timeless, of "time outside of time." "Los hechos graves están fuera del tiempo, ya porque en ellos el pasado inmediato queda como tronchado del porvenir, ya porque no parecan consecutivas las partes que los forman."[65]

"True in symbol if not in fact" determines the formal ending of the story. Emma's dishonor and outrage replicates that of her father. Dishonor must be avenged, justice must be executed. It is not a particular dishonor for which she seeks retribution but the Idea, the Word rather than the thing. Her vengeance is achieved and the remarkable symmetry of the story is maintained:

> Luego tomó el teléfono y repitió lo que tantas veces repetiría, con esas y con otras palabras: Ha ocurrido una cosa que es increíble . . . El señor Loewenthal me hizo venir con el pretexto de la huelga . . . Abusó de mí, lo maté . . .[66]

The words of the narrator which follow--"actually the story was . . . true" reveals how fictions are made. The irony of Emma's discourse is juxtaposed with the irony of the narrator's subsequent explanation. Emma's "false story" (incredible), did not impress everyone because as the narrator says, it was substantially true, but because it was more credible. The substantial truth of Emma's

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[65]Ibid., p. 566.

[66]Ibid., p. 568.

account is that she has been violated, and that she shot Lowenthal dead. By arranging these two episodes so that one follows from the first, she has, using the distinction between fabula and sujet, constructed a fiction. The double process of figuration is what designates this a parabolic narrative par excellence: it functions as a figurative explanation, introducing a "play" of the imaginary and the real that provokes new explanations. The narrative is the fictive mediation between these disjunctions, one representing justice in the normative or ideal world, and the other in the "real" or everyday.

The pervasive Borgesian pattern is the quest for immanence in structure; consequently, he is fascinated by the linguistic mysticism of the Kabbalah. The Aleph, earlier defined as total and unequivocal revelation, is the quintessential symbol of this quest. Regarded in Kabbalistic symbolism as the spiritual root of all other letters, it encompasses in its essence the whole alphabet and hence all other elements of human discourse. The mystic revelation is pregnant with infinite meaning, but it conveys no determinate, specific meaning.[67]

In "La Muerte y la Brújula" the detective attempts to solve a crime by reading the books of the dead Kabbalistic scholar and deciphering a mystical code. The process of seeking is doubled: the search for the Secret Name of God is the search for language, and it is through the labyrinth of words that the detective himself is trapped, indeed inscribed.

In the Borges story about the revelatory power of a mystical

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[67]Gersom Scholem, On the Kabbalah (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 30.

object "El Aleph," it is the sum of all the possible visual representations of the universe: "una pequeña esfera tornasolada, de casi intolerable folgar."[68] This visionary sphere serves as the poetic inspiration of Carlos Argentino Daneiri, in whose cellar it can apparently be found. His opus is purportedly the poem of all poems, a total representation of the known world, appropriately entitled "La Tierra." It is not irrelevant that the poem is immensely dull; its epic proportions, like the mind of Funes, far from exhausting reality, indicates the absurdity of attempting to enumerate it. It is trivial, local, particular, and random and the pointless variety of its constituents only emphasizes the poverty of its method.

The implicitly hostile relationship between the poet who is also a librarian, and the narrator (who calls himself Borges), centers around professional rivalry and a woman named Beatriz. Already dead at the beginning of the story, her presence is pervasive: she was Danieri's cousin and the narrator's love object. The reader is introduced to her by way of photographic description, in serial perspective. ("Beatriz Viterbo, de perfil, en colores; Beatriz con antifaz, en los carnivales de 1921; la primera communion de Beatriz; Beatriz el dia de su boda con Robert Alessandri; Beatriz, poco despues del divorcio, en un almuerzo del Club Hipico; Beatriz en Quilmes con Delia San Marco Porcel y Carlos Argentinos; Beatriz con el pekines que la regalo Villegas Haedo; Breatriz, de frente y de tres cuartos, sonviendo la mano en el menton . . ."[69])

There is a second "communion" with Beatriz; this time with

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[68] J. L. Borges, "El Aleph, " El Aleph, O.C., p. 625.

[69] Ibid., p. 617.

a single portrait which provokes an unusually intimate speech by the narrator: "Beatriz, Beatriz Elena, Beatriz Elena Viterbo, Beatriz querrida, Beatriz perdida para siempre, soy yo, soy Borges."[70] It is this ideal that Borges loves, the summation of her image; even though he knows that each particular photography is a vapid fiction.

Amidst the endless cataloguing of places and things in the universe and the petty passions of a few individuals, is the parabolic event of the Aleph, situated in all its inviolate splendor in Danieri's dark cellar.

> Arribo, ahora, al inefable centro de mi relato; empieza, aqui, mi desesperación de escritor. Todo lenguaje es un alfabeto de símbolos cuyo ejercicio presupone un pasado que los interlocutores comparten; ¿cómo trasmitir a los otros el infinito Aleph, que mi temerosa memoria apenas abarca: Los místicos, en análogo trance, prodigan los emblemas . . . Quizá los dioses no me negarian el hallazgo de una imagen equivalente, pero este informe quedaría contaminado de literatura, de falsedad. Por lo demás, el problema central es irresoluble: la enumeración, siquiera parcial, de un conjunto infinito. En ese instante gigantesco, he visto millones de actos deleitables o atroces; ninguno me asombró como el hecho de que todos ocuparan el mismo punto, sin superposición y sin trasparencia. Lo que vieron mis ojos fue simultanéo: lo que transcribiré, sucesivo, porque el lenguaje lo es. Algo, sin embargo, recogeré . . . vi el Aleph, desde todos los puntos, vi en el Aleph la tierra, y en la tierra otra vez el Aleph y en el Aleph la tierra, vi mi cara y mis vísceras, vi tu cara, y sentí vértigo y lloré, porque mis ojos habían visto ese objeto secreto y conjetural, cuyo nombre usurpan los hombres, pero que ningun hombre ha mirado: el inconcebible universo.[71]

The narrator claims after his transcendent experience that he believes the Aleph to have been a false one. He provides

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[70]Ibid., p. 624.

[71]Ibid., pp. 264-26.

"objective" explanation by way of documentation, but the duplicity and disappointment of which he speaks have another basis. They lie in the implicit analogy between his desire for the woman who is never possessed, and never equal to the process of idealization invoked in her name, and the Aleph. What remains of the face of Beatriz, after years, is no less palpable than the (distorted) memory of a revelation--absence--and the Word, ever struggling to retrieve it.

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