

## THE NEW LITERALISM: READING AFTER GRANT'S SCHELLING

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### Abstract

In the wake of post-hermeneutic refusals of interpretation in recent continental philosophy, this essay returns to Schelling as a means of understanding what such a renewed reading practice of philosophical fundamentalism might look like. I argue that recent impetus for a Schellingian conception of literalism can be found in Grant's attack on the metaphorising tendencies of previous Schelling scholarship, and the ground for such literalism is to be located in the concept of tautegory that Schelling proposes in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Mythology*. Schelling is a philosopher of form, and the form of the word remains as inviolable as any other natural form.

## 1.

The post-hermeneutic era in continental philosophy is grounded in a refusal to accept the vocation of the philosopher *as interpreter*, passing on old texts while uncovering new meanings.<sup>1</sup> Many philosophers in the continental tradition now see themselves embarking on a constructive, speculative voyage into the new.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I contend that this post-hermeneutic age is to be defined by a renewed literalism. It is a Schellingian age in which *one must read tautegorically*.

This is an argument that ultimately concerns *difference* and *repetition* – specifically, the various modalities of difference and repetition at play in critical readings of philosophy. At the centre of this essay is an interrogation of the hermeneutic contention that “we understand in a different way, if we understand at all”<sup>3</sup>, and the prejudice this exposes, widespread in philosophy, for *the disposability and mutability of form*. Philosophers tend to read *esoterically*, revealing content at the expense of form; Schelling, however, is first and foremost a philosopher of form<sup>4</sup>, and so I ask, following Schelling: what would philosophy become if it were grounded on a reading practice that repeated, rather than interpreted or translated forms? In other words, what would a philosophical fundamentalism look like?

In what follows, I argue that one of the most significant achievements of Iain Hamilton Grant’s *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* was to recover an obligation *to take Schelling at his word* – to read, that is, his *Naturphilosophie* not as metaphor

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<sup>1</sup> See Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2004), 22-40.

<sup>2</sup> See Levi Bryant, Graham Harman and Nick Srnicek, “Towards a Speculative Philosophy” in Bryant, Harman and Srnicek (eds), *The Speculative Turn: Continental Realism and Materialism* (Melbourne: re:press, 2011), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 296.

<sup>4</sup> On Schelling as a philosopher of form, see Bruce Matthews, *Schelling’s Organic Form of Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY, 2011) and Daniel Whistler, *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language: Forming the System of Identity* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 226-8.

but according to its very letter. And such an obligation is, I further contend, itself thoroughly Schellingian: it is Schelling who in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Mythology* sets out a mode of reading, based on the concept of tautegory, that remains resolutely literalistic.

## 2.

There are three contexts at stake in what follows. First, there is the matter of understanding Schellingian metaphilosophy, particularly the conceptions of writing and reading that are to be self-referentially applied to Schelling's own texts. Compared with Fichte, Maimon and Hegel who like nothing better than to discuss their own philosophical practice, Schelling is often reticent about metaphilosophical themes in general. And there are good philosophical reasons for his refusal to "go meta": his commitment to immanence is thoroughgoing, hence a transcendent (or even transcendental) viewpoint over one's own methodological presuppositions and practices is illegitimate.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, there are, I contend, moments in his oeuvre where his metaphilosophical and writerly practices are manifest. Two such passages are his construction of symbolic language between 1802 and 1804 and his discussion of tautegory in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Mythology*. The two passages are of course linked, since tautegory (or the inherence of meaning in being) is a major component of Schelling's definition of the symbol as well.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the literalism directly consequent on his late discussion of tautegorical myth equally results from his construction of symbolic language. Schelling's commitment to literalism is central to his metaphilosophy.

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<sup>5</sup> I argue for this reading of Schellingian metaphilosophy at length in Daniel Whistler, "Schelling's Poetry" in *Clio* 43.2 (2014).

<sup>6</sup> See Whistler, *Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language*, 37-40.

Secondly, as will become clear during the second half of the essay, much of my argument will ultimately rest on the relation between the late and early Schelling – that is, on the extent to which the metaphysical tenets that Schelling first presents in his early *Naturphilosophie* and *Identitätssystem* (particularly in the 1801 *Presentation*) hold true after 1809, even into the 1840s. The wager I make is that reading Schelling’s late philosophy through the prism of his early metaphysics – especially the doctrine of quantitative differentiation – is a productive exercise that sheds light on his recourse to tautology. Indeed, this is, I am contending, a strategy faithful to both Schelling’s own self-understanding and to the increasingly popular “continuity thesis” in Schelling scholarship.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, this essay forms part of a larger project that interrogates the idea of a *Naturphilosophie* of language as it is both implicitly and explicitly put forward in Schelling’s works. What are the consequences, that is, of treating words like rocks or philosophical texts in continuity with animal bodies? In previous essays<sup>8</sup>, following Schelling’s own claims that there are “homologous language formations like there are mountain formations” and that therefore one must “cognise the physical in language”<sup>9</sup>, I have argued that Schellingian texts do need to be conceived as part of nature, and that only a rich or, in fact, maximal naturalism is able to achieve this.<sup>10</sup> A dynamics of language is an integral, if regional domain of *Naturphilosophie*. In what follows, my implicit concern is the reception and interpretation of these rock-like

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<sup>7</sup> A particularly compelling argument for the continuity thesis is provided by Iain Hamilton Grant in *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2006), 14-21.

<sup>8</sup> See Joshua Ramey and Daniel Whistler, “The Physics of Sense: Bruno, Schelling, Deleuze” in Edward Kazarian *et al* (eds), *The Metaphysics of Gilles Deleuze* (Lexington, MA: Lexington, 2014), 87-109; Daniel Whistler, “Language after Philosophy of Nature: Schelling’s Geology of Divine Names” in Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler (eds), *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2010), 335-59; Daniel Whistler, “Improper Names for God: Religious Language and the ‘Spinoza Effect’” in *Speculations* 3 (2012), 99-134.

<sup>9</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856), vol. 8, 453.

<sup>10</sup> C.f. Grant’s extensity test (*Philosophies of Nature*, 19-21).

signifiers. What reading practices are appropriate or even feasible for a text that is fully and literally part of nature? What might a *dynamics* of reading look like?

### 3.

“The whole of modern philosophy since its inception through Descartes,” Schelling famously writes, “has this common deficiency – that nature does not exist for it and that it lacks a living basis.”<sup>11</sup> And my aim in the first half of this essay is to draw attention to Grant’s contention that this neglect of nature identified by Schelling potentiates itself in post-Schellingian philosophy and particularly within Schelling scholarship itself. Moreover, I argue that what is partly at stake here is a problem of *misreading*, a failure to take seriously the words Schelling actually wrote.

Grant’s *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* is so useful for my purposes because it is not merely an interpretation of Schelling, but also to be positioned in line with recent speculative trends in philosophy. That is, Grant writes, “The basic thing I want to talk about is the philosophical problem of nature, and I think this is a springboard for speculation.”<sup>12</sup> Through Schelling, Grant hopes to “expose a materialist current... that has remained more or less beyond the range of Anglophone thinking”.<sup>13</sup> He wagers that it is only by foregrounding, as Schelling did, “the eternal and necessary bond between philosophy and physics”<sup>14</sup>, that speculation becomes possible.

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<sup>11</sup> Schelling, *Werke*, 7:356; *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, trans. James Gutmann (La Salle: Open Court, 1936), 30.

<sup>12</sup> Grant in Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman and Quentin Meillassoux, “Speculative Realism” in *Collapse III* (2007), 334.

<sup>13</sup> Iain Hamilton Grant, “Schellingianism and Postmodernity: Towards a Materialist *Naturphilosophie*” (1998). Available at: [www.bu.edu/wcp/papers/cult/cultgran.htm](http://www.bu.edu/wcp/papers/cult/cultgran.htm); last accessed: 01/04/2010.

<sup>14</sup> Schelling, *Werke*, 7:101.

And what has impeded contemporary philosophy from practising its own *Naturphilosophie* is precisely that obstacle Schelling himself points to in the quotation above: the “common deficiency” of all philosophies since Descartes to forget nature. In Grant’s words, “The enemy [of *Naturphilosophie*] is *all* post-Cartesian European philosophy’s elimination of the concept, even the existence, of nature.”<sup>15</sup> Or, more precisely, this elimination consists in turning nature into one more “reducibly local problem-field” of philosophy<sup>16</sup>, rather than an orienting, fundamental concept. Nature is relegated to a merely regional aspect of philosophy’s more fundamental project, usually conceived in ethical or practical terms. The ethicisation of nature ends up obscuring it. In this vein, Schelling never stops attacking “the prioritisation of the practical over the physical.”<sup>17</sup> For example, he attacks Fichtean “nature-cide”<sup>18</sup> thus,

[Fichtean philosophy] consists of nothing but a moralizing of the entire world that undermines life and hollows it out; a true disgust towards all nature and vitality except that in the subject.<sup>19</sup>

This nature-cide can also be located, Grant goes on to argue, in post-Schellingian philosophers too: there remains an “essentially Fichtean solution to the metaphysics of nature underwriting the predominant trajectories of contemporary philosophy.”<sup>20</sup> And it is precisely “against [this] ‘ethical vision of the world’ that has, in the name of

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<sup>15</sup> Grant, *Philosophies of Nature*, x.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, ix.

<sup>17</sup> Iain Hamilton Grant, “The ‘Eternal and Necessary Bond Between Philosophy and Physics’: A Repetition of the Difference Between the Fichtean and Schellingian Systems of Philosophy” in *Angelaki* 10.1 (2005), 51.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>19</sup> Schelling, *Werke*, 7:19; translated in Grant, *Philosophies of Nature*, 61.

<sup>20</sup> Grant, “The Eternal and Necessary Bond”, 44.

metaphysics, supplanted nature” that “the entire naturephilosophical programme” is to be directed.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, Grant sees the very same obscuration of the concept of nature, and so the very same betrayal of *Naturphilosophie*, taking place *within Schelling scholarship itself*. He speaks of Schelling scholarship as “Fichteanism masquerading as Schellingianism”.<sup>22</sup> For Grant, this is most obvious in the perennial treatment of Schelling as a philosopher of freedom, a treatment that thereby subsumes the concept of nature to the practical domain, just as Fichte did. Nature becomes merely “the residuum of freedom”.<sup>23</sup> Heidegger’s treatise on the *Freiheitsschrift* provides a clear example: “What Schelling calls ‘philosophy of nature,’ does not merely and not primarily mean the treatment of a special area ‘nature’, but means the understanding of nature in terms of the principle of Idealism, that is, in terms of freedom.”<sup>24</sup> Heidegger distinctly performs precisely the Fichtean move described above: he refuses to confront nature, instead diluting, diverting and translating it so that it is subsumed by freedom. The scandal of *Naturphilosophie* is thereby lost.

One of the most important consequences of Grant’s work is therefore its insistence upon preserving the scandal of *Naturphilosophie* against such dilution. A case in point is the following well-worn passage from the *Freiheitsschrift*:

Nothing can be achieved at all by such attenuated conceptions of God [that] separate God as far as possible from all of nature... Idealism, if it is not

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<sup>21</sup> Grant, *Philosophies of Nature*, 170-1.

<sup>22</sup> Grant, “The Eternal and Necessary Bond”, 52.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 1985), 94.

grounded in a vital realism will become just as empty and attenuated a system as the Leibnizean, Spinozistic or any other dogmatic philosophy.<sup>25</sup>

In the wake of Grant's work, it is flagrantly obvious that Schelling is here insisting that his philosophy of religion – indeed, his entire philosophy of the ideal world, including his theory of freedom – is grounded directly in his *Naturphilosophie*. Nature takes on explanatory priority. As Schelling goes on to say, the doctrine of God “could only be developed from the fundamental principles of a genuine philosophy of nature”.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, who, before Grant, took this seriously? It is quite startling how, prior to the publication of *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* in 2004, how few Schelling scholars had paid any serious attention to what is right in front of our noses: that the *Freiheitsschrift* is an exercise in *Naturphilosophie*. What Grant has done is to restore the scandal that all philosophy invested in the primacy of the practical must feel on reading Schelling's texts. In other words, Grant makes us exclaim as Eschenmayer once did,

[Schelling's] essay on human freedom seems to me a complete transformation of ethics into physics, a consumption of the free by the necessary... of the moral by the natural, and above all a complete depotentiation of the higher into the lower order of things.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Schelling, *Werke*, 7:256; *Investigations*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 259; 32.

<sup>27</sup> Schelling, *Werke*, 8:150; translated in Grant, *Philosophies of Nature*, 202.

My question runs as follows, how did it come about that Schelling's readers have managed time and time again to miss what is so evident in his texts? That is, how have these readers managed to so successfully ignore nature? This is a matter (among other things) of reading practices: a refusal to read Schelling at his word, a refusal to countenance what is most evident in his texts. Instead, readers of Schelling cultivate a perennial blindness to their very "material", thereby transforming him from a philosopher of nature into a philosopher of freedom. What Schelling has suffered from more than most, I contend, is the metaphoricisation, translation and generally violent interpretation of his texts. The integrity of the Schellingian text is almost always given short shrift. Or to make this point in a slightly different way: hermeneutic strategies focusing on the margins, blind-spots and metaphors of his text continually function as defence-mechanisms to ward off nature, offering protection from the scandal of *Naturphilosophie*. One cultivates margins in order to avoid facing up to the obvious.

For example, in the decade leading up to the publication of Grant's book, post-Derridean articles on the *Freiheitsschrift* appeared by David Farrell Krell and David L. Clark, among others, which treated Schelling's text as a set of metaphors: when Schelling speaks of nature, he means to speak of *différance* or alterity.<sup>28</sup> This hermeneutical principle was formalised in exemplary fashion in Kyriaki Goudeli's *Challenges to German Idealism* in 2002. Goudeli listens to "the oracular language of the unconscious as it presents itself in [Schelling's works through] nebulous dreams,

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<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, David Farrell Krell, "The Crisis of Reason in the Nineteenth Century: Schelling's Treatise on Human Freedom" in John Sallis *et al* (eds), *The Collegium Phaenomenologicum: The First Ten Years* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988); David L. Clark, "'The Necessary Heritage of Darkness': Tropics of Negativity in Schelling, Derrida, and de Man" in Tilottama Rajan and David L. Clark (eds), *Intersections: Nineteenth-Century Philosophy and Contemporary Theory* (Albany: SUNY, 1995); David L. Clark, "Heidegger's Craving: Being-on-Schelling" in *Diacritics* 27.3 (1997); David L. Clark, "Mourning Becomes Theory: Schelling and the Absent Body of Philosophy" in *Schelling and Romanticism: Romantic Circles Praxis Series* 16 (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/schelling/clark/clark.html>; last accessed: 30/12/2013).

elusive fantasies, morbid symptoms, unheard voices, speaking images, puzzling symbols.”<sup>29</sup> This is a paradigmatic example of a critical evasion of what Schelling is saying: the truth of his writings exceeds his conscious philosophical capabilities. There is a Hegelianism to this reading practice, I want to argue – that is, this appeal to the unconscious truth of Schelling’s philosophy is an old trope often trotted out by Hegelians gone-by: from Engels (“Only this is certain, that it was Hegel who made Schelling aware of how far he had, without realising it, gone beyond Fichte”<sup>30</sup>) to Lukàcs (Hegel “rendered Schelling’s own discoveries... philosophically conscious to him”<sup>31</sup>).

It is of course true that the attitudes of Goudeli, Krell and others emerge out of other concerns and interests than reading Schelling *per se*. Nevertheless, I want to argue that these attitudes are particularly unfortunate when it comes to reading Schelling for three reasons. First, as intimated, a reading practice that privileges the unconscious truths of Schelling’s philosophy over its textual appearance has historically been deployed as a weapon to minimise his contribution to the history of philosophy, in the name of Hegelian ascendancy. Reading Schelling marginally, or even just translating him into a more contemporary idiom, is to repeat this Hegelian gesture. It is to read Schelling otherwise – to read him allegorically, as I will go on to argue. A second problem with reading Schelling otherwise returns us back to Grant’s criticisms of Schelling scholarship. To translate or make Schelling’s philosophy metaphorical *domesticates* it, because it avoids that scandal of Schellingianism, nature. Only a literal reading can retain Schelling’s challenge to the mainstream privilege accorded to the practical and so preserve his rebellion against the common

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<sup>29</sup> Kyriaki Goudeli, *Challenges to German Idealism: Schelling, Fichte and Kant* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2002), 163.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Georg Lukàcs, *The Young Hegel*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin, 1975), 241.

<sup>31</sup> Georg Lukàcs, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (London: Merlin, 1980), 134-5.

deficiency of all philosophies since Descartes. Finally – and this forms the subject matter for the second half of the essay – reading Schelling “otherwise” is an anti-Schellingian reading practice, for Schelling himself puts forward a reading strategy of pure literalism that opposes all attempts to translate the text, transpose it into metaphors or indeed enact any form of hermeneutic interpretation whatsoever. This reading practice – based on the concept of tautegory – gives rise to a philosophical fundamentalism.

## 5.

This practice of literalism is proposed in the Berlin lectures on the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of the Mythology*, a late lecture series which at its core consists in a series of reflections on the art of reading. Here, Schelling sets himself the task of “gain[ing] objectivity for mythological reproductions”.<sup>32</sup> Previously, he argues, myths have been read either as pleasing poems or as accessible ways of imparting information; the task, then, is to read mythology in a way that exceeds its significance for the subject, that exceeds its correlative existence as merely for-consciousness. The task is to find an objective meaning in myth, so as to get at mythology *in itself*. “[My] explanation,” Schelling claims, “fully breaks through into the objective realm” (207; 144), and so “unlocks a new world and cannot fail to expand human thinking and knowing.” (229; 175)

At the end of the eighth lecture, Schelling introduces the central explanatory concept for reading myth in this objective way, tautegory:

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<sup>32</sup> Schelling, *Werke*, 11:202; F.W.J. Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, trans. Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger (Albany: SUNY, 2007), 141. Within this section, citations to this work are made parenthetically without reference.

Mythology emerges immediately *as such* and in no other sense than in which it articulates itself.... Everything in it is thus to be understood as mythology expresses it, not as if something else were thought, something else said. Mythology is not *allegorical*; it is *tautegorical*. To mythology the gods are actually existing essences, gods that are not something *else*, do not *mean* something else, but rather *mean* only what they are. (195-6; 136)

Tautegory is opposed to allegory.<sup>33</sup> The latter violates the letter of a text for the sake of a hidden meaning; it is as if “something else [is] said” which the form of presentation distorts or disguises (195; 136). Hence, in allegory, esoteric meaning is attained at the expense of an “improper and inauthentic sense”, “by removing the false historical garb” (9; 11). Schelling describes the allegorical viewpoint as follows,

There is truth in mythology, but not in mythology *as such*. The mythological is: (1) either a *mere form, disguise* of (a) a historic truth, (b) of a physical truth; or (2) a *misunderstanding, distortion*, (a) of a *purely scientific* (essentially irreligious) truth, (b) of a religious truth. (214; 149)

According to allegory therefore, the form is a “cloaked form of wording” (33; 27) which conceals what is really crucial, the content. Allegory is premised on a discrepancy between form and content in myth, where the form is considered the disposable element. In Gabriel’s words,

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<sup>33</sup> The term “tautegory” had been coined by Coleridge (“On the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus” in *Literary Remains*, vol 2, ed. H.N. Coleridge (London: Pickering, 1839), 296) as a means of describing principles in Schelling’s earlier work. Schelling’s literal repetition of the term in his late lectures is therefore a prime example of his own practice of tautegorical interpretation: form is repeated and thus potentiated. (A very similar process occurs with respect to the term “symbol” as well, which Schelling literally repeats from A.W. Schlegel’s summary of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, see Whistler, *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language*, 13-4.) In a footnote to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Mythology* (196; 187), Schelling goes on to acknowledge Coleridge’s coining of “tautegory” and defend him against charges of plagiarism or, as one might put it, Coleridge’s own tautegorical reading practices.

All explanations of mythology which impute to it another meaning... all explanations which assert that myths can be read through or translated into conceptual structures, are now to be called “allegorical”, since they assume that the words of *mythos* mean something other than they say... All theories of mythology which subject myths to an interpretation which presupposes a difference between form and content are allegorical: this is the dominant mode of thinking about mythology.<sup>34</sup>

Philosophically, Schelling associates allegory with the neoplatonists and Hegel.<sup>35</sup> Hegel translates the content of mythology out of its primitive form; he re-presents it logically. As such, his reading practice is thoroughly allegorical. We have, of course, already encountered this Hegelian reading style applied to Schelling himself: Goudeli, for example, is an esoteric and therefore Hegelian reader of Schelling, uncovering a hidden content that needs to be liberated from its form.

Schelling, on the other hand, rejects allegory in the name of tautology. To quote Gabriel once more,

Schelling objects that any allegorical interpretation that attempts to translate mythology into a different language thereby misses the point of the mythological forms of expression. Myths are not faulty efforts at expressing a logical truth, they rather enact the very *unity of sense and being*, of content and form.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Markus Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 252; Markus Gabriel, “The Mythological Being of Reflection: An Essay on Hegel, Schelling and the Contingency of Necessity” in Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek, *Mythology, Madness and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism* (London: Continuum, 2009), 61.

<sup>35</sup> See Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos*, 252-4; “The Mythological Being of Reflection”, 61-2.

<sup>36</sup> Gabriel, “The Mythological Being of Reflection”, 62.

Tautegorical reading respects the inviolability of the original form and so repeats that form *too*. In Schelling's own words,

Form and content, matter and outer appearance cannot be differentiated in [myth]. The ideas are not first present in another form, but rather only emerge in, and thus also at the same time with, this form. (195; 136)

The original form of mythology is the only form for mythology; any translation or alteration is falsification. Adequate interpretations need not only to respect and repeat content but also form. Hence, "The form appears as necessary" (221; 193); as Gabriel glosses, Schelling here attains "insight into the necessity of a form... Whereas Hegel tried to uncover the necessity of the *content* of mythology, Schelling insists on the necessity of the *form* of representation which cannot be sidestepped."<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, such inviolability of form is synonymous with an absolute literalism in interpretation. Hence, Schelling continues immediately after introducing the concept of tautegory,

In order to take on a comprehensible and graspable meaning, the emasculation of Uranus, the regicide of Kronos, and the other countless acts and events of the history of the gods require nothing other than *to be understood literally*. (198; 137; my emphasis)

Myths must be understood literally, be taken at their word, and this is because their form is as inviolable as their content. All that adequate philosophy of mythology is

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<sup>37</sup> Gabriel, "The Mythological Being of Reflection", 62.

able to achieve, therefore, is a literal repetition of myth in philosophical discourse. Tautegory, I contend, leads immediately to a hyperbolic literalism.

## 6.

However, tautegory is only a relevant criterion for assessing the value of Schelling scholarship and philosophical practice in general, if it can be seen to apply legitimately to interpretations of philosophy as well as myth. This is a contentious claim: Schelling at no point explicitly makes this claim and *prima facie* it seems plausible that the opposite is the case – that is, interpretations of philosophical *logoi* obey very different laws to interpretations of *mythoi*. It is necessary to show, then, that there is good reason to apply tautegory to philosophical discourse, rather than just to mythological discourse, i.e. that tautegorical reading exemplifies Schelling's conception of all philosophical understanding.

The ground for such a claim is to be found in the Schellingian doctrine of potentiation (or repetition with intensification). Just as philosophy of nature repeats nature and philosophy of history repeats history, so too philosophy of mythology repeats myth at a higher potency or intensity. Such is the process of potentiation which structures *all* of reality. What is continually repeats itself in more intense forms. Hence, Schelling writes in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Mythology* themselves,

The potencies pass through all the positions and relations to each other which they had in the process of nature... The mythological process passes, *according to the same law*, through the same level through which nature originally passed. [These are] the principles of *all* being and *all* becoming...

the *universal process* that repeats itself... The process that repeats itself in [myth], only in a particular way, is the *universal* and *absolute* process.<sup>38</sup>

The same series of potencies which recur in everything recur both in myth and philosophy. In general, philosophy is repetition with a difference, where such difference is not at all to be understood as qualitative; it is not a difference of translation or appropriation. Rather, the difference is one of intensity and quantity.

This latter claim refers us back to Schelling's metaphysics as a whole. To quote two key claims from his earlier writings,

[Reality consists in] a single fundamental pattern repeated with continual quantitative variations.<sup>39</sup>

Philosophy will repeat and bring to light in infinite forms and shapes only the one, the absolute.<sup>40</sup>

That is, one essence always repeats itself in different forms; however, what is key is that these forms are qualitatively identical as well. The only distinction in the forms is quantitative, a difference of intensity or potency. Hence, in his canonical presentation of quantitative differentiation in the 1801 *Presentation*, Schelling insists, "None other than quantitative difference is at all possible between subject and predicate." Thus, it follows, first, that "any qualitative difference between the two is unthinkable" and, second, that the only difference possible is "in respect to the *amount* of being"<sup>41</sup> or,

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<sup>38</sup> Schelling, *Werke*, 11:216; *Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, 150.

<sup>39</sup> Schelling, *Werke*, 5:341; *On University Studies*, ed. Nobert Guterman and trans. E.S. Morgan (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1966), 140.

<sup>40</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Briefe und Dokumente*, ed. Horst Fuhrmans (Bonn: Grundmann, 1962), vol. 2, 326.

<sup>41</sup> Schelling, *Werke*, 4:123; *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, trans. Michael G. Vater, *Philosophical Forum* 32.4 (2001), 355.

what Schelling elsewhere calls, “different grades of identity”<sup>42</sup>. There are no qualitative differences between forms and none between content; all that alters is the various “amounts” of form.<sup>43</sup> I am here implying that we must take Schelling’s doctrine of quantitative differentiation far more seriously than it has heretofore been taken, particularly with respect to his later philosophy. Even into the 1840s, in the negative philosophy especially, Schelling retains many of the basic philosophical tenets he had first set out in his 1801 *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*; indeed, he continually refers to this text in the later work precisely as a foundational source of metaphysical doctrine.<sup>44</sup>

In sum, the relation between potencies in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Mythology* is a quantitative one, in which forms are continually repeated at higher potencies. Thus, the relation of not only myth but also philosophy to its interpretations must exemplify quantitative differentiation, for this is a metaphysical structure that *occurs universally* in the Schellingian cosmos. Such, then, is Schellingian tautegory: readings do not alter or translate the original; they repeat the original in a qualitatively identical manner – both in terms of content and in terms of form. The only difference is that they repeat the original *more intensely*. The form is quantitatively superior, but not qualitatively different, and, as such, tautegorical reading is founded on the inviolability of form and, consequently, a practice of absolute literalism.

## 7.

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<sup>42</sup> Schelling, *Werke*, 4:431.

<sup>43</sup> For a full reconstruction of Schelling’s theory of quantitative differentiation, see Whistler, *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language*, Chapter 5.

<sup>44</sup> See, for instance, Schelling, *Werke*, 7:357-8, 7:445-6, 8:25, 8:81, 10:147-50.

I have argued that the task of a *philosophy* of mythology is the literal repetition of myths, since *all* philosophical readings (as well as readings in the history of philosophy) from a Schellingian perspective must compulsively repeat to the letter. Tautegory leads directly to literalism. Such a reading strategy is opposed to all forms of allegory that forever attempt to retranslate, reform or reinterpret what is read. The most pervasive forms of allegory in philosophical readings are threefold, I contend.

First, there are those readings that concentrate on *metaphor* or the unsaid in order to extract from a text what is precisely not explicitly presented there. Tautegory puts paid to this endeavour to interpret a text through its figurative remainders. To put it bluntly, Schelling here rejects Goudeli's reading of him. The tautegorical imperative requires repetition of content *and form*; it requires attention to what is on the page, *and that alone*.

Secondly, the Schellingian ideal of tautegory challenges any philosophical interpretation which attempts to *translate* or update a philosophy into a new discourse. All transposition of philosophy into new forms is unSchellingian (which is not to say, of course, that it is necessarily bad philosophy). The ideal of tautegory prohibits the interpreter from updating past philosophies. Such practices are allegorical, ultimately Hegelian. In short, Schelling's comments about tautegory show up the Hegelian bias of vast swathes of philosophical interpretation: allegory remains the basic model for the history of philosophy, for it tends to place emphasis on the contemporary relevance of the content.

Thirdly, tautegory can be read as a critique of hermeneutics (at least insofar as hermeneutics names a reading practice). There is no room for Gadamer's dictum, "We understand in a different way, if we understand at all", if "different" is here to be understood in anything but a purely quantitative manner. For example, any appeal to

two horizons in interpretation – the past and the present – through the interplay of which a new meaning emerges is disguised allegory, on this reading. It does not respect the basic principle of tautegory: the necessity and so inviolability of the original form. A philosophy without allegory is a philosophy of absolute literalism – no paraphrase, no translation – *just repetition*. Just as religious fundamentalists can *only* go on repeating the original words of a text, so too a Schellingian fundamentalist. A very different account of the concepts of difference and repetition emerge here, then, from those typically found in hermeneutic philosophies. Differences are merely differences in potency; forms and content remain qualitatively identical throughout.

## 8.

Of Pierre Menard, Borges wrote, “Menard (perhaps without wanting to) has enriched, by means of a new technique, the halting and rudimentary art of reading”<sup>45</sup>, and he does so through unwavering fidelity to *the form* of Cervantes’ novel. According to Borges, Menard “did not want to compose another *Quixote* – which is easy – but *the Quixote* itself... His admirable intention was to produce a few pages which would coincide – word for word and line for line – with those of Miguel de Cervantes.”<sup>46</sup> And it becomes clear as *Pierre Menard* continues, that such absolute literalism is not redundant, but potentiates Cervantes’ original: “Cervantes’ text and Menard’s are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer.”<sup>47</sup> Menard’s new “art of reading” can stand, then, as the very paradigm for tautegorical reading: it affirms the

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<sup>45</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (London: Penguin, 1970), 71.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 65-6.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

necessity of form against esotericism and allegorising of all types, while simultaneously still potentiating the text.

Iain Hamilton Grant's reading of Schelling is more Menardian than most. When Grant preserves the scandal of Schellingian *Naturphilosophie* against those solely focused on the figural remainders or contemporary reinscription of Schelling's texts – when, that is, he takes Schelling at his word – he is closely conforming to the tautegorical ideal of reading. Hence, the explanatory priority that nature assumes in his interpretation does not implicitly lead to an esotericism where nature ends up being the perennial secret truth to any and every philosophical claim. Grant does not end up assuming that Schelling “speak[s] of gods where [he is] only thinking of natural forces” (as Schelling himself says of allegorical interpreters of myths<sup>48</sup>). Rather, for a Schelling taken at his word – a *naturphilosophische* Schelling – myths of the gods are not allegories of nature, but natural artefacts in their own right, requiring no reduction to a more basic natural potency or translation into the discourse of the natural sciences. Mythic and philosophical texts are part of nature too. Therefore, the non-textual status of nature (or even the gods of mythology) does not somehow interrupt literal reading practices, nor equally does literalism problematize *Naturphilosophie*. This is because Schelling's naturalism is maximal in the sense in which I outlined in the opening to this essay: everything is nature, therefore nothing need be excluded, or even reduced or translated into something “more fundamentally” natural. Here we glimpse, in conclusion, the convergence of the scandal of *Naturphilosophie* with Schelling's Menardian reading practice: a maximal *Naturphilosophie* is tautegorical without exception, and so the *Naturphilosoph* of a

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<sup>48</sup> Schelling, *Werke*, 11:34; *Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, 27.

maximal system must incessantly read according to the letter, compulsively repeating forms.

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