"FROM COMMUNICATION TO COMMUNION":
A POST-SECULAR READING OF APOSTROPHE

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of
the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy
by Gavin Hopps

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The poem is lonely. It is lonely and *en route*. Its author stays with it.

Does this very fact not place the poem already here, at its inception, in the encounter, *in the mystery of encounter*?

The poem intends another, needs this other, needs an opposite. It goes toward it, bespeaks it. [...]

The poem becomes – under what conditions – the poem of a person who still perceives, still turns towards phenomena, addressing and questioning them. The poem becomes conversation – often desperate conversation.

(Celan: 1986, 49–50)

Contents

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Abbreviations

BL: Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. George Watson (London: Dent, 1975).

BLJ: *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 13 vols. (London: John Murray, 1973-94).

CL: *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

CSPP: Coleridge: *Selected Poetry and Prose* (London: Penguin, 1957).

CPW: *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*.

DV: *The Documents of Vatican II*, trans. Monsignor Joseph Gallagher (New York: America Press, 1966).

KL: *The Keats Circle: Letters and Papers, 1816-1879*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

LB: *Lyrical Ballads*.

WL: *The Letters of William Wordsworth: The Middle Years*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937).

Introduction

'Tis always best to take things upon trust.

(Don Juan, XVI, 6)

Suspicion and Rumours: What is at Stake

In a note to the juvenile poem "Dura Navis," Coleridge recalls an incident concerning his old headmaster at Christ's Hospital Grammar School in which he was warned against certain extravagancies of style:

> I well remember old Jemmy Bowyer, the plagose Orbilius of Christ's Hospital, but an admirable educer no less than Educator of the Intellect, bade me leave out as many epithets as would turn the whole into eight-syllable lines, and then ask myself if the exercise would not be greatly improved. [...] Likewise, I remember that he told me on the same occasion – "Coleridge! the connections of a Declamation are not the transitions of Poetry – bad, however, as they are, they are better than 'Apostrophes' and 'O thou's,' for at the worst they are something like common sense. The others are the grimaces of Lunacy."
>
> *(CPW*, 3)

Jonathan Culler, in his brilliant but biased writing on apostrophe, puts forward a similar opinion of the figure:

> one might be justified in taking apostrophe as the figure of all that is most radical, embarrassing, pretentious and mystificatory in the lyric [...].
>
> (1981, 137)

These two views are, I believe, both useful and misleading. Both recognise that apostrophe represents an extraordinary mode of being, and signifies a sense of reality and relation that runs counter to rational thought. To Bowyer this is madness, to Culler it is embarrassing; to the Romantics it appears to be something else. The present thesis is concerned with this "something else" – what it is, what its bases are, how plausible it is, and how it is related to (or, as I shall argue, how it anticipates, coincides with, but is not exhausted by) the embarrassment identified by Culler.

My central argument is as polemical as that to which it is opposed and which provoked it. Indeed, in the same way that the Counter-Reformation was a "product" of the Reformation, even though it drew upon and sought to defend an anterior position, much of the "post-secular" argument

put forward in this thesis was precipitated or given momentum and clarity by Jonathan Culler's iconoclastic account of the figure. My central and essentially simple thesis may be stated as follows. I think that we may learn at least as much about apostrophes in poetry from theology and from religious practice as from the recent flurry of poststructuralist writing on the figure. This is not least because – in spite of the common misconception to the contrary – belief leaves more doors open than disbelief. That is to say, negatively, the boundaries of its conception of "that which is" are not predetermined by logic or limited to that which can be empirically "proven"; and, positively, whereas belief can contemplate and temporally accept, though obviously it ultimately "resituates" chaos, disbelief has to refuse, without temporally entertaining, the possibility of divine participation and final order. Furthermore, belief, in taking seriously the promise of "another kingdom," is also more conscious of the provisionality of present knowledge, and of itself as a *wager* (though disbelief, to be sure, is a wager of a sort, too); it is therefore more freely disposed towards that which is not apparent or the possibility that things might be radically other than they are at present. At the centre of such differences lies the issue of *trust*; trust, not only in the testimony of others or in that which is not susceptible of empirical proof, but also a trust that involves a *dis*trust of the present state of things and of our present knowledge.

If all of this sounds rather removed from literary criticism, it might be said in its defence, without too much exaggeration, that the revolution that has taken place within (though, obviously, not only within) literary criticism over the three or four decades, as a result of the spread of literary theory, has at its centre the issue of trust. Indeed, trust is but the obverse of theory's "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Ricoeur), and that against which theory was *itself* a reaction. The centrality of such "suspicion" to literary theory is delineated (and criticised) by Valentine Cunningham:

> Theory is an accumulated hermeneutics of suspicion, and one gone rampant, on the rampage. Jonathan Culler's handy little tome *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, could not be more succinct about this [...]:
>
>> The main effect of theory is the disputing of "common sense": common-sense views about meaning, writing, literature, experience.
>> [...]
>> As a critique of common sense and exploration of alternative conceptions, theory involves a questioning of the most basic premises or assumptions of literary study, the unsettling of anything that might have been taken for granted: What is meaning? What

is the author? What is it to read? What is the "I" or subject who writes, reads, or acts? How do texts relate to the circumstances in which they are produced?

(2002, 54–5)

To argue in favour of trust, as opposed to suspicion, then, is to be concerned with the same issues and questions with which literary theory is concerned, but it differs in being prepared to *suspend* its questioning, in positing the existence of tactful and pragmatic limits to its interrogations, and in being prepared to question the motives and usefulness of questioning itself.

There is another obvious preliminary objection to our general thesis, which it is best to deal with here. Chesterton once remarked that anyone "setting out to dispute anything ought always to begin by saying what he does not dispute" (1995, 14). Thus: what this thesis does not dispute is the possibility of the existence of God. This might strike some as *unwissenschaftlich* or seem to prejudice our investigation from the outset. This may be so. Yet literary theorists such as Culler and others obviously have – equally prejudicial and contestable – presuppositions, also, concerning the nature of the real and that which is possible. Presupposing that God does *not* exist or effectively assuming the invalidity of the believer's perspective (by silently excluding it) is *also* to proceed according to presuppositions. Furthermore, what is at stake in examining the act of addressing that which is invisible, absent or incapable of reciprocal response is *precisely* the question of whether or not it is a religious act. One of the founding objections of literary theory to more "traditional" criticism is that it encouraged readers, as Jonathan Culler puts it, to "interpret works as reflections on or of ideologically respectable themes and overlook authors' idiosyncratic views" (1984, 1328). Contemporary theory, by contrast, to a large extent, *makes its living* out of taking issue with the "idiosyncratic views" of authors. This works both ways, however. Thus, in disagreeing with Culler's account of apostrophe, I am disagreeing amongst other things with his account of reality.

If, then, the two points of view are opposed to one another, and yet are equally relevant and equally problematic, how are we to decide between them? What, to put it crudely, is wrong with literary theory's doctrine of suspicion, and what is to be gained by trust? I shall answer generally here, since the thesis itself does enough naming of names. First, contemporary theory's "hermeneutics of suspicion" frequently masquerades as a neutral and value-free mode of inquiry, which, like the boy in the story of the Emperor's New Clothes, seeks to expose ignored or unnoticed aporias, prejudice,

"mystification" and self-empowering discourses, whose claim to neutrality and objectivity rests upon its demand for "certainty," and the fact that it itself appears to assume nothing, but, instead, questions everything, without prejudice or influencing what it investigates. Yet its manner of proceeding and its construal of legitimacy automatically exclude certain things from the outset, and plainly shape and prejudice its findings. To proceed without assumptions – if that were possible – is, at least, to assume that assumptions are wrong, and clearly involves an opportunity cost. Questioning, similarly, precludes other modes of proceeding. Acceptance and waiting, as Milton reminds us, are also modes of proceeding. It also assumes that the initiative is always ours for the taking; that we are not *ourselves* being questioned, and that all knowledge is available to instrumental or discursive reasoning. Martin Buber, however, would argue, on the contrary, that questioning is a mode of I-It experience – perhaps the quintessential I-It mode – and thus certain things lie intrinsically outside of its scope or are of their nature unavailable to its manner of engagement. Attempting to survey, "comprehend" or abstract information from that which is over against us would annihilate or preclude the possibility of relation (in which, according to Buber, real "knowledge" lies).[1] Such questioning, finally, also rules out the possibility that knowledge might arrive *after* or as a *result* of acceptance. Yet clearly not everything discloses itself prior to commitment. To quote Chesterton again, the "great lesson of 'Beauty and the Beast'" is "that a thing must be loved *before* it is loveable" (1995, 55). The same, in a sense, is true of faith; as Phillip Blond succinctly puts it: "Faith gives over its content after one has already become faithful" (1998, 24). To reject everything, upon detached inspection, that does not wholly or immediately satisfy an idealistic demand for a certain sort of "certainty" is manifestly to restrict the field of inquiry at the outset and to tip the scales in favour of certain phenomena. Suspicion is thus clearly *not* neutrality. It has already taken a decision; a decision (at least), that is, not to trust.

Secondly, for all its vaunted and advertised reflexivity, theory's suspicion is, more often than not, supremely *un*reflexive; that is to say, it tends to be suspicious about everything except itself. How often does it call into question its own supposed neutrality, its apparent inclusiveness or the criteria upon which its subjective construal of legitimacy is based? For all the bravura emphasis upon its "critique of common sense," its "questioning of the most basic premises or assumptions of literary

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[1] This is the paradox of "objectivity," from Buber's point of view; attempting to see the Thou "objectively," that

study," and "the unsettling of anything that might have been taken for granted," it could in fact be argued that theory inhabits a rather limited and (by now) unadventurous territory, and, on the contrary, leaves unquestioned and assumes quite a lot. Only rarely, if at all, does it question its exaltation of questioning or show any awareness of what it precludes. Theory's suspicion is thus really only a *partial* suspicion, and one of the things wrong with it is that it is not suspicious *enough*. What is lacking and what we need to develop is, as John Milbank has observed, "a 'meta-suspicion' which casts doubt on the possibility of suspicion itself" (1990, 102).[2]

Thirdly, and finally, theory's suspicion is not disinterested. It is reactive and has an agenda. Its most central and obvious enemy, drawing on Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, is, of course, religion. In the newspaper article cited above, which begins as a review of the *oeuvre* of William Empson, though turns into a critical manifesto of its own, Jonathan Culler makes the reactive character and the agenda (as he sees it) of contemporary literary theory clear. According to Culler, "the historic mission of education" is "to fight superstition and religious dogmatism" (1984, 1328). More specifically, he criticises the academy's "promoters of religion" (Frye, Booth, Hartman, Kenner and Bloom), and the education system in general, which, he claims, has "abandoned the task of combating superstition and failed to foster a critique of religion" (1984, 1328). The way forward, he argues, and the "best way to honour [William Empson's achievement] would be to continue the critique of religious values" and "to keep alive the critical, demythologizing force of contemporary theory" (1984, 1328). He then concludes the article and his attack upon religion by proposing "'Down with the priests'" as a motto for the academy (1984, 1328).

Theory, then, at least as Jonathan Culler sees it, defines itself in and as an *opposition* to religion. In other words, it is ideological. More precisely, it is a partisan undertaking, which sets out to attack a contrary position – which it, ironically, condemns as self-empowering – on the basis of an unsubstantiated assumption of authority.[3] If, then, literary theory is essentially reactive, and draws its

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is, as an *object*, means not seeing it "as it is."

[2] This was Byron's stated position: "He who doubts all things, nothing can deny" (XV, 88).

[3] Culler naively equates religion with "superstition," and having listed a few of its harmful historical manifestations and abuses, assumes (rather than proving or even bothering to put a case for) the invalidity of all of its claims, even as he describes its, to him, curious persistence amongst some of those who have suffered as a result of such abuses.

borders *against* the religious, it should hardly surprise us if religion's mode of proceeding and construal of legitimacy fail to measure up to theory's criteria.

In making these criticisms, I am not denying the manifold value or even the *necessity* of the revolution brought about by literary theory. Its liberation and revelation of suppressed and minority voices, as well as its questioning of the nature, value and possibility of such things as canonicity, meaningfulness and criticism itself has undoubtedly corrected or at least cast light upon all sorts of serious inequalities and complacencies, and has unquestionably enriched what it is we call literature. I *do*, however, wish to criticise its excesses, and to relativise *its* attack. To be more precise, the problem is that, in a manner that resembles the trajectory of *the* French Revolution, if literary theory began as a necessary reaction against the complacencies, blindnesses and repressions of established criticism, it has ended up replacing them with a complacency, blindness and repressions of its own, which are arguably as prejudiced and tyrannical as those that it set out to dethrone.

In arguing for the importance of trust, as opposed to suspicion, this thesis concurs with but also diverges, in its more specific focus, from a number of distinguished recent studies on the subject of reading and criticism in general. I have, primarily, in mind George Steiner's brave and magisterial riposte to deconstruction – *Real Presences*, and Valentine Cunningham's spirited, if not always polite, indictment of "Theory" (as he calls it) in *Reading After Theory*, and *In the Reading Gaol*. Both writers, though in different ways and to different degrees, counterpose the nihilistic and reductive tendencies of recent critical theory with explicitly theological models of reading.

Summarily speaking, our argument coincides with the latter in that Cunningham sets against what he sees as the excesses of Theory the necessity of "tact." By which he means, on the one hand, the "negative" freeing of the literary text – curbing the "smothering," the "shrinking" and the de-composition of, as well as the diversion of attention away from, the text; and, on the other hand, the "positive" freeing of literary texts – letting them "speak in their own voice" (2002, 86), respecting their otherness, and approaching them with the "gentle touch of the right-minded communicant" (2002, 156).

As the foregoing phrase suggests, Cunningham proposes a sacramental or Eucharistic model of reading, which, against what he sees as Theory's manhandling and misappropriation of texts, views

reading as an encounter with the presence of the other, and a taking into ourselves of this presence, which, in intimately touching and being touched by the other, is something which should be done with the greatest care, respect and tact. Writing about the poem which concludes *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Cunningham draws out the following general counsel:

> What's on offer is a most personal encounter based in a kind of ethical law of reading. [...] The personal in the text speaks to the person of the reader of those texts; but only on, as it were Bunyan's terms. There is a law which is the revelation offered by Bunyan and claimed by Muir both depend on. Bunyan calls it honesty. Iris Murdoch calls it love – respect for the otherness of the other person [...]. I call it tact. Tact: the missing element in Theory's misconstruings and misreadings, in precisely its tactile failures, its mishandlings of text and textuality.
>
> Tact: gentle touch, caring touch, loving touch; appropriate handling, unmanipulative reading. [...] Theory keeps mishandling. Theorists mishandle. They don't care for the sacramental model, not least, I guess, because the sacramental effects of the eucharist are contingent upon the sacred items, the bread, the wine, being sacrally, carefully, perceptively handled, handled with scrupulous regard, "discerning the Lord's body," as St Paul has it. A careful *attention* [...] manifest in the communicant's clean hands, reflective of a "clean" heart, hands which respect what's offered, which don't pollute or snatch, or otherwise abuse the sacred object to be piously ingested.
>
> (2002, 155)

The parallels with Steiner's argument are more substantive. *Real Presences*, to which Cunningham's argument is obviously indebted, offers a profound and sustained meditation upon the encounter that obtains between an art-work and its audience, or, better, its addressee.[4] This encounter, as Steiner persuasively argues – against contemporary theory's attempts to see it as radically and irreparably sundered – involves not only a covenant of courtesy and trust, but is also "in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God's presence" (1989, 3).[5] We shall return to such claims

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[4] In his seminal essay "'Critic'/'Reader,'" which proleptically sketches the essential argument of *Real Presences*, Steiner distinguishes between I-It and I-Thou modes of engagement with a text; the former – which involves distance, detachment and objectification – is notionally identified as the *critic*'s position, whereas the latter – which is a matter of reception, ecstatic ingress and meeting – is identified as the (idealised) *reader*'s mode. *Real Presences* concentrates on and amplifies this latter understanding of art, and of communication in general, as an offering of presence and the possibility of I-Thou encounter. As Steiner puts it in the earlier essay:

> The art object is *not* an object in any normal sense because it springs out of a mystery of alien ingress, out of the *daimon*'s rush into the momentary vacancy of man's reason and identity. *Poiesis*, the poet's, the singer's inventions, are imperatives from without. The products of true art have in them the live vestiges of transcendent intrusion.
>
> (1979, 440)

[5] Steiner argues: "the act, the tenor of *trust* [...] underlies" and

> literally underwrites the linguistic-discursive substance of our Western, Hellenic-Attic experience. Often unregarded, because so evidently resistant to formalization, is the core of trust within logic itself, where "logic" is a *Logos*-derivative and construct.

later on, however, we may say for the moment that, according to Steiner, the act of trust which underlies "the art-act and its reception," bespeaks and is authorised by an analogous "wager on God" (1989, 214; 4). As Steiner writes:

> the wager on the meaning of meaning, on the potential of insight and response when one human voice addresses another, when we come face to face with the text and work of art or music, which is to say when we encounter the *other* in its condition of freedom, is a wager on transcendence.
>
> (1989, 4)

How, then, does all of this relate to apostrophe, and what, with respect to the present thesis, do we mean by trust? To answer the second of these questions first: what we mean by trust is, simply, that we do not rule out a priori claims which cannot be proved. This is partly a matter of "tact," as Cunningham defines it – being prepared to believe, and not turning away from, what is actually said, though it also involves taking seriously what Steiner calls "a wager on transcendence." Which is to say, if we do not rule out the possibility of a theological construal of the world – and it has to be allowed that it is, at least, a possibility – then we ought also not to rule out the possibility of certain cognate claims that might be made in literature; the possibility, that is, not only that they are actually being made, but that also that they might be *true*.

This is, of course, not to sanction blind acceptance or uncritical reading – tact, as we have seen, involves knowing when scrupulosity turns into something else, it does *not* mean not asking questions or that the judgements it informs are not *also* made on the basis of cogency and persuasiveness. Belief, as we shall argue, involves but is not dismantled or rendered ineffective by an even more *radical* scepticism about "that which is." Indeed, if all we know on earth of truth, as Wittgenstein suggested and as our legal system reminds us, is what is most persuasive, it is, of course, essential to ask how convinced and convincing is the speaker making the claim. Yet is there not a point beyond which questioning is more of a form of anxiety or, paradoxically, even a form of repression? or merely a questioning *for the sake* of questioning? What is important – and what we

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There would be no history as we know it, no religion, metaphysics, politics or aesthetics as we have lived them, without an initial act of trust, of confiding, more fundamental, more axiomatic by far than any "social contract" or even covenant with the postulate of the divine. This instauration of trust, this entrance of man into the city of man, is that between word and world.

(1989, 89)

mean by trust – is that we are *prepared* to believe and *prepared* to disbelieve. Or, as Martin Buber puts it, in his advice on how to read the Hebrew Bible, we should "not believe anything a priori" and "not disbelieve anything a priori" (1982, 5). In contrast to the declared or undeclared tendency of "suspicious" criticism, this thesis wishes to leave all of these doors open – because they *are* open – and, in line with a number of recent "post-secular" studies, sees postmodernism as a peculiar opportunity for doing so.[6]

How, then, to return to the first part of our question, does this relate to apostrophe? Jonathan Culler's influential writing on the figure obviously forms part of the anti-religious or "suspicious" reaction outlined above. Not surprisingly, then, his writing exhibits a remarkable lack of the sort of trust we have been describing, and an equally remarkable degree of confidence – silently assuming certain claims to be impossible, without offering any argument (and then, circularly, taking any act of questioning or indication of doubt on the part of the claimant as "proof" of their inveracity), dogmatically shrinking the horizon of that which is possible to that which can or has been "proved," and arguing, in spite of a few token disclaimers, as though we had arrived at some final vantage point from where we could conclusively separate the possible from the impossible, and securely speak, once and for all, about that which is the case.

My objection to Culler's reading of apostrophe thus reflects the concerns I have outlined about suspicious criticism in general, namely: what began as a legitimate reaction or a plausible counter-argument has not refuted but as a result of its assertiveness has occluded or supplanted an equally plausible anterior position. The first task of this thesis is therefore largely negative; that is, in calling into question the adequacy of recent poststructuralist readings of apostrophe, and revealing the contestablity of the presuppositions upon which they are based, it seeks to clear a space in which an alternative theologically grounded construal of the figure may be given a fair hearing.

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[6] This thesis is indebted to, though it was begun independently of, the movement within contemporary theology known as "Radical Orthodoxy." Briefly, what this thesis shares with and has learned from the movement – which is led by the editors of its eponymous collection of essays (John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward) – is, firstly, an awareness of secularism's infidelity towards, and spectacular failure to provide an adequate account of, that which is and is possible; and, secondly, the sense that, for all its kitsch nihilism and nihilistic kitsch, postmodernism's reconfiguration of the real, and aversion towards the "certainties" of late modernity represents an unexpected – and substantial, if partial and contradictory – convergence towards the theological, and a re-levelling of the playing-field, which, through the pervasive but historically and culturally specific predominance of a certain sort of positivism, had been unconducive to theological discourse.

More specifically, Part One is structured in the following way. The first section, "Embarrassment," offers an outline of Jonathan Culler's writing on apostrophe, concentrating on his essay "Apostrophe," which has become the standard account of the figure. Sections 2, 3 and 4 raise a variety of objections to this account. Section 2, "Unanswered and Unasked Questions," considers a number of methodological issues, whereas sections 3 and 4 focus on the claims and presuppositions of Culler's argument. There are three central issues that these sections contest, upon which Culler's argument is substantively based. The first of these, dealt with in section 3, "Dead Letters and Disingenuous Addresses," concerns the claim made by Culler and others that apostrophe is an address which does not or cannot in fact address. Section 4, "'Untenanting Creation of its God,'" considers the other two claims or presuppositions, which concern, firstly, the metaphysical implications of the figure, and, secondly, its representationality. The final section in the chapter, "Beyond Embarrassment," examines the criterion of embarrassment itself, seeking to question not whether it occurs but rather the *authority* accorded to it, revealing whose interests it protects and the territories it divides and patrols. This section therefore also serves to introduce the following two chapters, by showing how embarrassment might be – and *is* for many – an intermediary stage rather than the end of our inquiries, and to indicate how one might meaningfully proceed beyond or in spite of it.

If this thesis is to be of any real value, it needs not only to identify the inadequacies of existing accounts, it needs also to offer a convincing alternative to what it criticises. The target but also the source of a rebuttal of the attack at the centre of "suspicious" criticism is, as critics such as Steiner have argued, religious belief. As Nathan Scott observes, writing of Steiner in *Real Presences*: "He sees with absolute clarity that the most essential repudiation lying at the heart of the whole deconstructive enterprise is a theological repudiation, and thus, as he feels, the one kind of faith (in unfaith) may be countered only by another kind of faith" (1990, 11–12). It is, however, one thing to assert this, and quite another to offer a plausible account of what this alternative may entail. Whilst being deservedly praised for its breadth of allusion and argumentative brilliance, Steiner's *Real Presences* has been criticised for its failure to adumbrate the nature of the alternative it proposes. To cite Scott again:

> it is clear that Steiner's sense of what is seemly and unseemly does not comport with [Ihab] Hassan's, for his [Steiner's] is a hermeneutic that never ceases to insist upon the ultimately

religious import of literary art. Yet his argument dances round the whole question of transcendence in ever so gingerly a way: so chary an argument is it indeed that it never quite becomes a true argument, never quite manages to be more than a matter of sheer assertion. Though he conceives it to be the primary principle of hermeneutics that the possibility of junction between word and world is guaranteed by the immanence of the Transcendent, he never undertakes to set forth what it really means to speak of the world as indwelt by God. The affidavit that he offers in this connection is sometimes deeply moving, but it never rises above the level of personal testimony, whereas the role it plays in his discourse does in fact require a systematic elaboration of the grounds on which his testimony is based.

(1990, 18–19)

Clearly, then, neither negative criticism nor counter-assertion alone is sufficient to challenge the authority of "suspicious" criticism. For this reason, though such a step is somewhat unusual in literary criticism, this thesis offers as part of its argument an extended consideration of explicitly theological material and accounts of religious practice relating to the act of apostrophe.

This thesis concentrates on two such accounts. The first and famous account, by the Jewish philosopher and theologian Martin Buber, which forms the basis of our counter-argument, espouses a view of religious communion which radically eschews choreographed, public and mediated practice, in favour of the *im*mediate relation between an I and a Thou. The second account, presented more summarily, drawing on the work of the contemporary Radically Orthodox theologian Catherine Pickstock, deals with Christian liturgical practice, and the use of apostrophe in ritualised, corporate and sacramentally mediated worship.

Why two, and why these two? Whilst the two theological accounts of apostrophe offered here as a counterpose to Culler's sceptical reading of the figure fundamentally concur in endorsing a belief in the propriety and efficacy of I-Thou address across different ontological categories and apparently uninhabited space, they nevertheless exemplify practices or viewpoints which are emphatically opposed to one another, and which, I argue, exist in dialectical and mutually corrective relation. Central to this dialectical relationship is the difference between ritualised and non-ritualised practice. Obviously, this is a *relative* – and not an absolute – distinction, since all linguistic behaviour is inevitably conventionalised to some extent (Tambiah: 1979, 116; 123–4). We may nevertheless usefully distinguish between *degrees* of conventionalisation, and hence, contrastively, between ritualised and non-ritualised practice or, as we shall refer to it, between "liturgical" and "Romantic" apostrophe. Very generally speaking, then, although we shall be considering and contrasting Jewish

and Christian accounts of religious practice, the more general opposition with which we shall be concerned is between what we might refer to as "Catholic" and "Protestant" attitudes towards prayer.

What can accounts of religious practice tell us about the act of apostrophe in poetry? There are two basic points which may be summarised here. Firstly, and most importantly, they teach us to trust: to trust, against the claims of deconstruction, that what might from our finite side of the fence appear to be abysmally indeterminate, what might appear to say more, and therefore also less, than we mean, and be uttered into seemingly empty space, may in fact, beyond our sight, as the instinct that made us utter tells us, be meaningful and efficacious; to trust the rumours that the apparently chaotic flux, devoid of inherent meaning and relations, of which we and our words are supposed to come, and in which we and our words are supposed to be caught, in fact forms part of, and participates in, a larger meaning-*full* order. Secondly, in light of the differences in religious practice outlined above, I suggest we might usefully distinguish in poetry also, again contrastively, between "ritualised" and "non-ritualised" practice, that is to say, between apostrophes, on the one hand, which appear to resemble Buber's "Romantic" or anti-ritual model of utterance and, on the other hand, something comparable in its public and "ritualised" or choreographed character to liturgical usage. The distinction between apostrophe and invocation may, we propose, be drawn along these lines.

Although this thesis is concerned with apostrophe in poetry in general – and criticises Jonathan Culler's account for the disproportionate emphasis it accords to parodic or metapoetic usage – it nonetheless concentrates on *Romantic* poetry. Why? This takes us back to the "something else" with which we began – the evident discrepancy, that is, between what poets and poetry claim to be doing and its "demystification" in recent criticism. The revolutionary insistence of the first generation Romantics upon an "only if you mean it" proviso respecting the use of rhetorical figures naturally involved an increased and self-conscious seriousness towards as well as an attempt philosophically to justify the use of "counter-rational" tropes. Romantic poetry therefore obviously lies at the centre of our argument with the poststructuralist attack upon the metaphysics of apostrophe, which is manifestly prompted by, but which, I argue, in various ways "turns away" from, even as it purports to be describing, such "serious" usage. The second major reason for focusing on Romantic poetry is because the consideration of the dialectical contrast between ritualised and non-ritualised practice casts light

upon interesting differences between the major Romantic poets. Briefly, if we find in the first generation Romantics (Wordsworth and Coleridge) a "Protestant" suspicion of and aversion to ritual, it is possible to discern in the second generation (Byron, Keats and Shelley) a converse revival of or undisturbed attachment to ritualised utterance.

Part Two thus has three interrelated aims. First, it seeks in its recourse to theological models of apostrophic usage, to defend the act of apostrophe from the impoverishing gaze of "suspicious" criticism; second, the accounts of religious practice it draws upon in doing so are shown to be dialectically related in their attitudes towards ritual and capable of supplying an important corrective to one another; and, third, the differences in attitude with respect to ritual evinced by these models of religious practice may, we propose, help us to gain an enlightening purchase upon differences in Romantic practice elided in recent writing on apostrophe.

Part One

Incommunicado

Poetry is the soul's announcement that even when it is
alone with itself on the narrowest ridge it is thinking
not of itself but of the Being which is not itself, and
that this Being which is not itself is visiting it there,
perplexing and blessing it.

(Buber: 1969, 180)

Apostrophe may change her face [...].

(Vinsauf: 1971, 50)

I

Embarrassment

It appears to be a truth incestuously disseminated, if not universally acknowledged, that apostrophe in

poetry is an embarrassment. The most impressive exponent of this hypothesis is Jonathan Culler.[1] To

Culler, the use of apostrophe in poetry is an embarrassment, firstly, because it is unrealistic or non-

representational;[2] he writes:

> It is hard to imagine what sort of situation would lead someone to speak in this way or what
> non-poetic act they would be performing. The answer we are likely to come up with is that
> these speakers are getting carried away and waxing poetical, extravagantly posturing. If we try
> to understand these poems as fictional imitations of ordinary speech acts, the act seems to be
> that of imitating poetry itself.
>
> (1997, 72)

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[1] Culler's views on the figure are adumbrated in *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (1975, 164–70), and most extensively set forth in his essay "Apostrophe" (1977, 59–69), which is reprinted in *The Pursuit of Signs*. His argument is repeated with minor variations in "Changes in the Study of the Lyric," (Hošek and Parker: 1985, 38–54); "Reading Lyric" (1985, 98–106); and *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (1997, 71–4).

[2] Needless to say, not all apostrophes are addressed to inanimate objects, natural phenomena, abstractions and the like; many are, obviously, addressed to those who are living and who – it is to be presumed – are likely or supposed to read them. Whilst apostrophes of the latter sort are neither statistically insignificant, unproblematic nor uninteresting, they are unmentioned by Culler, whose argument only considers what we might describe as "counter-rational" apostrophe, that is, apostrophes of the former sort.

The second, related reason why, according to Culler, the figure is embarrassing is because it implies things that we do not believe; namely, it appears to make present and personify that which is absent or inanimate, suggesting the possibility of responsivity and relation, and also represents a temporality or presentness which outwits the linear flow of time. Such serendipitous implications are, in Culler's view, "enforced by the apostrophe" – and indulged by poets – "independent[ly] of any claims made about the actual properties of the object addressed" (1981, 141). Neglecting, as J. Douglas Kneale points out, "a distinguished tradition of commentary" on the figure (1999, 12), Culler claims that, out of embarrassment, in the face of such pretension, criticism has "repressed" and "systematically avoided both the topic of apostrophe and actual apostrophes" (1981, 136–7; and 1985, 99). We should therefore, it seems, acknowledge the Emperor's nakedness, and see apostrophe as a rhetorical trick, whose "timeless present [...] is better seen as a temporality of writing" (1981, 149), and whose power to confer the appearance of presence or sentience is, as Barbara Johnson puts it, "a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness" (1998, 221).

Culler's account is, obviously, related to a larger and extremely influential movement within literary criticism which emphasises the *figurative* character of literary utterances at the expense, if not to the exclusion, of their referentiality. Culler's reading favours an extreme form of this argument, according to which "apostrophe involves a drama of 'the one mind's' modifications more than a relationship between an *I* and a *you*" (1981, 148).[3] The act of apostrophe is therefore, to Culler, a deception or *pretence*; it is an address which does not in fact address (or does not address anything except itself). This deception and the lack of referentiality directs us towards a further source of embarrassment. What, it is logical to ask, is the *purpose*, then, of an address which does not appear to address? Culler offers the following explanation:

> the vocative of apostrophe is a device which the poetic voice uses to establish with an object a relationship which helps to constitute him. The object is treated as a subject, an *I* which implies a certain type of *you* in its turn. One who successfully invokes nature is one to whom

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[3] Culler quotes Paul de Man's reading of one of Rilke's early lyrics in support of this point; de Man writes: "the 'du' of the poem, is present in the poem only to delegate, so to speak, its potential activity to the speaking voice" (1981, 148), from which Culler concludes: "the apostrophic postulation of addressees refers one to the transforming and animating activity of the poetic voice. The 'you' is a projection of that voice" (1981, 148).

nature might, in its turn, speak. He makes himself poet, visionary. Thus invocation is a figure of vocation. This is obvious when one thinks how often invocations seek pity or assistance for projects and situations specifically related to the poetic vocation, but it can also be inferred from the functionally gratuitous invocations which mark so many poems. [...] voice calls in order to be calling, to dramatize its calling, to summon images of its power so as to establish its identity as poetical and prophetic voice.

(1981, 142)

Apostrophe, thus, according to Culler, is the voice that poets use when they want to sound like poets.

"A phrase like 'O wild West Wind,'" he explains,

evokes poetic presence because the wind becomes a *thou* only in relation to a poetic act, only in the moment when poetic voice constitutes itself.

If we think of what the vocative represents in this process, we can see why apostrophe should be embarrassing. It is the pure embodiment of poetic pretension: of the subject's claim that in his verse he is not merely an empirical poet, a writer of verse, but the embodiment of poetic tradition and of the spirit of poesy. Apostrophe is perhaps always an indirect invocation of the muse. Devoid of semantic reference, the *O* of apostrophe refers to other apostrophes and thus to the lineage and conventions of sublime poetry.

(1981, 142–3)

Assuming a similar deception and lack of referentiality (and also taking "Ode to the West Wind" as his exemplar), John Hollander puts forward a parallel explanation: "[i]n either case," he contends, speaking of different sorts of poetic imperatives,

we are to be considering metaphoric commands and urgings, schemes of the imperative that are designed not literally to enact, but poetically to bring a fiction into being. To take a poetic command literally [...] is trivially to misread the poetry. We cannot, of course, literally become the west wind addressed in Shelley's ode, and thus cannot, as idiotic literalists, attempt to comply with his injunction to "Be thou me, impetuous one!" (how would one do that, anyway?) nor even with the final advice to "Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth /Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!" [...] On the other hand, throughout the poem, we can and do absorb the spill, as it were, of the first three strophes' concluding imperatives, "Oh, hear!" We, as readers, hear, and not merely overhear, those elaborate predictions and specifications which in fact make up the earlier part of the ode. The command, addressed not to ourselves, which says, "O You over there, with your X and Y and Z, and your tendency to do A and B to C whenever you can, and your nasty mother M from whom you derive your vile habit of always doing D and your poor father F from whom you never learned to L ... and so forth, O You, listen to me!" is, we might say, a crudely rhetorical command, from the point of view of the putative listener, who will have thrown something at the speaker or left the scene. He will do the opposite of listen. We, as oblique listeners, are also attending to a figurative command: what we are in fact made to listen to is a polemically moralizing description of the "You." All that material has been smuggled into any listener's hearing in the lining of the manifest subject of the imperative.

(1988, 65)

According to Hollander, such utterances are thus rather like the phone calls that occur in soap operas, in which one character stiltedly repeats for the benefit of the audience what the other character is supposed to have said.

Whether the purpose of apostrophe, then, is to constitute dramatically the speaking self or surreptitiously to say something to a third-party auditor *about* the addressee – and the two options are obviously not exclusive – it is, as far as Culler and Hollander are concerned, embarrassingly disingenuous.

Before arriving at, and as a way of inoculating, his recommended reading, Culler, more or less fairly, takes cognisance of and then, more or less explicitly, rejects a number of competing interpretations of the figure. These are referred to as "levels of reading," and our guided tour through them is presented as an ascent from "naive" or credulous readings towards "sophistication" and truth.[4]

According to the first level of reading, apostrophes in poetry "serve as intensifiers, as images of invested passion" (1981, 138). Such a reading is summed up and left behind in the following way:

> This is a matter on which rhetoricians seem to agree, and in so agreeing they inoke a rudimentary psychology to naturalize the figure: to explain its meaning by treating it as the natural effect of an unexceptionable cause. Thus Fontanier in his *Figures du discours*: "But what can give rise to apostrophe? It can only be feeling, and only the feeling stirred up within the heart until it breaks out and spreads itself about on the outside, as if acting on its own ... [as if it were] the spontaneous impulse of a powerfully moved soul!" [...] Apostrophe, by this tale, is a figure spontaneously adopted by passion, and it signifies, metonymically, the passion that caused it. If one were to accept Fontanier's claim, repressing one's suspicion that few things are more artificial than apostrophic addresses to inanimate objects, one might conclude that apostrophes indicate intense involvement in the situation described. "O Rose, thou art sick" differs from "The rose is sick" in that the former marks a powerful outburst of concern.
>   There may be some truth in this, but for many apostrophes, including "O Rose, thou art sick," the moderate, controlled, or admonitory tone does not justify tales of an outburst of passion.
>
> (1981, 138)

The second level of reading moves away from the feelings of the speaker to the relation between the speaker and the addressee, and the speaker's attitude towards *the act of address*. Referring to Blake's "Spring," from *Poetical Sketches*, Culler observes:

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[4] In a number of ways, which we shall elaborate upon later, Culler's argument resembles that of Peacock's "The Four Ages of Poetry," which similarly takes us through a "progression" (though in Peacock's case the trajectory is historical) from primitive "credulity" towards enlightenment in poetry, which, as we know, he then claims the Romantics (to his regret) attempted to reverse.

To say that the act of addressing spring signifies the speaker's intense feelings about that season would be too simple, for the poem evokes not a love for an empirical season of the year so much as an intense feeling for the act of addressing this season. As Geoffrey Hartman writes about Blake's four poems to the seasons,

> We feel at once their intensely vocative nature – that the prophetic or speaking out and the invocational or calling upon are more important than their conventional subject. Their mood is never purely descriptive but always optative or imperative: what description enters is ritual in character. It evokes an epiphany so strongly as to carry the poet towards it.
>
> (1981, 139)

This fine observation by Geoffrey Hartman serves to introduce the second level proper, which draws upon (a version of) Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue, and which is taken more seriously but rejected more emphatically than the first level of reading. Commenting on the quotation from Hartman, Culler writes:

> We can see why this might be the case if we ask why rhetoricians should claim that passion spontaneously seeks apostrophe. The answer would seem to be that to apostrophize is to will a state of affairs, to attempt to call it into being by asking inanimate objects to bend themselves to your desire. In these terms the function of apostrophe would be to make the objects of the universe potentially responsive forces: forces which can be asked to act or refrain from acting, or even to continue behaving as they usually behave. The apostrophizing poet identifies his universe as a world of sentient forces.
>
> Harold Bloom, in the days when he thought that poetry was about poets' relationship to the world as well as their relationship to Milton, interpreted Shelley's major poems as manifestations of an *I–Thou* relationship to the universe, but he insisted that in addressing Mont Blanc or the West Wind Shelley is invoking an unseen power behind them, an ultimate Thou: "To invoke the Spirit that is in the west wind is not to invoke the wind or the autumn only." [...] Doctrinally, this is a thoroughly plausible interpretation, for the poems themselves display considerable interest in a pervasive unseen power. But in defining the true auditor the critic reduces the strangeness of apostrophe: while the poems directly address natural objects, the critic identifies the true addressee as a divine spirit. The student of apostrophe must resist this reduction. Whatever sort of pantheism the poems embody, when they address natural objects they formally will that these particular objects function as subjects; they perform the radical act of Keats's charioteer:
>
>> The charioteer with wondrous gesture talks
>> To the trees and mountains; and there soon appear
>> Shapes of delight, of mystery, and fear [...].
>>
>> (1981, 139–40)

Culler's third level of reading represents a further criticism or complication of the foregoing construal of the figure, and introduces the first element of his "demystifying" account. "At the second level of reading," he writes,

the function of apostrophe is to constitute encounters with the world as relations between subjects, but the simple oppositional structure of the *I–Thou* model leaves out of account the fact that a poem is a verbal composition which will be read by an audience. What is the effect of introducing this third term? A prosaic example may assist reflection here.

Imagine a man standing on a corner in the rain cursing buses: "Come on, damn you! It's been ten minutes!" If he continues apostrophically when other travellers join him on the corner, he makes a spectacle of himself; his apostrophes work less to establish an *I–Thou* relation between him and the absent bus than to dramatize or constitute an image of self. We might posit, then, a third level of reading where the vocative of apostrophe is a device which the poetic voice uses to establish with an object a relationship which helps to constitute him.

(1981, 141–2)

Culler's fourth and final level of reading represents an even more radical rejection of the figure's ability to refer and to establish relation. According to such an interpretation, the relation which apostrophe appears to establish between the speaker and the addressee is viewed as an entirely solipsistic and fictional act. Which is to say that no relation in fact exists, or if it does, it – and the Thou also which is addressed – only exists within and as a construction of the mind of the speaker. Basing his conclusions on the evidence of several poems which manifest doubts about or parody their own apostrophic procedures, Culler argues:

To read apostrophe as sign of a fiction which knows its own fictive nature is to stress its optative character, its impossible imperatives: commands which in their explicit impossibility figure events in and of fiction. This line of thought has already led beyond the third level of reading, at which apostrophe was a way of constituting a poetical persona by taking up a special relation to objects. It has led to a fourth level at which one must question the status so far granted to the *thou* of the apostrophic structure and reflect on the crucial though paradoxical fact that this figure which seems to establish relations between the self and the other can in fact be read as an act of radical interiorization and solipsism. Either it parcels out the self to fill the world, peopling the universe with fragments of the self, as in Baudelaire's apostrophes to his pain, his mind, his soul, his living matter [...], or else it internalizes what might have been thought external (things, says Rilke, "want us to change them entirely ... into ourselves").

(1981, 146)

Having outlined the reasons why apostrophes in poetry are supposed to be embarrassing, and having looked at Culler's evaluation of a number of competing readings of the figure, as well as his recommended poststructuralist alternatives, we are now in a position to ask, how convincing is Culler's argument?

His account of apostrophe certainly identifies a number of important and intriguing facts about the figure. To begin with, Culler draws attention to the crucial but frequently neglected fact that the act

of apostrophe makes something *happen*, and that this something is, to use Graham Ward's fine phrase, an "ontological scandal" (2000, 81).[5] Additionally, drawing upon Shelley's distinction in "A Defence of Poetry" between a story and a poem, Culler's essay usefully suggests how this "happening" or apostrophic "event" is fundamentally opposed to narrative; as Culler writes:

> If one brings together in a poem a boy, some birds, a few blessed creatures, and some mountains, meadows, hills and groves, one tends to place them in a narrative where one things leads to another; the events which form ask to be temporally located [...]. But if one puts into a poem *thou shepherd boy*, *ye blessed creatures*, *ye birds*, they are immediately associated with what might be called a timeless present but is better seen as a temporality of writing. Even if the birds were only glimpsed once in the past, to apostrophise them as "ye birds" is to locate them in the time of the apostrophe – a special temporality which is the set of all moments at which writing can say "now." This is a time of discourse rather than story. So located by apostrophes, birds, creatures, boys, etc., resist being organised into events that can be narrated, for they are inserted in the poem as elements of the event which the poem is attempting to be.
>
> Such considerations suggest that one distinguish two forces in poetry, the narrative and the apostrophic, and that the lyric is characteristically the triumph of the apostrophic. A poem can recount a sequence of events, which acquires the significance lyric requires when read synecdochically or allegorically. Avoiding apostrophe, Wordsworth wrote lyrical ballads: anecdotes which signify. Alternatively, a poem may invoke objects, people, a detemporalized space with forms and forces which have pasts and futures but which are addressed as potential presences. Nothing need happen in an apostrophic poem, as the great Romantic odes amply demonstrate. Nothing need happen because the poem itself is to be the happening.
>
> (1981, 149)

Furthermore, Culler's account of the different "levels" of reading represents an astute criticism of more "conventional" interpretations of apostrophe. In particular, his emphasis upon self-referentiality and, following Frye (1990), upon elements of "doodling" and "babbling" in the lyric constitutes a necessary qualification of "[t]he methodological heritage of [...] New Criticism," which encourages us to read literary works as "fictional representations of ordinary speech acts" (1985, 39).[6] Lastly, Culler's account instructively directs attention to the various ways in which "apostrophic poems display [...] awareness of the difficulties of what they purport to seek," pointing out that "[p]oems which contain apostrophes often end in withdrawals and questions" (1981, 143). Such observations have proved extremely productive in the interpretation of a number of late Romantic and early Modernist lyrics, and appear to lend support to his general contention that apostrophe is "a relic of archaic beliefs"

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[5] The phrase picks up on St Paul's famous use of the word "scandal" in his first letter to the Corinthians: "we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock [*skandalon*], and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1:23).
[6] For an extended critique of the tenets of New Criticism, see Culler's lucid essay "On the Negativity of Modern Poetry: Friedrich, Baudelaire, and the Critical Tradition" (1989).

(1981, 140), which can only now be used ironically, nostalgically or self-deceptively, as "a fiction which knows its own fictive nature" (1981, 146). It would therefore seem that Culler has good reason to conclude that "one might be justified in taking apostrophe as the figure of all that is most radical, embarrassing, pretentious, and mystificatory in the lyric" (1981, 137).

II

Unanswered and Unasked Questions

For all its plausibility and influence, however, Culler's reading of the figure may be called into question in several respects. First of all, there are two major methodological problems which significantly affect the validity of his argument, which will be dealt with in the present section. The first of these concerns the data upon which his conclusions are based, the second concerns his indifference towards the problem of definition.[7] Other, more serious objections concerning the claims and presuppositions of Culler's account will be dealt with in the three subsequent sections.

Jumping to Conclusions

One of the most striking things about the recent spate of poststructuralist writing on apostrophe is the astonishingly limited, and highly selective, sample of utterances that is considered (and then promiscuously recycled). Conclusions about the figure in general are invariably drawn from atypical utterances such as Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" or else from a few "belated" nineteenth-century texts (usually by Baudelaire) which exhibit Modernist anxieties about, or ironisations of, Romantic

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[7] These two criticisms are also raised by Engler: 1987, 67.

practice.[8] As Engler remarks: "Culler [...] uses the Romantic lyric, a historical phenomenon, in constructing a generic system that is not explicitly limited to a particular period" (1987, 69).[9]

It is worth spelling out more precisely what is at stake here. The point is that what Culler says about the figure is perfectly true *of certain types* or *certain instances* of apostrophe, though it is by no means true of the figure in general. Engler, I would argue, is too generous in his criticism, implying that what Culler says is valid for the Romantic lyric in general. Culler, however, appears to be committed to, or at least wishes to encourage, the belief that all apostrophes are essentially the same. To try and convince us of this, he must carefully exclude innumerable obvious counter-examples, and attempt to build a general case from a few isolated instances. On some occasions, he is more open about such discrepancies than on others. In "Changes in the Study of the Lyric," for example, where the focus of concern is upon the inadequacies of New Criticism rather than apostrophe as such, Culler reiterates his earlier argument, though he in part concedes that there are significant exceptions. Referring to the practices and premises of New Criticism, he writes:

> This has certainly been a productive approach to lyric, but if we turn to some of the most famous lyric openings – "Hail to thee, blithe Spirit / Bird thou never wert!" or "Thou still unravished bride of quietness," or "O Rose, thou art sick!" – problems immediately arise. It is difficult to see these apostrophes as fictional representations of plausible historical speech acts. This is one of the reasons why apostrophes are awkward and embarrassing: it is difficult to find a tone in which to read them, and one declaims them with mildly embarrassed, self-conscious grandiloquence. We find it hard to imagine any nonpoetic or nonfictional utterance that would use them. If we try [...] to "conceive of the kind of situation that might lead a man to feel thus and to speak thus," we find ourselves suggesting, in an uncomfortably circular fashion, that these lyrics are fictional representations of utterances by speakers who are waxing poetical, indulging in bardic flights.
>
> With a poem like "Tintern Abbey," on the other hand, we fare better if we treat the poem as the fictional representation of a nonfictional utterance, and ask what sort of speaker, situation, tone, and drama of attitudes are represented here. We draw inferences about the attitudes of a speaker who is meditating on the scene he is now revisiting. This procedure works well for "Tintern Abbey" precisely because its tone and syntax of mediation preserves the fiction of a speaker's historical utterance and avoids flights and figures that might force us to read the poem as something else. We can treat this lyric as if it were a dramatic monologue,

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[8] If, as Culler argues elsewhere, Baudelaire is "the founder of that poetry which must be described with negative categories" (Budick and Iser: 1989, 190), it would seem to be a suspect though telling thing to do to go fishing for one's examples there.

[9] Valentine Cunningham makes a similar point about literary theory in general:

> there's assistance from a kind of chronological bad faith, the pretence that certain great fragmentary texts of modernism, culminating in *Finnegans Wake* [...] are the only proper kinds of text, the goal that all textual experiment is leading to, the great *telos* of all writing.

(2002, 73–4)

which is what the reigning New Critical theory of the lyric encourages us to do; but the theory creates difficulties both for lyrics whose voice is not individualized, such as songs, and for poems in the bardic tradition whose apostrophes to the wind, to nature, or to Canada do not belong to a recognizable attitude, a familiar tone of speech overheard.

(1985, 39–40)

Here, where it is not instrumental to his argument, Culler implicitly concedes that what he is saying about the figure is only true of *some* apostrophes. "Tintern Abbey," it will be recalled, has at its centre an extended apostrophe to the river Wye, yet Culler is prepared to see the poem as a "fictional representation of a nonfictional utterance," and say that it "avoids flights and figures that might force us to read the poem as something else." Thus, either Culler has forgotten about the apostrophe to the river Wye or he is conceding, whilst trying to conceal his concession, that some apostrophes are naturalistic, in belonging to "a recognizable attitude, a familiar tone of speech overheard" whereas others are metapoetic and represent extravagant "flights" from everyday discourse.[10]

This sort of concession, such as it is, is notably absent from his essay "Apostrophe," which deals exclusively with the figure, and which is where one would expect to find such information. The omission is understandable, since such a concession – that his conclusions do not apply to a large number of important examples – would obviously restrict the significance of his argument. We may, furthermore, discern in this essay a corollary attempt subtly to *extend,* without substantiation, the general significance of individual examples. Let us look again at two short passages already quoted or quoted in part, both of which represent crucial points in Culler's argument:

repressing one's suspicion that few things are more artificial than apostrophic addresses to inanimate objects, one might conclude that apostrophes indicate intense involvement in the situation described. "O Rose, thou art sick" differs from "The rose is sick" in that the former marks a powerful outburst of concern.
There may be some truth in this, but for many apostrophes, including "O Rose, thou art sick," the moderate, controlled, or admonitory tone does not justify tales of an outburst of passion.
[...]
If, as we tend to assume, post-enlightenment poetry seeks to overcome the alienation of subject from object, then apostrophe takes the crucial step of constituting the object as another subject with whom the poetic subject might hope to strike up a harmonious relationship. Apostrophe would figure this reconciliation of subject and object. But one must note that it figures this reconciliation as an act of will, as something to be accomplished poetically in the act of apostrophizing; and apostrophic poems display in various ways awareness of the

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[10] Such differences are discussed at greater length in Part Two, "A Step Backwards."

difficulties of what they purport to seek. Poems which contain apostrophes often end in withdrawals and questions. The "Ode to a Nightingale" affirms the deceptive power of fancy:

> Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
> As she is famed to do, deceiving elf. [...]

Fancy deceives by not deceiving as effectively as it is said to. This problematic structure leaves open the questions with which the poem concludes:

> Was it a vision or a waking dream?
> Fled is that music: – Do I wake or sleep?

The question about the status of the event is a way of suspending the referential aspect of the poem and focusing on a poetic event.

> (1981, 138; 143–4)

Culler's point is argued so well that it feels like an act of cavilling to question his use of a couple of words. However, the unearned generalising of his argument, as seen in his use of the word "many" in the first passage, and "often" in the second, should not go unattended. In both cases, the assertion is highly questionable, to say the least (*many* apostrophes are unjustly described as an outburst of passion? poems which contain apostrophes *often* end in withdrawals or questions?), and yet, in both cases, the assertion is left wholly unsubstantiated. What these various manoeuvres appear to suggest is that Culler is attempting, though finding it difficult, to conceal that his claims may be of limited application. Thus, even if what Culler has to say about the figure is true, it still needs to asked: is it the *whole* truth?

Pretexts, Contexts and Syntax

The second major methodological problem with Culler's account, as a number of other critics have noted,[11] is that it fails to give a definition of what an apostrophe is.[12] This might seem like a simple matter. The problem, however, is complex and slippery in the extreme for a number of reasons. To

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[11] See, for example, Kneale: 1999, 154.
[12] The problem is jettisoned in the following way: "if we would know something of the poetics of the lyric we should study apostrophe, its forms and meanings. Such a project would confront at the outset complex problems of definition and delimitation, which I here leave aside in order to focus on cases which will be apostrophic by any definition" (1981, 137).

begin with, whilst we all know that apostrophe, etymologically speaking, means "turning away,"[13] and

whilst it is perfectly clear what is meant by "turning away" in a courtroom setting, what does it mean

to "turn" in poetry?[14] There are, it seems, two important dimensions to this question. The first concerns

that *from which* apostrophe turns, the second concerns the issue of "orientation." To consider the first

of these, we need to take a step backwards to examine the comparability, as such, of apostrophes

uttered in oratory and literature.

First of all, we need to ask, is there in literature an equivalent or analogue to the judge in

judicial discourse? The obvious answer is that the *reader* is the equivalent of the judge in classical

rhetoric. Though there are a number of differences between the situations which complicate the

comparison, and suggest that attempts to insist upon "literal" equivalents in defining the figure's use in

poetry might be misplaced.

Leaving aside the differences between first person consonant and first person dissonant

utterances for the moment, it might be argued, for example, that whilst both the reader and the judge

constitute an audience to the speaker's act of addressing another, the nature of the audition may vary

significantly, in that the reader may be both more or less of an audience than the judge in a courtroom

situation. More, in that certain apostrophes are rather like the conversations staged in front of, and

intended benignly to deceive, Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*. As we saw earlier,

John Hollander reads Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" in this way. In such cases, we might say that

the auditor is, in fact, the addressee, and that the formal addressee is more of an auditor. Indeed, it is

often argued that *all* (lyric) poetry involves the reader in this way, and that all apostrophes are of this

sort. As T. S. Eliot famously claimed "a good love poem, though it may be addressed to one person, is

always meant to be overheard by other people" (1979, 90). To a certain extent, such awareness or

intentional involvement is perhaps inevitable (again, leaving aside the complications of first person

dissonant utterances), though, if it is true, I think both the degree of awareness and the degree to which

such awareness is "at the expense of" orientation towards the formal addressee vary so much as to

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[13] *Apo-* from, away + *strepho* turn; Greek: ἀποστροΦή; Latin: *aversio*.

[14] The differences between the figure's use in classical oratory and in literature have been largely overlooked. This is perhaps not surprising since most other tropes suffer transfer more peaceably – a metaphor, for example, remains a metaphor whether it is in poetry or oration. In the case of apostrophe, however, given that it is more of an "action" or a shift in orientation than a figure of speech in the customary sense, how it is recognised or

trouble the generalisation.[15] St Augustine's *Confessions*, for example, are addressed to God, and take

throughout the form of prayer, yet they are consciously written or uttered *in front of* – and with the

avowed purpose of influencing – another audience, without, I think, meaning that he is not in fact

addressing, or at least trying to address, God.[16] It is also easy to imagine poetic apostrophes that were

written and intended only for the eyes of their addressee, which may then by choice or chance reach a

wider audience. (Eliot's specifying modifier "good" represents a shrewd anticipation of various

objections). In any case, the general truth of such contentions is far from uncontested. J. S. Mill's

famous epigrammatical distinction between eloquence and poetry, for instance, whose virtual

proverbiality suggests widespread endorsement, explicitly argues *against* such general assumptions:

> Eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *over*heard. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of
> poetry appears to lie in the poet's *utter unconsciousness of a listener*. Poetry is feeling
> confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude.[17]
>
> (1965, 109; emphasis added)

In pointing this out, I do not wish naively to elide the obvious and significant differences between

poetic and non-poetic utterances (though I contend that such differences vary dramatically and may be

overemphasised); rather, I wish simply to indicate that the reader in poetry may be significantly *less* of

an audience – especially given their spatio-temporal separation – than the judge in a courtroom setting.

If it is true, as I am suggesting, that the reader of literature (and of poetry especially) is

frequently only tenuously or loosely analogous to the judge in classical rhetoric, it would seem wrong

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indicated (and how its conventionalised usage may develop) in a purely linguistic medium is evidently more
problematic.

[15] If, when Eliot was writing, it was necessary to counter a naive tendency insufficiently to differentiate between
"art" and "life" (a distinction which both parties are forever attempting to subvert as much as defend in their
borrowing from one another), it might be argued that we are nowadays faced with the obverse and paradoxical
naivety of being *too* knowing about art, as evidenced in the habit of reading *everything* in the light of Modernist
and Postmodernist views about art's glorious (emasculated) autonomy. Again, what I am arguing for is a
corrective of a corrective.

[16] See below, "Unsaying Our Prayers," and "Saying Someone Else's Prayers," for further discussions of the issue
of multiple addressees.

[17] W. B. Yeats insightfully complicates Mill's distinction, though in a way that again calls into question the
significance or degree of a speaker's awareness of their audience when speaking: Talking of the orator John F.
Taylor, he comments:

> I would say, quoting Mill, "Oratory is heard, poetry is overheard." And he would answer, his voice full
> of contempt, that there was always an audience; and yet, in his moments of lofty speech, he himself was
> alone no matter what the crowd.
>
> (1955, 97)

to expect exactly the same sort of discourse to precede apostrophes in poetry that we find preceding apostrophes in classical rhetoric. What bearing does all of this have upon the issue of "turning"?

The phantom antagonist whose argument lies behind these general remarks is J. Douglas Kneale. According to Kneale, apostrophe – as opposed to address – "always depends on a pre-text" (1990, 14). Utterances such as those cited by Culler – "'O Rose, thou art sick!'; 'O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being!'; 'Thou still unravished bride of quietness ...'; and *'Sois sage, ô ma douleur!'*" – are therefore, as far as Kneale is concerned, not apostrophes by definition. This is because "there is no vocal turn involved, no 'sudden removing,' in Peacham's phrase [...] they are all direct exclamations, or ecphoneses, occurring in the *first line* of their respective poems, with no preceding speech, no pre-textual basis from which to turn, no discourse to 'interrupt'" (1990, 18). I have already outlined why, in general, I think looking for or insisting on literal equivalences might be misplaced. I shall now offer a number of more specific reasons why I think Kneale's definitional criterion is neither necessary nor sustainable.

To be sure, an apostrophe is only an apostrophe because it "turns away" from something. In oratory, this is obviously the preceding oration, and in poetry, this might be the preceding verse; though I think it is also possible and proper to see a poetic utterance as an act of turning away even where there is no explicit "pre-text." The word "explicit" indicates an alternative way of understanding such utterances.

Since it may be presumed that we do not spend all of our lives talking to nightingales, mountains, rivers and so forth (and insofar as an apostrophe may be considered a fictional representation of a non-fictional utterance, we are presumably supposed to conceive of it as a moment in its speaker's "unapparent" life in general rather than as occurring within an act of oration), is it not safe and sensible to deduce a turning away on the part of the speaker to do so? Surely it is more accurate and appropriate to see such utterances as a turning away that is shorn of that from which it turns? (surely *not* imagining most Romantic lyrics as a turn – from something more quotidian, however unspecified – would rob them of the apparently intended and important impression of

"spontaneous overflow"?).[18] To argue as Kneale does is rather like insisting that a portrait that only depicts the head and shoulders of its subject is not a representation of a human figure since it lacks parts of the body considered essential to our definition of human beings.

The tenability of insisting upon the explicit inclusion of a pre-text for an address to be defined as an apostrophe is brought further into doubt by poetry which begins with apostrophes addressed to different phenomena. Here, for example, is the beginning of Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College":

Ye distant spires, ye antique towers,
That crown the watery glade,
Where grateful Science still adores
Her Henry's holy Shade;
And ye, that from the stately brow
Of Windsor's heights th' expanse below
Of grove, of lawn, of mead survey,
Whose turf, whose shade, whose flowers among
Wanders the hoary Thames along
His silver-winding way.

Ah happy hills! ah pleasing shade!
Ah fields belov'd in vain,
Where once my careless childhood stray'd,
A stranger yet to pain!
I feel the gales, that from ye blow,
A momentary bliss bestow,
As waving fresh their gladsome wing,
My weary soul they seem to sooth,
And, redolent of joy and youth,
To breathe a second spring.

(1–20)

It would clearly be absurd to insist that the second of the opening vocatives ("ye antique towers") is an apostrophe and that the first ("Ye distant spires") is not, on the grounds that there is an explicit pre-text from which the second of these turns which the initial utterance lacks. Or, equally, if one wished to take the two opening vocatives as a single address, as referring to a single site (although they are addressed to different phenomena and hence there is, strictly, a diversion of speech), it would seem

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[18] Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser appear to endorse such a wider definition of what constitutes a "pre-text," including the following parenthetical qualification as part of their definition of the figure: "the figure of apostrophe [...] is always coded as both invocation and turning away, and [...] necessarily interrupts a previous discourse (spoken or mute)" (1989, xvi).

similarly nonsensical to define the subsequent and more obviously separated vocatives to the "happy hills" and "pleasing shade" or (later on) to "Father Thames," with which the following stanzas begin, as apostrophes but not those with which the poem begins, again merely because the initial and obviously parallel vocatives lack the sort of pre-text that they provide for the subsequent vocatives. Plainly, the poem *as a whole* is not addressed to the "distant spires"; and just as the speaker turns to address different phenomena at the beginning of the second and third stanzas, it would seem sensible to see the initial utterance as a comparable act of spontaneous turning.

There is one final reason why I think it is worth holding on to a sense of such utterances as apostrophes. "Lyric poetry," as Barbara Hardy has observed, "thrives [...] on exclusions. It is more than usually opaque because it leaves out so much of the accustomed context and consequences of feeling that it can speak in a pure, lucid, and intense voice" (1977, 2). This is true, and evidently needs emphasising in view of Kneale's argument. Though I think that the lyric may also be seen as strangely *in*clusive, or, to put it another way, as, paradoxically, involving the silence and space that surrounds it. Is not one of the consequences of the non-inclusion of a particular interrupted discourse the *dilation* of that which is interrupted? Does not the utterance, in the absence of any *specific* prior orientation, appear to be (and gain power from appearing to be) a turning away from *everything*? Alternatively, in that this everything-else is, paradoxically, signified by nothingness, the utterance might represent the mysterious emergence of voice out of blankness, situating this emergence in a deeper source of self, so that the utterance is seen to arise not out of the already speaking self, but out of a silence *within* the self, or out of a silence in which the self stands before it stands in speech.

Supposing we accept that a poem may be an apostrophe without the inclusion of an explicit pre-text, this still leaves us with the question of what it might mean to "turn" in poetry, or what we referred to earlier as the issue of "orientation." Once again (though it is seldom acknowledged), there are competing claims; namely, are we to recognise – and define the figure according to – syntactic or contextual criteria?[19] Let us consider the respective claims.

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[19] Specific, comprehensive definitions of the figure are difficult not least because our notions of poetic apostrophe have in a sense two different points of origin – one in rhetoric or rhetorical theory, and one in the tradition of poetic usage itself, which are by no means incompatible, but which are not identical either, and which has resulted in a degree of (inevitable) uncertainty or vagueness in the figure's definition. Katie Wales puts the matter with exemplary, pragmatic accuracy as follows:

Customarily, and with good reason, apostrophe is identified as a vocative utterance. Yet there are problems with such a definition. On the one hand, it ignores the fact that it is obviously possible to have an apostrophe, contextually speaking, without the use of vocative forms (Thomas Hardy, for example, has a poem entitled "Apostrophe to an old Psalm Tune," which, though addressed to the psalm, as indicated by its use of second person pronouns, is devoid of vocative forms); furthermore, as J. Douglas Kneale observes: "[t]he vocative itself does not signal apostrophe so much as does the movement from the third-person [...] to the second person pronoun" (1990, 21). On the other hand, such a definition is troubled by the fact that the syntactic constitution of the vocative is less stable and more problematic than is routinely assumed. The problem is posed (or revealed) by the presence of complex dependent constructions. Whilst we might not have a problem where the modification is relatively simple, as, for instance, in the following examples –

> Ye flowery banks o'bonie Doon
>
>   ("Ye flowery banks," Burns)

> O thou who camest from above,
>
>   ("Hymn," Charles Wesley)

– manifestly there is a point at which the modification tilts the balance of the vocative's function away from more simply addressing towards a *characterisation* of that which is addressed or the speaker's attitude towards it.[20] Such attributive "thickening" may be seen, for example, in the opening lines of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn":

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apostrophe originated in the orator's turning aside from his immediate audience to address some other person, whether physically present or not. It then came to signify a vocative address to an absent, or dead person, or to an inanimate object or quality as if personified.

(1989, 32)

Thus, on the one hand, according to classical (that is, rhetorical) sources, it is defined as the *action* of "turning away," irrespective of the object of address or the syntactic type of the utterance. On the other hand, if we define the figure, as it were, descriptively, according to its conventional use in poetry, we would have to recognise a tendency to identify the figure with the vocative, as well as – to a lesser extent – with certain objects (the deceased, inanimate phenomena and so forth) and perhaps even with certain effects (such as emotion or formality). The distinction offered below between explicit and contextual apostrophe represents an attempt to recognise the validity of, as well as the differences between, the two accounts of the figure.

[20] Such distinctions are further complicated by the fact – even though it is less obviously or frequently the case nowadays – that names themselves may, of course, have an attributive character or origin.

> Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
> Thou foster-child of silence and slow time

or in one of Milton's sonnets to Cyriack Skinner:

> *Cyriack*, whose Grandsire on the Royal Bench
> Of Brittish *Themis*, with no mean applause
> Pronounc't and in his volumes taught our Lawes
> Which others at their Barr so often wrench [...].

In spite of the fact that the latter two examples have exactly the same syntactic structure as the former two (pronoun + adjectival premodification + genitive head noun – in the examples from Burns and Keats, noun or pronoun + postmodifying relative clause – in the examples from Wesley and Milton), we can see in the degree of vocative extension in the latter examples the beginning of what Michael R. G. Spiller has aptly referred to as a "grammatical ominousness." As Spiller explains:

> the poet may extend the apostrophe by attaching a dependent clause to a name [...]. This has the effect almost opposite from immediacy: the name is expanded in a kind of *pronominatio*, giving the apostrophized person an honorific, which suggests a ceremonial introduction upon a definite social occasion. The mimesis suggests that the addressee is *not* the main object of attention, since the information given in the dependent clause is designed to introduce him to others, who require it either to identify him or to praise him as he deserves.
> Further, a kind of grammatical ominousness [...] is created, because the dependent clause suspends the main statement [...] the reader, who is summoned by the dependent clause to stand by while the praise of the addressee is recited, then must expect some further social direction or placing of the apostrophized person.
>
> (1991, 484–5)

This attributive swelling or extension of the addressee's name (which, in spite of Hollander's burlesquing of such tendencies in Shelley's ode, may form part of and complicate, though need not subvert the utterance's ostensible orientation) is a common characteristic of prayer. As Thomas M. Greene has observed, writing of the Homeric hymn "To Hestia":

> This text is typical of the collection in which it appears, as it is of Greek religious practice generally, in following the name of the divinity addressed with her "attributes," conventional characteristics or associations or specifying accoutrements. Listing the attributes [...] was apparently a form of paying honour which also increased the substance, the specificity, the density and power of the god. Structurally, the attributes fill out the name of the figure apostrophized; they are properly considered part of the name, and they are frequently filled out with the periphrastic alternatives for it.

Evidently, then, the relationship between form and function is far from stable,[21] and renders problematic attempts to define the figure syntactically.[22]

If, however, a strictly syntactic definition of the figure is problematic, a more inclusive contextual approach, based on the use of second person discourse, would elide the obvious importance and apostrophic concentration of the vocative form. How, then, might we accommodate these competing claims? The following compromise suggests itself.

There is a sense in which one might distinguish between explicit apostrophe (vocative utterances, such as "O sylvan Wye," "O wild West Wind") and contextual apostrophe. Thus, the whole of Keats's "To a Nightingale," for example, would be an apostrophe, or what we might term "apostrophaic," in that the speaker is evidently "turned towards" and speaking *to* the nightingale, though there are counter-tendencies in the poem (such as observation or reflection) which are sufficiently felt to make the use of explicit apostrophe seem like a turn – in this case, a turning back to

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[21] Just as a vocative may be predominantly "attributive" in function, an attributive utterance might be said to have something akin to a "vocative" function. Presumably the following diversion of speech would, according to the precepts of classical rhetoric, be classified as an apostrophe, even though it is devoid of a formal vocative: "Your honour (addressing the judge), I waited at the altar for over an hour – (turning to the defendant) *for over an hour!* – (re-addressing the judge) and only then did I begin to notice the chorister's charms."

[22] The confusing similarity of apostrophe and exclamation may also, I suggest, be explained in terms of such an unstable correspondence between form and function. According to J. Douglas Kneale,

> [t]he difference between *aversio* and *exclamatio* [...] is that exclamation does not necessarily contain a turn or diversion from the original hearer; a text may be a consistent exclamation to a reader, and yet still not an apostrophe. By contrast, apostrophe always depends on a pre-text.
>
> (1990, 14)

Whilst it is certainly true that "apostrophe always depends on a pre-text" (though, as I have argued, this need not be explicitly included or textual in character), I would contend that the difference between the two figures is more a matter of orientation, that is to say, it is more a difference in turning *towards* than in turning away. For, if it is true that "a text may be a consistent exclamation to a reader, and yet still not an apostrophe," it is, I think, also true that an utterance may be a diversion of speech without being an address. Most blasphemy is of this sort, in that it frequently names but lacks apostrophe's vocative (that is, "calling") function. The following example may illustrate the point:

> Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
> The river glideth at his own sweet will:
> Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
> And all that mighty heart is lying still!
> ("Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802," 11–14)

I think that the utterance "Dear God!" is more of an exclamation than an apostrophe (and, problematically, it will, it seems, always be a matter of degree) in that although the naming might be described as a diversion, it appears not to involve a *turning towards* or to represent an *address* of that which is named. An exclamation might therefore be defined as a turning away without turning towards, or a naming that is not an address.

the form of the poem as address, as well as to the immediately preceding mode. Hence, though the poem as a whole may represent an act of turning away and address, it may nonetheless incorporate apparently divergent modes, and sustain (perhaps residually) its apostrophaic mode, even though locally something else is going on. Metre provides a useful parallel. Almost all metres – like keys in music – tolerate or "flirt" with other recognisable patterns or cadences but remain an instance of the basic metre. What matters is whether the declared metre is overthrown or not (which, of course, it can be). Thus, if we have persistent feminine endings, for example, as we do in James Shirley, the seventeenth-century dramatist, then one more or less begins to lose the sense that it is blank verse at all, although it purports to be. Similarly, if the second foot of a line is twice not that of the declared metre, then the declared metre is overthrown. We might therefore postulate similar rules (which would obviously be less numerical but nevertheless comparable) as to when an apostrophaic mode, which can tolerate apparent divergences, is overthrown. Thus one might say that the Nightingale Ode is apostrophaic, but that it almost overthrows (or arguably *does* overthrow) its basic mode, which can be seen, paradoxically, by the re-assertion of its basic apostrophaic character by explicit apostrophes, which suggest or testify to the overthrow. Indeed, we might say that the Nightingale Ode is about, and exists as, a tension between sustaining or surrendering an apostrophaic mode.

One other general definitional issue remains to be considered. This concerns what, if anything, apostrophe represents. Does it always represent a speech act? If so, are there different *sorts* of speech act it may represent? If not, what might it represent *other* than a speech act? These questions are taken up in the following section.

"Silence which is Communication"[23]

It is customarily assumed that if apostrophe is representational, then it must represent some sort of speech act; moreover, it is usually assumed that this must be an *externally audible* speech act. Here,

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[23] The quotation is taken from Buber: 1969, 3.

for example, is what Paul de Man has to say about the figure in his discussion of Baudelaire's "Obsession," in his influential essay "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric":

> Everything [in the poem] can be substituted for everything else without distorting the most natural experience. Except, of course, for the "vous" of address in the apostrophe "Grands bois," which is, of course, absurd from a representational point of view; we are all frightened by windy woods but do not generally make a spectacle of ourselves talking to trees.
>
> (1984, 255)

De Man's witty disparagement of a representational reading of the trope involves first of all assuming that it has to represent an externally audible utterance. Yet it needs to be asked, *must* this be the case? *Do* all apostrophes purport to represent externally audible utterances, or even explicitly *verbal* acts? Are there not *non-verbal* modes of confrontation which apostrophe might represent? A simple comparison should illustrate the point.

If we consider the apostrophes spoken by Marianne Dashwood in the following extract, it seems clear that they are meant to make us laugh or blush on her behalf, and that we are meant to imagine them as actually spoken:

> "Dear, dear Norland!" said Marianne, as she wandered alone before the house, on the last evening of their being there; "when shall I cease to regret you! – when learn to feel a home elsewhere! – Oh! happy house, could you know what I suffer in now viewing you from this spot, from whence perhaps I may view you no more! – And you, ye well-known trees! – but you will continue the same [...]."
>
> (1960, 27)

If, however, we look at a lyrical equivalent, taken at random, from *In Memoriam*, in which a lone and emotional speaker similarly apostrophises a tree, we can see that the difference – which is perfectly clear in the extract from *Sense and Sensibility* – between experiencing and reflecting or narrating perspectives is collapsed in the lyrical mode, so that it is hard to say what, if anything, we are meant to understand as spoken, either audibly or interiorly, and what is authorial scene-setting or narration:

> Old Yew, which graspest at the stones
> That name the under-lying dead,
> Thy fibres net the dreamless head,
> Thy roots are wrapt about the bones.

> The seasons bring the flower again,
> And bring the firstling to the flock;
> And in the dusk of thee, the clock
> Beats out the little lives of men.
>
> O, not for thee the glow, the bloom,
> Who changest not in any gale,
> Nor branding summer suns avail
> To touch thy thousand years of gloom:
>
> And gazing on thee, sullen tree,
> Sick for thy stubborn hardihood,
> I seem to fail from out my blood
> And grow incorporate into thee.

(2)

The voice that utters the explicit apostrophes ("Old Yew" and "sullen tree") is hard to distinguish from the voice that describes the setting and what occurs, which – *pace* Paul de Man – I presume we are not supposed to imagine as actually spoken. Might not the apostrophes therefore be a *verbal representation* of an act of confrontation which did not itself consist in words? Certain apostrophes, it seems to me, represent or consist in interior orientations of self, which may, of course, be articulated or brought about by language, but which may also, I think, occur *without* language. It might help to clarify what I mean if we consider T. S. Eliot's well-known categorisations of voice.

In his essay "The Three Voices of Poetry," Eliot distinguishes between "the voice of the poet talking to himself – or nobody [...] the voice of the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small" and "the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse; when he is saying, not what he would say in his own person, but only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character" (1979, 89). There might, however, I suggest, be a voice of poetry which precedes or lies beneath Eliot's first voice, or, more precisely, a level or mode of being on which poetry *bestows* a voice, and which is rendered, though it did not consist, in words. This level of self or mode of being, beyond or beneath the speaking self, might be described from the outside – "he sat, rapt, beneath the plum tree listening to the nightingale" – or which, alternatively, may be represented from the inside by a voice or apostrophe, which was not actually spoken. The poetic apostrophe may represent, that is, a confrontation which distends the self

into silence, or more exactly, which in its integration of self, silences the individual *parts* of self. Martin Buber describes such a mode of meeting and communication:

> For conversation no sound is necessary, not even a gesture. Speech can renounce all media of sense, and it is still speech. [...] Unreservedly communication streams from him, and the silence bears it to his neighbour. Indeed it was intended for him, and he receives it unreservedly as he receives all genuine destiny that meets him. He will be able to tell no one, not even himself, what he has experienced. What does he now "know" of the other? No more knowing is needed. For where unreserve has ruled, even wordlessly, between men, the world of dialogue has happened sacramentally. [...] Human dialogue, therefore, although it has its distinctive life in the sign, that is in sound and gesture [...], can exist without the sign [...].
>
> (1969, 3–4)

We find an example and retrospective verbalisation of such a moment of silent communion in Augustine's *Confessions*:

> But what is my God? I put my question to the earth. It answered, "I am not God", and all things on earth declared the same. I asked the sea and the chasms of the deep and the living things that creep in them, but they answered, "We are not your God. Seek what is above us." [...] I asked the sky, the sun, the moon, and the stars, but they told me, "Neither are we the God whom you seek." I spoke to all the things that are about me, all that can be admitted by the door of the senses, and I said, "Since you are not my God, tell me about him. Tell me something of my God." Clear and loud they answered, "God is he who made us." I asked these questions simply by gazing at these things, and their beauty was all the answer they gave.
>
> (X, 6)[24]

I do not, of course, mean to suggest that *all* apostrophes are of this sort – the apostrophe in poetry may, obviously, represent an audible exclamation, or, equally, it might represent an internal utterance, which the reader "overhears"; nevertheless, I *do* wish to make the point that in some cases the experience which the apostrophe represents no more consists in words than the painter's experience consists in paint.

In most cases, to be sure, the differences are not so neat or clear: words continually emerge from and give way to other inaudible areas or orientations of self in ways that are infinitely interesting and slippery. Lyric or apostrophic poetry is in this sense both stranger and more realistic than is sometimes thought. The first person lyricist is in one sense obliged to incorporate elements of

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[24] Prayer, to be sure, has never been a purely vocal or verbal matter – according to the Old Testament, as J. C. L. Gibson points out, the Hebrews thought with their hearts and not with their heads (1998, 8); and as Ambrosius Verheul observes, "we can even say that the gesture is itself a prayer. For man can speak to God in gesture and attitude of body, as well as in words: both, word as well as gesture, can be an act of prayer. If my genuflection is an act of adoration of the majesty of God, if it is really an expression of an inward state, then I am praying with my genuflection just as well as if I muttered with my lips, "My Lord and my God" (1972, 129). Furthermore, prayer may even occur without our being conscious of doing so (the Ancient Mariner, it will be recalled, blesses the sea-snakes "unaware").

narrative into his utterance, for the benefit of the reader, which might be extraneous to the event as such – if it was not for such scene-setting narration, which merges with elements of explicit address, as we saw in Tennyson's "Old Yew" stanzas, many of these utterances would be poetic variations upon Beckett's "Breath." In another sense, however, the non-differentiation of verbal and non-verbal modes might be seen as an element of realism. As we noted a moment ago, the differences between authorial and first person perspectives are radically elided in the "Old Yew" lyric. One might dismiss this or be satisfied with saying that it is a literary convention (which, of course, it is). However, if we do so, we are, I think, missing part of what makes the mode so interesting. Such poetry blurs the point at which language emerges from and gives way to a mysterious blankness or interior space, which we inhabit and at the same time remain outside of; which is to say that in leaving unclear the relationship between authorial (narrating) and first person (experiencing) perspectives, and, hence, the relationship between the event and its articulation, such poetry represents what is *in fact* unclear.

III

Dead Letters and Disingenuous Addresses

Having examined a number of preliminary methodological and definitional issues, we now turn to the claims themselves made by Culler and others about apostrophe. In section one, we identified three major reasons why the figure is supposed to be embarrassing; these were: (1) because it is a non-representational literary extravagance; (2) because it implies things about the world that we do not believe; and (3) because it is so blatantly disingenuous, in not being able or even trying to do what it purports to do, namely, address. For reasons of practicality, we shall deal with these in reverse order. The present section, which consists of three parts, will consider the figure's alleged disingenuousness or inability to address, and the following section, "Untenanting Creation of Its God," will examine the two preceding claims. The subdivisions of the present section separate off progressively more radical versions of the same basic claim, and it is to the first of these that we now turn.

"Souls, Skylarks and Sofas":[25] Addressing that which is Unable to Hear

In his brief account of apostrophe in *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, tellingly entitled "The extravagance of lyric," Jonathan Culler makes the following observations:

> Not only do lyric poems seem willing to address almost anything in preference to an actual audience (the wind, a tiger, my soul); they do so in hyperbolic accents. Exaggeration is the name of the game here [...].
>
> We touch here on a major theoretical issue, a paradox that seems to lie at the core of lyric poetry. The extravagance of poetry includes its aspiration to what theorists since classical times have called the "sublime": a relation to what exceeds human capabilities of understanding, provokes awe or passionate intensity, gives the speaker a sense of something beyond the human. But this transcendent aspiration is linked to rhetorical figures such as *apostrophe*, the trope of addressing what is not an actual listener, *personification*, the attribution of human qualities to what is not human, and *prosopopoeia*, the granting of speech to inanimate objects. How can the highest aspirations of verse be linked to such rhetorical devices?
>
> (1997, 73)

Leaving aside for the moment the subtle but critical attenuation involved in Culler's definition – "*apostrophe*, the trope of addressing what is not an actual listener," I wish to consider what is implied or assumed about the act of apostrophe in such comments. The obvious implication of the claim that apostrophe is the act of "addressing what is not an actual listener" is that apostrophe is not a *real* address. This point is repeatedly underlined by Culler: speakers of apostrophe, we noted earlier, are described as "getting carried away and waxing poetical, extravagantly posturing," so that Culler can conclude shortly afterwards that "apostrophe [...] is what is most blatantly, most embarrassingly 'poetical,' most mystificatory and vulnerable to dismissal as hyperbolic nonsense" (1997, 74). In spite of the confidence of Culler's assertions, as well as their apparent common-sense, I would like to ask the seemingly unpromising question: Can one really address that which is empirically unable to hear? I am not sure that the matter is as simple or trivial as Culler seems to assume.

If one considers the question, as Culler does, of whether such addresses are real addresses from the point of view of the addressee, the answer would appear to be "obviously not." What, for example, does the West Wind know of Shelley's invocation or the "sylvan Wye" of Wordsworth's

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[25] The quotation is taken from Culler: 1980, x.

apostrophe? There are, however, *other* points of view which are at least as, if not more, important when deciding what constitutes a "real" address. To clarify: we might ask, for example, does our address in other situations cease to be a real address because the person we are talking to is preoccupied, out of earshot or unable to speak our language? Conversely, does saying the name of someone we do not know, or believe to be absent, suddenly become an address if they happen to be present and overhear it? The SOS call of the poor proverbially drowning man does not become unreal just because no one is around to hear it. Furthermore, if, as critics such as Priestley and Ruskin (most famously) have argued, the use of anthropomorphic figures involves a state of "temporary deception" which makes us "for the time, more or less irrational" (Ruskin: 1898, vol. 3, 164), it might also be argued that it is not exactly *known* that our utterance will not be heard, or that it is in fact *irrelevant* what the speaker might ordinarily or common-sensically think. Indeed, it is precisely the nature of the "deception" that the speaker temporarily takes that which is inanimate, absent or non-receptive for that which is animate, present and receptive. Manifestly, then, the authenticity of an address does not depend merely upon the addressee's awareness of being addressed.[26] Poetic apostrophes might (in certain cases), like Hopkins's "cries countless," be dead letters, but they are nonetheless *sent*. Derrida appears to make a similar point, speaking of Paul Celan:

> The poem speaks, even should none of its references be intelligible, none other than the Other, the one to whom it addresses itself and to whom it speaks in saying that it speaks to him. Even if it does not reach and leave its mark, at least it calls to, the Other. Address takes place.
>
> (1994, 60–1)

There is another, more serious problem with Culler's account, which concerns his contention that the apostrophe is "the trope of addressing what is not an actual listener." The problem is that it is obviously not true. It is not true of classical rhetoric, neither is it true of poetry. Even if for the moment we leave aside all of the inanimate objects, natural phenomena and non-human creatures that poetry addresses, what about apostrophes uttered to those that are living and likely or supposed to read them? This is hardly a negligible category. There is, however, an even larger exclusion, which runs

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[26] Indeed, one might even argue that the sense that one will *not* be heard may, peculiarly, liberate or generate *real* address. Do we not, in fact, call the more when we feel we cannot be heard? To adapt the lines in Gray's sonnet admired by Wordsworth, surely we call the more because we feel we call in vain. This is certainly the case in a number of the Psalms. In *The Message of the Psalms*, Walter Brueggemann writes of Psalm 88: "The

throughout Culler's writing on the figure. It is an exclusion that is so consistent that it is hard to see as negligence or indifference. That which is excluded is, of course, any reference to utterances directed towards God. And yet, as Valentine Cunningham points out, "apostrophe is, of course, the fundamental trope of prayer" (1994, 392).

The exclusion once again seriously restricts the significance of Culler's claims. All of the poems that contain or consist of apostrophes to God are simply and silently written out of Culler's view of literary history. Their existence is not a matter of faith. It might, of course, be argued that such utterances fall under the category of addressing that which is not "an actual listener" – and this, it seems likely, is Jonathan Culler's position. Yet surely this is more than a little presumptuous? Not only does it assume the (God-like) ability categorically to say whether or not God exists, it involves retrospectively decreeing what *others* believed on the basis of one's own beliefs. Faith is not only a rational possibility, it is also an historical *fact*. Just because Jonathan Culler does not believe in God does not mean that no one can nor ever has. Likewise, all of the apostrophes that have been and continue to be uttered in faith to God do not suddenly cease to be authentic because Jonathan Culler does not believe in them.

Whether or not we believe in or pray to God (and, interestingly, more people claim to pray than to believe in God[27]), the act of prayer further problematises attempts to define the authenticity of an address according to the addressee's knowledge of our address, or, to be more precise, according to our knowledge of the addressee's knowledge of our address. The fact is that our knowledge of the addressee, and of their awareness of being addressed is not always complete and is in some cases profoundly inconclusive. Which is to say that we do not always *know* whether or not our address has been heard. In certain situations, and paradigmatically in prayer, the receptivity, nature and even the existence of the addressee is profoundly uncertain and beyond verification, without this rendering the utterance inauthentic.

Plainly, then, for various reasons, the authenticity of an address does not depend upon its "success" as a communicative act; partly because it is not always *possible* to establish whether or not

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failure of God to respond does not lead to atheism or doubt in God or rejection of God. It leads to more intense address." (1984, 79).
[27] See Berger: 1969, 24.

our address has been heard, and partly because it is sometimes *irrelevant* or because we do not *consider* whether or not our address will be heard. In any case, whether it is because of the insufficiency or provisionality of what we know, whether it is because we forget or *ignore* what we know, or whether it is because we do not always trust, or are *more* than, what we "know," the problems with the claim that apostrophes in poetry cannot be *real* addresses because the addressee is not "an actual listener" should be apparent. Let us now turn to a more radical version of the claim that apostrophe in poetry is an address that cannot address.

The Limitations of the Figurative

Poststructuralist criticism, if one can generalise, has tended to emphasise the figural as opposed to, and frequently at the expense of, the literal character of poetic utterances, and has brought into question literature's ability (or desire) to refer to anything outside of or other than itself. As we noted earlier, Jonathan Culler endorses an extreme form of this argument in his reading of apostrophe. Let us remind ourselves of the reasons offered by Culler why apostrophe in poetry does not really or literally address what it purports to address. Culler puts forward three basic criticisms of "the I-Thou model."[28] The first concerns the presence of, and surreptitious orientation towards, a third-party audience (1981, 141–2). The second criticism concerns the allegedly fictitious alterity of the other: "Either it [apostrophe] parcels out the self to fill the world, peopling the universe with fragments of the self [...] or else it internalizes what might have been thought external" (1981, 146). In either case, in Culler's view, the "other" that the speaker is addressing is in fact himself. The third critique of the I-Thou model is a metapoetic variation of the previous two, according to which that which is addressed is the poem or apostrophe itself:

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[28] On account of the complexity of the issue, consideration of Culler's criticism of the claim that in addressing any particular Thou we are also addressing the "eternal Thou" will be deferred until the following chapter.

Other poems, instead of posing questions about the efficacy of the apostrophic act, parody their own procedures. Baudelaire's "Le Cygné," which begins with the apostrophe "Andromâque, je pense à vous," tells of a swan who, nostalgically seeking his "beau lac natal" in a "ruisseau sans eau," supplies an "O" apostrophizing nature: "Eau, quand donc pleuvras-tu? quand tonneras-tu, foudre?" [...] The coincidence of "*O*" and *Eau* can be variously interpreted: the nostalgic quest for a moment or place of origin, the "eau" of a "beau lac natal," yields only an "O" of a trope; or the pun identifies the potential addressee of every apostrophe as the apostrophic "O" itself and makes every apostrophe an invocation of invocation. However one develops the implications of the pun, the result is the foregrounding of apostrophe as trope: a verbal equivalent of the Cygne's ineffective writhing ("Sur son cou convulsif tendant sa tête avide"). In so far as the swan is identified with an apostrophizing poet,

> Je pense à mon grand cygne, avec ses gestes fous,
> Comme les exilés, ridicule et sublime,
> Et rongé d'un désir sans trêve.
>
> [...]

the poem offers a critique of the apostrophic gesture, which is *ridicule* as well as *sublime*: when it seeks something other than itself (*eau*), it finds only itself (*O*), which may also be nothing (O). In these terms, the opening apostrophe, "Andromâque, je pense à vous," which seeks nothing but merely accomplishes what it states, is a demystified apostrophe.[29]

(1981, 144)

In apostrophising, then, according to Culler, the poet is either or at once talking to his own utterance, to himself or a fictitious projection of self, or else he is covertly talking to those that "overhear" the address. In any case, the (widely reiterated) claim is that apostrophe in poetry does not *really* address

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[29] This third metapoetic reading of apostrophe is advocated, though importantly qualified, by John Hollander in his discussion of poetic imperatives and invocations, in which he argues:

> The commands to the muses to "sing" the Iliad and the Odyssey which start each of these poems are tropes of commands to the poems themselves to start up, to the singer to start singing.
> [...] poetic invocations [...] represent clear instances of poetry's discourse with itself in that they talk not to an audience or an active agent which might respond to the imperatives by clearly observable action. To this degree, they partake of prayer.
>
> (1988, 66; 78)

Having focused (almost exclusively) upon the metaopetic character of poetic invocations, however, Hollander insists upon, and closes the chapter with, the following emphatic qualification:

> If in these discussions of grammar I have appeared to suggest that poems talk only to themselves and never to readers or, in another sense, "to" nature or "to" issues, it is only because I have been concerned with what is most genuinely poetical about them. But I hope it has also been clear that some of these features of poetry's discourse with itself have not been merely solipsistic, self-absorbed, or even narcissistic, but rather, parabolic. That is, these stories about being able to bring things about, these fictions of presence, these nonquestions and oblique answers, have all had morals which lie deep in our own experience. The notion that poetry is only about itself is as appalling to me as the notion that poetry is directly "about" life – that it is a kind of emotional journalism, trivially true to a kind of natural history of feelings. In their misunderstanding of true poetry, the journalist and the totalitarian sceptic, who affirms that nothing is about anything, deserve each other's company in a no-exit hell. Meanwhile, poetry, which has itself invented the punishments of such a hell, will go on talking to and with itself, about everything else, and the highest human attention will continue to overhear and learn.
>
> (1988, 84)

what it appears to address. As J. L. Austin observed a number of years ago, poetry "like some other frivolous uses of language, cannot ever be a 'serious' way of doing things with words;" a soliloquy, he points out, "will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void" (1975, 22). The same, it seems, is true of apostrophes in poetry, which are similarly staged, short-circuited or diverted away from their ostensible addressee. To think that such addresses are real would be a mistake akin to trying to eat one of Cézanne's grapes.

Or would it? I wish to suggest that there are at least two types of apostrophe (or circumstances) which might in some sense lie outside of and trouble such readings, in that they may be considered to be "real" or *literal* acts of address, and which it would certainly be reductive, if not falsifying, to describe as merely figurative.

Before looking at these, however, it is important to emphasise that "literal" and "figurative" or self-reflexive readings of the figure are, obviously, not mutually exclusive, neither does a zero-sum relationship obtain, according to which one aspect would only occur at the expense of another. As John Hollander points out:

> The notion that self-reflexiveness operates in despite of representation is widespread. Poetry that is "of" (about, representative of, devoted to) itself cannot be about something else, whether called "reality," "the world," "life," or whatever. A recently departed academic fad disseminated the reciprocal folly of denying that there could exist Schlegel's elliptically named "poetry," but only "the poetry of poetry." The mirror of nature, in this view, can only reflect itself. Modern poetry, at least that from the 1580s on, has had to contend with both of these modes of blindness. In the way it turns "descriptions" [...] of itself into allegories about what lies beyond it, it rejects the cloven fiction of what Harold Bloom has recently called "facticity" – the blindness to trope – the deconstructive unsight – blindness to reference.
>   Poetry is neither a transparent window nor a pair of mirrors facing each other in an empty room.
>
> (1988, 13)

What are the circumstances or types of apostrophe in which an element of real or literal address may be involved or even predominate? The first of these has been obscured by the failure of recent discussions of the figure to consider the issue of narrative perspective. A question which needs to asked is whether an apostrophe represents a first person consonant or first person dissonant utterance; in other words, are the utterance and the poem coterminous or is the poem a representation of an *anterior* utterance? The tendency to overlook such questions, and hence to elide possible

(temporal) differences between story and discourse perspectives, leads to a silent displacement or distortion of the latter type of utterance. This elision may in turn be seen as illegitimately encouraging a figurative reading, in viewing certain poetic features as belonging to that which is represented rather than the mode of representation. The second type of apostrophic utterance that is routinely ignored by most recent writing on the figure is, as we have already noted, prayer. In what sense, then, might prayer and first person dissonant apostrophes be said to exceed their figurative character? Let us deal with the latter first.

There is in a first person dissonant utterance a difference – or temporal distance – between the levels of story and discourse; that is, between "what occurred" and the narration or representation of what occurred. For example, when Wordsworth in the "Glad Preamble," with which *The Prelude* begins, apostrophises the wind –

> Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze
> That blows from the green fields and from the clouds
> And from the sky: it beats against my cheek,
> And seems half conscious of the joy it gives.
> O welcome Messenger! O welcome Friend!
> A captive greets thee, coming from a house
> Of bondage, from yon City's walls set free,
> A prison where he hath been long immured
>
> (I, 1–8)

– we can identify the utterance as first person dissonant as a result of the subsequent comment (which is itself a first person consonant apostrophe to Coleridge) which differentiates between, by temporally separating, the moment of narration and that which is narrated:

> Thus far, O friend! did I, not used to make
> A present joy the matter of my song,
> Pour out that day my soul in measured strains,
> Even in the very words which I have here
> Recorded. To the open fields I told
> A prophesy; poetic numbers came
> Spontaneously, and clothed in priestly robe
> My spirit, thus singled out, as it might seem,
> For holy services.
>
> (I, 55–63)

In a first person consonant utterance, by contrast, there is no such temporal dissociation, and the speaker is presented as describing things as they occur, so that the moment of "experience" or story is coterminous with the moment of narration or discourse. Here, for example, is Wordsworth's apostrophe to his sister in "Tintern Abbey," in which we find a synchronisation of narrating and experiencing perspectives:

> Nor perchance,
> If I were not thus taught, should I the more
> Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
> For thou art with me here upon the banks
> Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,
> My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch
> The language of my former heart, and read
> My former pleasures in the shooting lights
> Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
> May I behold in thee what I was once,
> My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,
> Knowing that Nature never did betray
> The heart that loved her [...]
>
> (111–23)

These categories might, of course, be combined or collapsed, and are not always clearly signalled; however, what is important for the moment is the simple fact that (even lyric) poetry, like prose, permits and may or may not draw attention to a differentiation between experiencing and narrating perspectives. What bearing does this fact have upon our discussion of the figurative and literal character of apostrophe?

First, and most obviously, if the act of apostrophe is differentiated from the moment of narration or representation, which is the point at which – in becoming an art work – the audience or "third term" comes into play, then such apostrophes would seem to lie outside of the scope of Culler's first criticism. Whilst it might, in response, be argued that even in the "anterior" act, the speaker may have been aware that the utterance was to become a poem, and hence may have had a sense of a "future" audience, this need not necessarily be the case. Though Culler seems loath to acknowledge the fact, sometimes people simply *do* things, however "irrational," without *planning* to do so or "doing" so in front of and *because* there is an audience. It is therefore obviously possible to argue that the sense of an audience or the "third term" that Culler claims undermines an I-Thou reading of

apostrophe in poetry pertains to the level of discourse rather than that of story, and hence that his criticism (once again) only applies to *some* apostrophes. How does the distinction between dissonant and consonant utterances relate to Culler's other criticisms of I-Thou readings?

Culler, it will be recalled, brought into question the status of the addressee as an independent or external entity, and argued that apostrophes addressed to inanimate or insentient objects were fictional – as opposed to literal acts of address – because what they requested was (he alleged) empirically impossible. The distinction between consonant and dissonant apostrophes, however, once again reveals limitations in the scope of Culler's criticism. This is because the dissociation of experiencing and narrating perspectives in first person dissonant apostrophes resuscitates or brings back into view the possibility of seeing such apostrophes as "the spontaneous impulse of a powerfully moved soul," to use Fontanier's definition, which in turn raises questions about the relevance or applicability of Culler's criticism. Most obviously, whilst (as we shall see in the following chapter) not only the nature of what is requested but also its "impossibility" may be contested, even if we were for argument's sake to concede that what such apostrophes request is impossible, it is, as we saw in the previous section, drawing on the writing of Ruskin and others, possible to question the *relevance* of considerations of "rational awareness." That is to say, who, before spontaneously crying out, first of all asks themselves whether or not their doing so accords with the dictates of reason? or whether that to which they cry is capable of being a subject, from a certain empirical point of view? As Ruskin, Lord Kames and others have argued, the act of anthropomorphic apostrophe is accompanied, if not brought about by, the *loss* of precisely such awareness. With respect, then, to Culler's second criticism, we may say: that something is (allegedly) impossible or irrational is obviously not a bar to its being attempted or done, and, moreover, it is as an argument which is supposed to prove the fictionality of an act of address severely weakened if some of these acts characteristically entail the disabling of the faculties that adjudicate such matters.

Let us turn now to the second type of apostrophe that is not fully accounted for in being described as figurative. As we noted in the preceding section, the most obvious and serious exclusion from Culler's account is any consideration of the act of prayer. Nowhere in his writing on the figure are the innumerable apostrophes which are prayers in poetry alluded to. Nowhere are the affinities

between apostrophe and prayer, as such, acknowledged. Yet, as Derrida has recently emphasised, the act of apostrophe is, quintessentially, an act of prayer:

> In every prayer there must be an address to the other as other; *for example* – I will say, at the risk of shocking – *God*. The act of addressing oneself to the other as other must, of course, mean praying, that is, asking, supplicating, searching out. No matter what, for the pure prayer demands only that the other hear it, receive it, be present to it, be the other as such, a gift, call, and even cause of prayer.
>
> (1989, 41)

Why, then, does Culler exclude an area of such obvious importance to the subject of apostrophe? We can, of course, only speculate, but one reason would appear to be because it troubles his argument in so many ways. One obvious contention for which it poses problems is, as John Hollander acknowledges, if somewhat grudgingly, the claim that apostrophes in poetry are merely figurative. Writing on the subject of invocations and imperatives, Hollander includes the following footnote:

> The extravagance, or hyperbolic tone, of imperatives becomes interestingly problematic in the case of, say, Donne's "Batter my heart, three-personed God," even as it goes on to try to be reasonable about why battering is in order. Prayer – poetic or institutionally liturgical – always poses problems of the figurative and the literal, and a theology may or may not specify how literal or figurative any predication of God may be, let alone questions of the deity's identity. Imperatives in devotional poetry seem less rhetorically complex than questions do. But they may engage deeper matters of belief, in the speakers' insistence on the literalness of what an unbeliever would call figurative.
>
> (1988, 244)

In what ways, then, do apostrophes which are prayers in poetry lie outside of and challenge Culler's argument with respect to their figurative character and criticism of I-Thou readings of the figure? His criticisms were, to remind ourselves: (1) that apostrophes in poetry are fictional because impossible, and (2) that their ostensible orientation towards the other is subverted by the presence of an audience or "third term." To deal with what is perhaps the most straightforward first. Whilst, as Hollander noted, to an unbeliever, prayer may be considered to be figurative and "impossible," needless to say, to a believer, it is possible and may therefore be literal. After all, who can delimit the ecstatic reach of prayer? Who can draw a restrictive circle around the "invasion of all the atmosphere which surrounds a being by that being's interior state" (Ong: 1972, 500) which is the act of addressing

the other? The undelimitable hopeful reach of prayer is nicely described in John Updike's novel *The Centaur*:

> I hurried and, having told Penny to pray, prayed *Let him live, let him live, do not let my father be sick*. The prayer was addressed to all who would listen; in concentric circles it widened, first, into the town, and, beyond, into the hemisphere of sky, and, beyond that, into what was beyond.
>
> (1963, 124)

If God, as most religions teach, can hear our silent prayers, there is clearly no reason why one might not pray – hoping that it will be heard – in poetry. And though we may not be able to say with any certainty of any particular instance that it is a genuine or literal act of prayer, *neither can we rule it out*.

It is, furthermore, worth noting that although the poet's communicative situation with respect to his or her addressee may differ from most everyday (non-poetic) communicative situations, it closely resembles in a number of ways the communicative situation that obtains in prayer; that is, in both situations, the speaker is in some sense separated from, yet attempting to talk across this separation to, an other. The differences between praying in poetry and praying in other contexts would therefore appear to be less significant and hence less "troublesome" or intrusive than the differences between other sorts of speaking in poetic and non-poetic contexts, thereby lessening, if not dispersing, the sense of moving from a literal to a figurative mode.

Culler's other criticism is more pertinent, and requires more detailed consideration. As we have seen, according to Culler, the involvement of a third-party audience subverts the utterance's ostensible I-Thou structure by introducing a covert alternative orientation away from the utterance's nominal addressee. The involvement of a third-party audience cannot be side-stepped as it could be in the case of first person dissonant apostrophes. The question can, however, be asked: *Does* the awareness of a "third term" necessarily subvert or diffuse I-Thou relation? More than one answer seems possible. Culler's view of the matter, as put forward in his essay "Apostrophe" and summarised above, is not only persuasive in its own terms, but would also appear to correspond to what Buber says about I-Thou relation. Yet is the speaker's situation and their awareness of a third-party audience exactly as Culler describes it? It will be recalled that Culler puts forward a "prosaic example" to "assist

reflection," and asks us to imagine a man standing in the rain cursing buses, who then continues to do so when other travellers join him. Certainly, it would seem true to say in this situation that the man's apostrophes "work less to establish an *I-Thou* relation between him and the absent bus than to dramatize or constitute an image of self." But is the act of poetic speaking like this? Is our sense of speaking in front of others in poetry the same as our sense of speaking in front of others at a bus-stop? I think not. As we noted earlier, the poetic speaker's separation in time and space from the utterance's third-party audience renders this audience far less substantial than Culler's bus-stop audience; indeed, whereas the bus-curser's audience is physically present and potentially responsive (a factor which for Culler is ordinarily crucial), the poetic speaker's audience is – at the moment of writing – only hypothetical. To this it should be added that, if the act of composition is anything like that described by Wordsworth in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, the poet's "ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which [...] resemble the passions produced by real events," and to contemplate recollected emotion "till [...] the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does actually exist in the mind" (*LB*, 165; 173) would presumably take the poet further away from and diminish the sense of his or her hypothetical audience, which is, I presume, in any case easier to forget about than the group of people with whom one might be waiting at a bus-stop. Thus, whilst it might be true that Culler's argument appears to concur with what Buber says about I-Thou relation (though Culler notably passes over the bus-curser's bus-cursing *prior* to the arrival of the other travellers), the situation about which he is talking is not interchangeable without loss or remainder with the situation that pertains in poetry. In this sense, Culler's criticism fails decisively to undermine the plausibility of an I-Thou reading of first person consonant apostrophes also. Furthermore, even if it could be shown that a poetic speaker was wholly aware of his or her audience in the act of apostrophising, even to the degree that Culler's curser of buses is aware of his, by no means everyone would agree with Buber that such awareness necessarily subverts the moment of I-Thou relation. Most notably, liturgical religious practice, as we shall see, simply and categorically opposes Buber on this point, suggesting that communal prayer is not only unperturbed by such "horizontal" relations but is in fact the highest and most "proper" form of prayer.

To conclude this section, we need to ask: how generalisable are our findings respecting the act of prayer? It is the general contention of this thesis that the act of apostrophe is, in essence, an act of prayer. That is to say, with Derrida, insofar as a speaker is "asking, supplicating, searching out" the other with "out-stretch'd voice"[30] in apostrophe, he or she is praying.[31] This is *not* to say that *all* apostrophes are of this sort. As Culler shows, a significant number of apostrophes in poetry do *not* appear to be addressing the other in this manner, but are rather *parodying* such procedures, or else employing them as a cover for other purposes. Indeed, what Culler says about the figure is undoubtedly true *about a certain type of apostrophe*. Of course, one may address the other without actually or literally doing so, or in order to "constitute an image of self." Yet, as this section has attempted to show, this is not always or necessarily the case, and the range of such criticism is drastically limited in failing to take account of significant differences between apostrophes and certain sorts of usage that appear to lie beyond its scope.

Unsaying Our Prayers

In "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," Jacques Derrida raises certain crucial questions about the act of prayer and apostrophe, which appear to pose an even greater challenge to our thesis than those we have looked at so far. These concern, briefly, the very possibility of apostrophe or "the pure address of the prayer to the other," as Derrida puts it (1989, 42), and its ability to outwit the contagion of predication, which would then be subject to *différance* and deconstruction.

The questions asked by Derrida at the end of his argument, which represents his most extensive statement on negative theology to date, are paralleled by a set of questions asked almost two thousand years ago by St Augustine at the start of his *Confessions*. It may even be argued that the fourth-century bishop arrived at a similar dilemma, or aporia, as we are now wont to call it, that

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[30] Aphra Behn, "A Paraphrase on Ovid's Epistle of Œnone to Paris" (1967, vol. 6, 220).
[31] We shall examine the obvious differences, passed over here, between addressing particular finite phenomena and addressing God explicitly, in the following chapter.

Derrida presents us with by way of conclusion. Augustine, however, responded in a different way to this dilemma, and in doing so, I wish to argue, mapped out an alternative non-nihilistic response to the deconstructive conclusions put forward by Derrida. What exactly are these questions or conclusions, and what are the two writers' differing responses? Let us begin with Derrida.

Having argued with recourse to the prayer that opens Denys the Areopagite's *The Mystical Theology* that apostrophe or prayer cannot "escape" but is contaminated by predication, Derrida concludes his essay as follows:

> Perhaps there would be no prayer, no pure possibility of prayer, without what we glimpse as a menace or as a contamination: writing, the code, repetition, analogy or the – at least apparent – multiplicity of addresses, initiation. If there were a purely pure experience of prayer, would one need religion and affirmative or negative theologies? Would one need a supplement of prayer? But if there were no supplement, if quotation did not bend prayer, if prayer did not bend, if it did not submit to writing, would a theiology be possible? Would a theology be possible?
>
> (1989, 62)

Derrida's position – which forms part of a larger on-going debate with the Catholic theologian Jean-Luc Marion – has been helpfully summed up and contextualised by Arthur Bradley. As Bradley writes, in the discussion of Denys, Derrida shows

> how the theological negativity defended by Marion is always threatened or infiltrated by the kind of radical negativity represented by the *khôra*. Marion, remember, had argued that Derrida's reading of negative theology was wrong because Dionysius substituted the language of predication for the language of pure praise. [32] But Derrida points out that Dionysius still clearly, explicitly and predicatively addresses his encomium and prayer to the trinitarian Christian God. Despite all Dionysius's attempts to speak *to* God, he cannot help saying something *of* God as well:
>
> > As Jean-Luc Marion correctly remarks, the encomium is "neither true nor false, nor even contradictory," although it says something about the thearchy, about the Good and the analogy; and if its attributions or namings do not belong to the ordinary signification of truth, but rather to a hypertruth that is ruled by a hyperessentiality, in

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[32] As Bradley notes: Marion's "chapter entitled 'The Distance of the *Requisit* and the Discourse of Encomium' argues that the encomium, or celebratory discourse, which anticipates the opening prayer of *The Divine Names* tends to 'substitute another verb for the speaking of predicative language, ὑμνειν, to praise.' To begin with, Dionysius's substitution of praise for predication is, Marion suggests, crucial to an understanding of his theology. It indicates 'the passage of the discourse to prayer, because "prayer is a λογοσ, but neither true nor false" (Aristotle)' (ID, p. 232). Prayer is no longer a question of speaking *of* God, in other words, but of speaking *to* Him, praising Him, and so it exceeds the metaphysical and more specifically Aristotelian concept of truth as *adequatio*" (2000, 5).

that it does not merge with the movement of prayer itself, which does not speak *of*, but *to* (HAS, p. 42).

The big question for Derrida is whether Dionysius can ultimately succeed – as Marion claims – in addressing the totality of his discourse purely and non-predicatively towards the goodness of God. Perhaps, he ponders, the *via negativa* remains beholden to the "promise" of an originary repetition [...]. Thus "How to Avoid Speaking" offers a new twist on the very familiar Derridaean arguments about repetition in alterity, the a priori openness to the other, the intertwining of conditions of possibility with conditions of impossibility and so on. In the conclusion to the essay, Derrida repeats differently his famous argument from *Of Grammatology* to say that the repetition of prayer is not just an unnecessary addition to a prayer that is already pure in itself but a necessary substitute for a prayer that can never achieve purity without it [...].

(2000, 9–10)

Let us turn now to Augustine's questions and the dilemma he confronts at the start of his *Confessions*. Here are the second and third paragraphs of the work:

> Grant me Lord to know and understand which comes first – to call upon you or to praise you, and whether knowing you precedes calling upon you. But who calls upon you when he does not know you? For he may call for some other help, mistaking it for yours.
> Or are men to pray to you and learn to know you through their prayers? *Only, how are they to call upon the Lord until they have learned to believe in him? And how are they to believe in him without a preacher to listen to?*
>
> (1991, 3; 1961, 21 [translations combined])

Augustine appears to be faced with a similar dilemma: Can we call upon God without knowing anything about Him? Who do we call? To whom do we address ourselves? Yet, can we know anything about God without calling upon Him? Augustine's proliferating questions seem to form and enclose him within a circle, which similarly suggests the impossibility of addressing God in prayer. How, then, does Augustine's response to the apparent aporia differ from Derrida's?

Our explanation of the difference between them is bound at first to seem unsatisfactory, if not nonsensically tautological. It is as follows. Although the two writers appear to have arrived at a similar impasse, both facing the apparent impossibility of addressing God in prayer, I suggest that Augustine is able to pray – whereas Derrida implies that the road to prayer is blocked – because he *does* pray. This obviously requires a little explaining.

The problems identified by both writers are real, but in neither case does it necessarily mean that progress beyond the apparent impasse is not possible, nor that our prayers cannot be heard. To deal with Augustine's sense of impossibility first. It is true that we cannot pray to God without any

knowledge or sense of Him; as the Bible reminds us "we do not know how to pray as we ought" (Romans, 8:26). Yet, as the remainder of the quotation makes clear, and as Augustine comes to realise (and teaches us) in *Confessions*, we are not exactly *without* "knowledge" of, or orientation towards, the divine, for "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Romans, 8:26). It is thus, as Michael Hanby puts it, "by virtue of a form within him that is not him" and "by virtue of his participation in a form which is not him, and which yet contains him" (1999, 113–4) that Augustine (and man in general, of course) is able to come to know and "recognise" that which in another sense he does *not* and is *unable* to know. (As we shall see in the following chapter, Wordsworth puts forward a corresponding account of the origin of our orientation towards the Good – which forms the basis of "the Poetic Spirit in human life" (*The Prelude*, II, 276) – in the famous "Blest Babe" narrative). It is because of this "aspect of our being [...] which somehow already has something and yet does not have it" (Milbank, Pickstock, Ward: 1999, 11) that we can move beyond the "*aporia* of learning," and means that we can pray that we might be given knowledge of how to pray, of Him to whom we pray, and that we might be *able* to pray.

Whilst in one sense, as we shall elaborate later, we can (properly) never move beyond this stammering, which is as it were prayer's preparation for itself, and which never "arrives at" or "achieves" knowledge, it is nevertheless in another sense neither "empty" nor pointless, in that it allows us to grow in knowledge of, and move towards, that which we address. It is in this way that the "doing" of the "impossible" – an acceptance of the wager – renders it possible. As John Milbank writes in another connection, "[t]he abyss can be traversed by a 'decision'" (1998, 132).

The aporia arrived at or uncovered by Derrida takes a slightly different form, however, it leads to the same sense of impossibility, and may, I suggest, be overcome in a similar fashion. Commenting on "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," Kevin Hart sums up how prayer may "survive" and efficaciously reach its addressee, in spite of the truth of Derrida's claims, with admirable clarity:

> let us assume for the sake of argument what, strictly speaking, cannot be risked outside of the dimension of faith. Let us assume there is a God as evoked by the Pseudo-Dionysius. Now as Derrida cheerfully admits, everyday communication occurs between individuals even though no speech act or writing can have a unique addressee. Conversations happen, meals are ordered, classes are taught, and so on, with structural undecidability impinging, to be sure, though without it being an insupportable burden that makes communication impossible.

Deconstruction begins its labours when the possibility of deflection in any communication is suppressed or repressed. Or, equally, when it is noted that signification exceeds intended meaning. Communication is not abolished in Derrida's world but is reset in a new framework, one that does not appeal to a constitutive or regulatory presence. So god, if there is a God, can presumably hear and answer the Pseudo-Dionysius's prayer for guidance even though it necessarily contains the possibility of being deflected to other destinations, and even though it may signify more than he intends. It is worth noting that, in the terms of this argument, we are not obliged to regard God as a mode of presence, let alone pure self-presence, a *res cogitans*. Communication occurs between people who, on Derrida's understanding, are not and cannot be self-present. Insofar as communication is the question, then, one need not go so far as to claim that God be self-present in order to hear and answer prayer.

(1998, 274)

To conclude this section: Derrida's writing on negative theology has salutarily troubled certain traditional ways of thinking about human-Divine communion, and the practice of theology in general. Indeed, although he "rightly pass[es] for an atheist" (Derrida: 1993, 155), it might not be too far-fetched to see Derrida's attack upon onto-theology as a radical, if purely astringent, form of Protestantism. Though in another sense, his questioning of the possibility of prayer has something of the mischievous genius and reduction to absurdity of Zeno's "stadium" or "dichotomy" paradox, which argues that it is impossible to cross a certain distance; as Anthony Flew explains:

Before you reach the far end, you must reach the halfway point. Before you reach that, you must reach the halfway point to it. And so on indefinitely. If space is infinitely divisible any finite distance must, allegedly, consist of an infinite number of points; and it is, it is also said, impossible to reach the end of an infinite series of operations in a finite time.

(1979, 380)

This is brilliant casuistry, which is hard to refute only if one forgets the Sophistical Solution: *"Solvitur ambulando"* ["It is solved by walking"] (cited in Clough: 1995, 77).

IV
"Untenanting Creation of Its God"[33]

Jonathan Culler's standard account of apostrophe may be called into question in another respect. His argument is predicated upon certain very definite a priori assumptions, which are undeclared and

remain unexamined but which may be contested. These concern, generally speaking, the nature of the universe and normal human behaviour. Let us begin with the nature of the universe.

Questioning the Secular

One of the reasons why apostrophe is supposed to be embarrassing is because it implies things that we do not believe; or, to be more precise, things that *some* people do not believe. In the writing of Culler *et al.* on apostrophe, however, it is taken as a foregone conclusion – and it is assumed to be so unquestionably self-evident that it does not even need mentioning that it *is* an assumption – that we live in a Godless universe, without inherent relations, that there is no one to pray to, that no word has been (or is being) spoken to us, and that we are simply caught up in the chance-born, purposeless flux of things. Such views are, of course, plausible, and now widely espoused, yet they *are* unproven presuppositions not self-evident truths, and they are *not* held by everyone. They also do not constitute the *only* plausible view of the world. Disbelief as much as belief is, of course, a matter of faith, and both are *to be argued* positions.

It is also worth noting that not only are Culler's presuppositions unacknowledged and contestable, it may even be argued that they are less "reasonable," less open and more *dogmatic* than those of the believer. As Chesterton argues, categorically to rule out the possibility of transcendence is to presuppose and religiously to hold onto a doctrine (that of materialism) which in its absolute intolerance of evidence or testimony to the contrary is far more fanatical and prejudicial than the believer's position (1995, 28–32; 157–8). Whereas faith is free to accept the material world in all its materiality, and need not deny any of it in any way in order to safeguard its own position, materialism has to refuse *a priori* and *absolutely* the possibility of anything which appears or claims to exceed the material. In this sense, Culler is a dogmatist, who assumes upon unproven and unacknowledged presuppositions the categorical impossibility of views of reality other than his own.

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[33] Coleridge, "The Destiny of Nations," 31.

Relatedly, Culler's argument exhibits considerable, though again questionable, confidence in our ability to know and articulate once and for all, on the basis of contemporary secular beliefs, the nature of that which is. This in turn leads him to read the whole of literary history as though it were a uni-directional journey of "demystification" towards contemporary enlightenment. The first of these is premature, if not presumptuous, the second is factually inaccurate. Let us deal with the historical inaccuracy first. There are two aspects to this. In the first place, such a reading of history fails to do justice to the seriousness of the Romantics' opposition to Enlightenment thinking; and, secondly, it ignores the significance of this opposition – both in terms of what it inaugurated, and in terms of its *recurrence* (in a variety of guises) – in subsequent periods.

According to most versions of the story, the Romantics were reacting against an atomistic Enlightenment view of the universe, presumed to be that of the eighteenth-century, which viewed

> all objects unremittingly,
> In disconnection dead and spiritless
>
> (*The Excursion*, IV, 961–2)

and left the world all *light* and comfortless. Yet, if the Enlightenment championed the cause of "reason," which it set over against what it deemed to be "superstition," what were the alternatives facing the Romantics? Could the way forwards be opposed without moving backwards? Could one move "backwards" without retreating into "superstition"? Yet could Enlightenment reason be opposed *without* holding onto or retrieving what it condemned as "superstition"?[34] Thomas Love Peacock's view of the Romantics' reaction, which in essence is shared and updated by Culler, is famously set forth in *The Four Ages of Poetry*. To Peacock, while

> the historian and the philosopher are advancing in, and accelerating, the progress of knowledge, the poet is wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance, and raking up the ashes of dead savages to find gewgaws and rattles for the grown babies of the age. [...]
> A poet in our times is a semi-barbarian in a civilized community. He lives in the days that are past. His ideas, thoughts, feelings, associations, are all with barbarous manners, obsolete customs, and exploded superstitions. The march of his intellect is like that of the crab, backward. The brighter the light diffused around him by the progress of reason, the thicker is

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[34] Geoffrey Hartman similarly argues that the Romantics were faced with the following question: "Could poetry outlive the Enlightenment, when it was perfectly clear that the great works of the past had been based on 'Superstition'?" (1970, 319).

the darkness of antiquated barbarism, in which he buries himself like a mole, to throw up the barren hillocks of his Cimmerian labours.

(1921, 15–16)

Peacock's satire is an entertaining though obvious caricature, which like most caricatures achieves its effects by means of exaggeration and exclusion. It is, of course, true that Wordsworth and Keats, for example, looked nostalgically back to and mourned the loss of a pre-modern world

> When holy were the haunted forest boughs,
> Holy the air, the water, and the fire;

("Ode to Psyche," 38–9)

– which made Wordsworth wish he were a "Pagan suckled in a creed outworn" ("The World Is Too Much with Us," 10) and Keats propose "Confusion to the memory of Newton! [...] Because he destroyed the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to a prism" (Haydon: 1926, I, 269). It is also obviously true that the Romantics did not believe that reason had a monopoly on the beautiful, the good and the true, nor even that it was in complete possession of *itself*. The point is clearly made in Wordsworth's famous comments on the "semi-Quixote" of whom he (or his friend or Descartes) dreamt:

> Full often, taking from the world of sleep
> This Arab Phantom, which my Friend beheld,
> This semi-Quixote, I to him have given
> A substance, fancied him a living man –
> A gentle dweller in the desart, crazed
> By love, and feeling, and internal thought
> Protracted among endless solitudes –
> Have shaped him, in the oppression of his brain,
> Wandering upon his quest, and thus equipped.
> And I have scarcely pitied him; have felt
> A reverence for a being thus employed;
> And thought that in the blind and awful lair
> Of such a madness, reason did lie couched.

(*The Prelude*, V, 141–52)

Yet the Romantics' response was not so much a retreat from as an *attack* upon Enlightenment reason. As Hartman observes,

[t]heir concern with the darker graces of poetry, with the realities of myth and the relation of the poetic and the religious genius, did not mean an unscrutinized use of archaic beliefs. On the contrary [...] [t]hey knew that light must be fought with light and that the great intellectual movement which preceded them, and in which they continued to participate, could not be reversed.

(1970, 311)

The fact that it could not be reversed, however, is not to say that what the Enlightenment taught was true or that it might not itself be surpassed, nor is it to say that the Romantics did not try or in doing so did not lay the groundwork for such a reversal in the future. As Hartman, again, puts it: "the struggle of the Romantic poets with romance is a moving, intense, and endless one" (1970, 311). Though neither Peacock's nor Culler's account acknowledges the contestability of that which "triumphed," nor does it do justice to the way in which it was seriously called into question by the Romantics' reaction.

This leads us to our second point concerning the subsequent significance of the Romantics' opposition. Let us for a moment suppose a partial defeat. Let us suppose that for all the brilliance, vigour and diversity of their attempts to refute and furnish an alternative to Enlightenment thinking, the Romantics were ultimately unable theoretically to substantiate the metaphysics of their apostrophic practice. So much is commonly supposed. The only thing that would sanely warrant the use of counter-rational apostrophe is a religious sense of analogy and relation, and a doctrine of participation, according to which all creation is related to and bespeaks, albeit dimly and imperfectly, its Creator, in whom everything participates and who participates in everything. The Romantics, it seems, therefore did not sign up. John Henry Newman argues, however, that the Romantics (Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey) did at least bring this possibility into view in a way that the eighteenth-century had erased (1994, 99–100), and thus made possible an orthodox religious revival in the nineteenth-century. Therefore, whilst it might be argued that the Romantics could not always or unreservedly believe in the sort of universe implied by their use of apostrophe, and that, like chivalry in the fifteenth-century, they were revisiting nostalgically that which had already been decisively lost, in another way, it may be argued that they inaugurated the possibility that the venture of separateness – separating moral, cosmic, and psychological life – which constitutes the post-seventeenth-century world, is neither inevitable nor well-grounded. This critique of Enlightenment thought has, of course, come even more radically, if more ambiguously, to fruition in postmodernism.

Such reversals of and opposition to the advance of secular Enlightenment and the part played in their initiation by the Romantics are ignored by Culler's account, which appears blithely to presuppose not only that history has simply been going in a secular direction but also that contemporary secularism's construal of reality is the last and uncontested word on the matter. Yet the sort of reversals and counter-movements that we have pointed to are a *recurrent* and *continuing* feature of history; as John Milbank notes, referring to Feuerbach's critique of religion, which "exemplifies the contrast between the French outright rejection of Christianity and the German mode of 'retreat in due order,'" there has been a tendency to

> confuse Europe with Germany, so that they regard this gradual retreat as the main mode of European de-Christianization; the gradualness then takes on for them the appearance of an historical inevitability which theology must "come to terms with." But this disguises from view the earlier French Enlightenment return of a more *perennially renewed* clash between unbelief and belief.[35]
>
> (1990, 180)

Returning to the initial criticism: Culler's silent but categorical exclusion of the possibility and *reality* of faith – turning a blind eye to poetry's innumerable religious apostrophes, and dismissing or refusing to consider any sort of theological construal of the figure – suggests a remarkable confidence in the viewpoint of contemporary Western secularism. Such exclusions appear to assume that there are no more corners left to turn, and that it is neither possible nor necessary to re-turn in any way. Faith, however, argues otherwise. From the believer's perspective, the greatest "corner" has yet to be turned, and the "one thing needful" is our re-turn. Whilst the following chapter will elaborate upon this perspective, we might indicate how it affects our view of the present by means of two quotations.

At the end of his argument in *Theology and Social Theory*, John Milbank offers a musical analogy which underlines the openness of the present and apparent discord to continuity *ad infinitum*

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[35] Geoffrey Hartman puts forward a reading of literary history with respect to the *genius loci*, which is more nuanced than, though is ultimately paralleled by, Culler's account, arguing that the

> history of English Literature since the Renaissance suggests a continuous process of demystification. Thomas Warton observed of the Reformation that "Truth propagates Truth, and the mantle of mystery was removed not only from religion but from literature." [...] This is a statement both Blake and Wordsworth could support. There may be lapses or relapses, but they do not affect the "great stream of tendency."
>
> (1970, 330–1)

or further intensification of dissonance but *also* to (ultimate, though as yet unseeable) harmonious resolution, which should serve summarily to indicate a position which may counter Culler's confident interpretation of history and the nature of the real in the light of contestable contemporary belief:

> In Baroque music, the individual lines become increasingly distinct and individually ornamented; there is an increasing "delay" of resolutions, and an increasing generation of new developments out of temporary resolutions. The possibility of consonance is stretched to its limits, and yet the path of dissonance is not embarked upon. To say (with Deleuze) that dissonance and atonality are "held back" or "not arrived at," would be a mistake of the same order as claiming that nihilism is evidently true in its disclosure of the impossibility of truth. [...] Instead, one should say, it is always possible to place dissonance back in Baroque "suspense"; at every turn of a phrase, new, unexpected harmony may still arrive. Between the nihilistic promotion of dissonance, of differences that clash or only accord through conflict, and the Baroque risk of harmony stretched to the limits – the openness to musical grace – there remains an undecidability.
>
> (1990, 429)

The second quotation, from Martin Buber's powerful defence of the prophetic as opposed to the apocalyptic, represents a religious construal of history and the present that is utterly opposed to Jonathan Culler's but which also radically differs from Christianity's:

> What view of the ruling of the Ruler underlies all this? Clearly a view that preserves the mystery of the dialogical intercourse between God and man from all desire for dogmatic encystment. The mystery is that of man's creation as a being with the power of actually choosing between the ways, who ever again and even now has the power to choose between them. [...] The future is not fixed, for God wants man to come to Him with full freedom, to return to Him even out of a plight of extreme hopelessness and then to be really with Him. This is the prophetic *theologem*, never expressed as such but firmly embedded in the foundations of Hebrew prophecy. [...] Prophecy has in its way declared that the unique being, man, is created to be a center of surprise in creation. Because and so long as man exists, factual change of direction can take place toward salvation as well as toward disaster, starting from the world in each hour, no matter how late.
>
> (1982, 177–8)

We shall return to the differences between Jewish and Christian perspectives in the following chapter. What is important at the present stage of our argument, is, firstly, to indicate the questionability of Culler's confidence in contemporary secularism's construal of the real by alluding, albeit briefly, to radically alternative, yet equally cogent, construals of that which is or might be to come; and, secondly, to suggest that if what such theological perspectives say about the world is substantively true – and it has to be allowed that it *is* a rational possibility – then the apostrophic

practice of the Romantics, although it might not proceed from explicitly theological sources, may nevertheless be seen *not* as reversal of "the progress of knowledge" and a "wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance," as Peacock has it, but, on the contrary, as an inchoate groping or convergence towards truth and reason.

Whose Embarrassment?

At the start of his argument in his essay "Apostrophe," Culler makes something of a song and dance about the hitherto critical evasion of apostrophes, accusing critics of "turning aside from," "denying the significance of," "repressing" and "sytematically excluding" discussion of the figure's existence (1981, 136–7). As we noted earlier, this is something of an overstatement. What is more remarkable, however, is the fact that Culler himself seems to show exactly the same response when it comes to apostrophes uttered *outside* of literature – turning away, denying their significance, repressing or evading the fact of their existence – and, even more ironically, he seems to do so *out of embarrassment*.

The third of the three reasons we identified why apostrophe in poetry is deemed to be embarrassing is because it is supposed to be non-representational; in other words, normal people in normal life do not do it. This is sheer misinformation. Whilst Jonathan Culler may never have spoken in a moment of passion – as Basil Fawlty speaks to his car – to a malfunctioning electrical appliance, or, more gently, to an injured or inquisitive animal or bird that happened to cross his path, or interiorly to the deceased, an absent loved one or antagonist, it seems fair to say that many, if not most, people have and do. Apostrophising is a sign of our responsivity to the suggestiveness of things – which might be us and which might be them, but which is in any case perfectly normal; as Joseph Priestley (hardly a man with his head in the clouds) states at the beginning of his lecture on Personification:

"We see *life, sense* and *intelligence* every where" (1968, 247).[36] Evidence of such behaviour is harder

to avoid than to find. Indeed, Shoshana Felman ends her public tribute to Paul de Man — which was

spoken at the Memorial Service at Yale University Art Gallery, and forms part of the volume that

includes Culler's essay "Changes in the Study of the Lyric" — with an apostrophe to the late critic:

> He was teaching us how, even in the face of death, mortality can be experienced, consummated, and assumed in creativity, how life can be asserted in acts of intellectual and human kindness.

> Thank you, Paul, for having taught us, even through the process of your loss of life, how life can triumph.
> May we live up to your precious memory.
> May we, through the loss of you, learn how to live *up to your triumph.*[37]
>
> (1985, 9)

That an enormous number of people, publicly and privately, formally and informally,

regularly turn away or turn away from their turning away to realise they are standing in prayer, even in

secularised Western societies, is an even harder fact to overlook. This is not a minority matter. As the

sociologist Kieran Flanagan points out: "Even in a secular society, such as England, more attend

Church on Sundays than football matches on Saturday" (1991, 1). Even if the reputation of England's

football fans is more widespread than that of its churchgoers, such facts are difficult to escape. Neither

can praying be considered in some sense "external" to or exempt from our inquiries. To talk about

realism, one has to have recourse to reality. And if reality is the sum of that which *is*, our account of

reality, if it is to be valid, cannot be selective or exclusive in its choice of data (how can an aspect of

reality be irrelevant in the consideration of realism?). Judgements concerning representationality that

are based upon a partial or restricted account of reality are therefore obviously falsifying from the

outset.

Drawing some conclusions, then, respecting Culler's selective sample of utterances and

concomitantly restricted construal of reality, it seems that his contention that apostrophe is

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[36] The Quaker grammarian Lindley Murray (again, hardly the most chimerical of men) puts the matter nicely: "there is a wonderful proneness in human nature, under emotion, to animate all objects" (1795, 322).

[37] We might also note that the first two stanzas of Baudelaire's "Transcendence" ("Élévation") — the second of which involves an apostrophe to the speaker's spirit — were included on the gold-plated "Greetings to the Universe" record aboard the spacecraft Voyager, which was sent outside of our solar system in the hope of being heard but without its senders knowing whether anyone or anything exists to receive or understand it. (I am grateful to Dr. Edwin Bell of NASA for confirming this information.)

unnaturalistic depends upon two related manoeuvres. Whilst the examples he takes, obviously, do *not* correspond to speech acts uttered in mundane situations, this does not mean, firstly, that all apostrophes in poetry must be of this sort. And, secondly, it does not mean, as we shall illustrate later, that there are no specialised contexts outside of poetry which are similarly removed from quotidian behaviour in which comparable utterances might be used. Culler's claim that apostrophe is non-representational might thus be said to depend upon a shrinking as well as a shifting of the goalposts.

Why, it seems pertinent to ask, does Culler exclude and seek to deny the significance of apostrophes uttered outside of poetry? One reason might be that it is a matter of exigency, since, as we have seen, his argument in various ways depends upon its suppression; though might it not, as we suggested earlier, be out of *embarrassment*? The fact that people apostrophise and pray outside of literature *is* quite hard to overlook. Might not his silence about such matters, to use his own deductive logic, represent an attempt to deny or exclude "that which cannot [be] comfortably assimilate[d]" (1981, 137)? I shall be a little bolder. I think that Culler would like to believe that we are all perfectly rational, enlightened beings, who have "grown out of" such superstitious and irrational behaviour, and that anyone who still apostrophises is a camp self-dramatiser, slightly touched or something of both, since this would appear to endorse what secular science tells us about the world. The fact that an unignorable amount of perfectly rational and enlightened people *do* still pray to and apostrophise things that cannot be seen, whose existence cannot be empirically proved, or that which is inanimate and apparently incapable of reciprocal response, troubles such a belief. This cannot simply be dismissed as "extravagance." As John Henry Newman sturdily observes: "[t]hat is to be accounted a normal operation of our nature, which men in general do actually instance. [...] Our hoping is a proof that hope, as such, is not an extravagance" (1979, 270). We *can*, of course, see this as a regrettable though harmless "left over" or residue of "unenlightened" practices, like touching wood for luck or not walking under ladders (though such an explanation is less convincing when faced with the remarkable duration and pervasiveness of such behaviour).[38] Yet it can *also* be seen as a peculiarly resilient

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[38] The thesis of Steiner's *Real Presences* is defined against, and launched in adamant opposition to, a similar argument:

> We speak still of "sunrise" and "sunset." We do so as if the Copernican model of the solar system had not replaced, ineradicably, the Ptolemaic. Vacant metaphors, eroded figures of speech, inhabit our

instinct that not only refuses to be silenced or governed by but actually *challenges* "secular reason" (Newman: 1997, 57). The need to attack the metaphysics of apostrophe by Culler and others seems to suggest that it has a force that they recognise but must explain away. Writing on the subject of sacrifice, John Milbank makes the following point, which may, I suggest, be applied to the act of apostrophe also:

> Having cast unreason into the shadow, the Enlightenment had to explain why this darkness had dominated human history hitherto. Unreason was either described as the occasional aberration of madness, or, in its more consistent occurrence, it was narrated as a gradual approximation towards reason. But at the heart of the Counter-Enlightenment lies the claim that throughout human history, and persisting today, occur fundamental phenomena which can neither be dismissed as aberrations, nor be seen as primitive gropings towards knowledge.
> (1990, 66)

I wish to conclude this penultimate section with a hypothesis which cannot be proved. It is a hypothesis that is categorically opposed to a number of the arguments we have been considering, though it extends and is corroborated by a number of others, and which indicates in summary the direction that the following chapter takes.

I think that most of our little acts of address bespeak an instinctive and resilient faith in an unlimited and corroborated vocative. Such faith may, obviously, be more or less consciously held, and more or less troubled by contrary beliefs; the act may also be lightly or parodically done, and towards that which we in no sense think of as sentient or potentially responsive. Nevertheless, I would contend that our habit of talking to people and things that are invisible, absent or insentient is testament to a belief which may persist in spite of the declaration of *un*belief.[39]

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vocabulary and grammar. They are caught, tenaciously, in the scaffolding and recesses of our common parlance. There they rattle about like old rags or ghosts in the attic.

This is the reason why rational men and women, particularly in the scientific and technological realities of the West, still refer to "God." This is why the postulate of the existence of God persists in so many unconsidered turns of phrase and allusion. No plausible reflection or belief underwrites His presence. Nor does any intelligible evidence. Where God clings to our culture, to our routines of discourse, He is a phantom of grammar, a fossil embedded in the childhood of rational speech. So Nietzsche (and many after him).

This essay argues the reverse.

It proposes that any coherent understanding of what language is and how language performs, that any coherent account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God's presence.
(1989, 3)

[39] Tertullian puts forward a related argument for the existence of God, based, as Aidan Nichols points out, "on the fact that even atheists when they are in trouble exclaim, 'Oh God!'" As Nichols explains: Tertullian "held that

Martin Buber was fond of quoting what he calls "a strange confession" by Nietzsche, who, he says, "circumscribed the process of inspiration by saying that one accepts without asking who gives" (1966, 176). Likewise, I think, more often than not, we address without asking who is listening, or whether the other is *capable* of listening, and the faith is in the doing.

V

Beyond Embarrassment

Let us return, at the close of this chapter, to the subject of embarrassment. The epigraph to Culler's essay "Apostrophe" is taken from Wallace Stevens's "Botanist on Alp (No. 1)" and reads:

apostrophes are forbidden on the funicular.

(3)

Stevens's (speaker's) arch pronouncement tells us, I think, a number of things about the figure that Culler's account leaves out or belies, with which it may be useful to conclude. First of all, the fact that the act of apostrophe is, albeit with comic formality, "forbidden" obviously suggests that people are naturally inclined to do so – a fact that Culler's essay seeks to conceal or downplay. Secondly, the fact that apostrophes *are* forbidden is itself intriguing. What does this tell us? That apostrophes are embarrassing? And if they are, what does this mean? That they are unbecoming? or unrefined? that like bowler hats or hand-jiving, they are gauche or outmoded? that like playing air-guitar or showing fondness for one's wife, they are considered unseemly in public? Perhaps. Though surely it tells us as much or begs as many questions about the culture that forbids. If we look at the line in the context from which it is taken, its tone or sympathies seem to be more equivocal:

the soul was 'naturally Christian' and only overlaid by a superficial carapace of ideology in the case of atheists and agnostics" (1991, 44).

Panoramas are not what they used to be.
Claude has been dead a long time
And apostrophes are forbidden on the funicular.

(1–3)

What is being criticised here? the act of apostrophe or those that *criticise* the act of apostrophe? It seems to me that the lines are to some degree for and against both. If the comically excessive formality of "forbidden" indicates the gravity of and invites our laughter at the "faux pas" of apostrophe, there also seems to be an element of elegy or regret at its prohibition, coming as it does after more obviously negative losses. Moreover, is not the prohibition *itself* made to appear faintly ridiculous as a result of its almost Wildean excess? – One is reminded of Lady Bracknell's wonderful sense of propriety: "Come, dear, we have already missed five, if not six, trains. To miss any more might expose us to comment on the platform" (Wilde: 1994, 412). Finally, Stevens's comment seems to set this conflict – that people are inclined to apostrophise but are prohibited from doing so – within a larger oppositional perspective. The comically inconsonant yoking of "apostrophe" and the "funicular" – foregrounded by the syntactic symmetry of the line, and the words' parallel iambic cadence – maps out the distance and establishes an opposition between the emotive or poetic and the functional quotidian, taking us through a bathetic fall from the sublime to the utilitarian particular. Furthermore, it is a fall which seems to dismantle, or reveal as pretentious, the claims of the former. This is to be expected. Seen from a mundane or strictly rationalistic perspective – and the line's parody of the voice of public prohibition combined with the formality of the Latinate designation presents the act of apostrophe from precisely such a point of view – apostrophes *are* embarrassing. Yet, whereas Culler seems unable to see the relativity or questionability of this perspective, Stevens's poem – in its apparently equivocal sympathies for the act of apostrophe as well as the embarrassment it causes – presents us with the dismantling of the figure's claims by quotidian propriety whilst holding its dismantling up for questioning also.

We are now in a better position to consider the value, limits and *politics* of the criterion of embarrassment. Culler is right to identify the metaphysical implications of apostrophe as embarrassing. He is wrong, however, to conclude that this proves their inveracity (or our lack of

belief). Culler argues as though embarrassment were in itself (and sufficiently) incriminatory – as though it necessarily meant and validated disbelief, or were at least incompatible with belief. Yet belief *also* obviously lives with embarrassment – countenancing that which is "scandalous to reason" (Steiner: 1989, 226). Indeed, it is not the *occurrence* of embarrassment that is in dispute or even its meaning,[40] but rather the tyrannical authority accorded to it as arbiter of the real. It speaks, however, but for a single perspective or mode of reasoning, which, as we have seen, may be tolerated, challenged or surpassed by other ways of thinking and behaving. Whereas embarrassment might be seen as policing the boundaries of secular reason, theology might be said to think and act – and perhaps even centrally to have its being – in the space beyond, or *in spite of*, such embarrassment. To complain that the metaphysical implications of apostrophe do not conform to the dictates of secular reason is therefore not unlike one's eyes complaining to one's ears when listening to music that they are unable to see what the fuss is all about. This is not at all to say that belief is irrational or (exactly) opposed to reason. As Newman once again robustly points out, if "Faith may be viewed as opposed to Reason, in the popular sense of the latter word, it must not be overlooked that Unbelief is opposed to Reason also" (1997, 230). Nevertheless, belief is, of course, not the same as or encompassed by reason. The difference between them is marked, and, we might say, policed by embarrassment. Though, as we saw in Stevens's poem, it is a *silent* "policing of the sublime," to use John Milbank's phrase (1990, 101). We might, then, to conclude, say that embarrassment is the response of reason to that which exceeds it or goes over its head – its retaliation, we might say, not at being refused admission, but at being asked to forego its accustomed dominion.

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[40] The "wisdom of the world" *is*, of course, opposed to "the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians, 1:18–24).

Part Two

Legitimate Stammering

> we know not what we should pray for as we ought:
> but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with
> groanings which cannot be uttered.
>
> (Romans, VIII, 26)

> *s'io m'intuassi, come tu t'inmii*
> [were I to inyou as you now inme]
>
> (Dante, *Paradise*, IX, 81)

I
Irrisio Infidelium

One of the purposes of theology, according to Thomas Aquinas, is to defend faith against the laughter of the non-believer (1964, 29–30; 1967, 81). Though engaging in a literary debate, this thesis, similarly, has recourse to theology in an attempt to counter the ridicule of apostrophe and its metaphysical implications in recent secular writing on the figure. The second part of this thesis will therefore obviously involve a considerable widening of our focus and the discussion of matters that are not normally dealt with in literary criticism. That such matters are relevant is part of our argument. In the previous chapter, we saw that Culler's standard account of apostrophe may be called into question in several respects, most notably on account of its reduction of all apostrophes to a few of the trope's figurative characteristics, at the expense of a range of important and interesting differences in usage, and the critic's unquestioned assumption that the secular presuppositions about the nature of the real and normal human behaviour that underlie his reading of the figure are universally held and reflect the only rational account of the way things are. In the following chapter, it will be shown, to the contrary, not only that theology provides an alternative and equally rational account of the real which underwrites an alternative construal of apostrophe, but also that religious practice presents us with variations in apostrophic usage which may help us to retrieve and conceptualise important differences elided in Culler's account of the figure.

II
Turning and Turning Again

Wordsworth's apostrophe to the river Wye in "Tintern Abbey," which violently sunders and yet also seems to repair the poem's preceding orientation, is an apostrophe *about* apostrophe, which suggestively distinguishes a number of ways of understanding the trope that take us beyond the construals we have considered so far:

> If this
> Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft –
> In darkness, and amid the many shapes
> Of joyless day-light; when the fretful stir
> Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
> Have hung upon the beatings of my heart –
> How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
> O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer through the woods,
> How often has my spirit turned to thee!
>
> (49–57)

Wordsworth's apostrophe appears to offer three different ways of looking at what it might mean to apostrophise. Firstly, there is the act itself, which takes place in front of us, and which is a turning of or in words. Secondly, the speaker's act of present turning recalls, or might be prompted by the recollection of, previous acts of turning towards that which he now addresses. These previous acts of turning towards, which are apparently identified with the present act, are communicated by means of narrative "telling" as opposed to the "showing" of the "meta" apostrophe, and may or may not have been a turning in words. The speaker, finally, offers us two slightly different descriptions of these previous acts of apostrophe, which nonetheless appear to be coextensive with each other, subtly suggesting alternative construals of what it means to turn:

> How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
> [...]
> How often has my spirit turned to thee!

The subtle alteration in grammatical subject bespeaks an intriguing hesitancy in attempting to define the nature and agency of the speaker's turning. What is the difference between the speaker's saying that

"I" "in spirit" turned and "my spirit" turned? *Is* there a difference? Is the speaker's "spirit" the same as his "I"? And, if they are not the same, in what way do they differ and how are they related?

The following chapter contends that such a hesitancy is significant and "proper," in that it refers to something real and worthy of attention, and focuses on two general questions or sets of questions suggestively raised by Wordsworth's apostrophe. Firstly, what does it mean to turn? In Wordsworth's lines we find a turning of words, a turning of the self, and a turning of the spirit. In what way, then, do we turn when we apostrophise? Are there different types or degrees of turning? and, secondly, is there a sense – intimated by the distinction between yet correlation of self and "spirit" in Wordsworth's lines – in which our turning might be a turning of the self and that which is *other than* the self or that which is superadded to (and exceeds whilst forming part of) the self?

One set of answers to such questions has, as we saw in the previous chapter, been put forward by Jonathan Culler and others. The turning of apostrophe, it is claimed, is a turning of words; there is nothing and no one outside of the text to turn to; there is no self "in" or "behind" the text doing the turning; and any talk of "spirits" being spoken to or speaking is an embarrassing "relic of archaic beliefs" (Culler: 1981, 140). Such answers obviously have a lot to recommend them, not least because they confirm and are confirmed by contemporary secular beliefs about the world. There are, however, other possible answers to such questions. Answers, moreover, which may be more consonant with what Romantic poets and poetry claim to be doing.

It might be said that Martin Buber spent most of his life as a philosopher and theologian thinking about and asking others to think about what it means to "turn." In the Postscript to her book *Buber on God and the Perfect Man*, Pamela Vermes asks and then answers the following questions about Buber's work:

> What is the real concern of these literary and teaching endeavours of a lifetime? To promote a new divine form in place of the God gone into eclipse? To offer a new ideal of personal and social existence? To stir the human religious instinct into new life?
>
> In every case, no. They are, of course, also intended, but viewed from near to, and not from afar, the black characters of Buber's written work spell primarily the one word *teshuvah* [...].
>
> What is *teshuvah*?
>
> *Teshuvah* is when a person, in anguish and despair, prostrates himself beside the ruins of all that he possessed, and from his loss, fear, isolation, alienation, and dereliction, cries out to his *You* to be there with him.

"Turn!" has been the cry of all the prophets. It is the word with which the Baptist's preaching began, and that of Jesus and his apostles. They called for *teshuvah*, the word falsely rendered as *metanoia*, with its implications of a spiritual process, a change of mind. *Teshuvah* is a turning to God of the whole man.

Teshuvah is not a return to a sin-free condition. It is a turn-about to face in an opposite direction. It is the beginning of a different journey, not along a way ordered by God, but along a path taken by God's own indwelling Presence. [...]

Teshuvah in Buber's terms is all of this and something more. It calls for a turning to perfect relation by means of other relation. It demands that the *you*-world should take precedence over the *it*-world, but also that the *you*-world and the *it*-world should both be sanctified by relation with the everlasting *You*.

(Vermes: 1994, 234–5)

To Buber, then, the act of I-Thou "turning" may mean a variety of things, which might best be seen as concentrically or analogically related rather than qualitatively different (though Buber, to be sure, still wishes to draw lines between certain sorts of turning). As Vermes points out, *teshuvah* is an orientation of one's *life* towards God; though this is an on-going and all-inclusive aim rather than something which can be "achieved" or "established." It is, however, relatedly, also something that we are called to do moment by moment; indeed, according to Buber, we can *only* orient our life towards God in orienting our selves in every given moment towards Him.[1] Additionally, as the quotation from Vermes indicates, for Buber, *teshuvah* refers to the act of turning with one's whole being to any particular *finite* Thou, which, as we shall see, according to Buber, involves simultaneously turning, without diversion or dilution, towards the eternal Thou, also. Finally, *teshuvah*, for Buber, may signal a turning *towards* as well as a turning *away* (indeed, the one *entails* the other); as Buber writes: "[w]hen man turns away from evil with all that might with which he is able to rebel against God, then he has truly turned to God" (Buber: 1953, 44), which may, furthermore, signal the reciprocal turning towards us of that towards which we turn.[2]

What is important, in each of these cases, for Buber, is that it is a turning "with the whole being" (1944, 3); or, as he puts it elsewhere, in a formulation which recalls Wordsworth's rephrasing in "Tintern Abbey," it is "an aiming of the soul at the being meant" (1982, 58). Any "holding back of an I

[1] "Turning," as Fritz Kaufmann points out in his article "Buber's Philosophy of Religion," is "also expected of the people in Plato's cave" (Schilpp and Friedman: 1967, 209).
[2] It is worth noting that both the act of turning – as a turning away as well as a turning towards – and the pattern of (Divine) call and (human) response has a parallel in the Gospels; as Michel de Certeau points out: "in Luke, Jesus is always turning round in order to speak. The advent of Jesus (the call) and the departure of his disciples (the response) suppose, in the first case, that he separates himself off in order to come and, in the second case, that they leave everything in order to follow him" (Certeau: 2000, 235).

which does not enter into action with the rest of the person, an I to which the action is an object [...] depossesses the moment" (1957, 126), and entails a fall from or a failure to ascend out of I-It experience.

Having summarily identified the different types of turning, and having said something briefly about what essentially defines the act of turning for Buber, we need now to say something about the role of language in Buber's philosophy. This might appear to be straightforward and self-evident. After all, Buber's I-Thou philosophy is a philosophy of *dialogue*, which, with extraordinary simplicity, is based upon a distinction between "primary utterances." Yet the role or "meaning" of language in Buber's philosophy is in fact highly ambiguous and far from stable, which might, I suggest, go a long way to explaining why, for all its apparent relevance, there has been a notable lack of success in applying Buber's philosophy to works of literature.

The principal reason for this ambiguity is due to the fact that what is meant by "dialogue" and "speech" is literal *and* metaphorical (or, we might say, because it refuses as an authentic opposition the conventional distinction between the literal and metaphorical (or verbal and non-verbal) with respect to speech). The different modes of being or attitudes it identifies are defined in terms of pronominal relations or orientations – I-Thou, I-It – which are described as being brought about by the act of "speaking"; as Buber writes: "[t]he attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the words which he speaks" (1944, 3). The two attitudes thus depend upon the "words" he "speaks." Yet, as Buber continues, these words are spoken "with one's being" (1996, 54) (*mit dem Wesen* (1962, 7)). "[G]enuine speech," he contends, is "truly directed address" (Schilpp and Friedman: 1967, 22). This ambiguous construal or modification of what is meant by "words" and "speaking" is made more explicit in Buber's repeated assertion that "[h]uman dialogue [...] although it has its distinctive life in the sign [...] can exist without the sign" (1969, 4). Clearly, then, to paraphrase Eliot, the words as such do not matter. As Buber stresses:

> The form of the words proves nothing. If many a spoken *Thou* indicates fundamentally an *It*, addressed as *Thou* only from habit and obtuseness, and many a spoken *It* fundamentally a *Thou*, its presentness remembered as it were remotely with the whole being, so are countless *I*'s only indispensable pronouns, necessary abbreviations for "This man here who is speaking."
> (1944, 62)

The two modes or attitudes *may* therefore take place in language – may even have their "distinctive life" in language – though, crucially, they *need not*.[3] This would seem to be consonant, we may provisionally note, with the different forms of turning described by Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" (Wordsworth, we noticed, distinguishes between, whilst also appearing to equate, turning in speech, turning in spirit and a turning *of* the spirit), and, concomitantly, to lend support to our contention that apostrophe in poetry may represent a *non-verbal* act.

A recurrent problem with literary studies which employ Buber's philosophy of dialogue is that they fail to take into account this unstable or ambiguous role of language, and instead assume, contrary to what Buber says, that every second person utterance or act of apostrophe is an I-Thou address. Harold Bloom, for example, whose reading of Shelley's major poetry in *Shelley's Mythmaking* represents probably the most well-known and most severely criticised large-scale attempt to apply Buber's dialogical paradigm to literary texts, nowhere questions the relationship between the use of second person address and Buber's I-Thou utterance, or the role of language in the moment of relation; instead, it appears to be taken for granted that addressing the other as "Thou" is an unproblematic sign of I-Thou relation.[4] As Bloom writes elsewhere, Buber's "'I-Thou' doctrine" is

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[3] Drawing upon Karl Barth's theology of invocation, Matthew Boulton makes the same point respecting Christian invocation. Having observed that "[i]nvocation involves, typically and often crucially, speech" (Boulton: 2001, 75), he explains:

> I say "typically" because, although most forms of Christian invocation do involve utterances, some do not; as the Quaker meeting and various Christian forms of non-verbal prayer silently attest, spoken words may or may not be employed in invocational eloquence. Further, Barth's claim that our every gesture, our "speech" but also our "thought" and "action" – indeed, our "whole life" – properly finds itself in the invocational "movement" confirms the idea that, for him, not only verbal but also non-verbal episodes of human life are to be understood as fully human and duly obedient only "as the form of the praise of his gift, his giving, and himself as the free Giver" [...] Speaking, then, is by no means the only way to follow the divine directive, "Call on me" (Psalm 50:15).
>
> (2001, 82)

[4] James K. Lyon has more successfully compared the poetry of Paul Celan to the writings of Buber (Lyon: 1971), though, like Bloom, he nowhere questions the relationship between I-Thou address and the use of the second person pronoun, but counts, and counts on, the occurrence of the latter as an invariable sign of the former. From the other side, as it were, the Buber scholar Maurice Friedman offers a more general consideration of the relevance of Buber's philosophy of dialogue to literature in *The Affirming Flame: A Poetics of Meaning* (1999), though likewise fails to consider the problems and questions that are raised when talking about I-Thou utterances in *literature*. Culler's opposition to the I-Thou model of reading may in part be related to this.

a grand turning operation dependent upon the traditional trope of apostrophe, the confrontation between life and life, subject and subject, that always conditions Western lyric poetry, and that attained its apotheosis in a radical lyricist like Shelley.

(1982, xii)

This is true, but it neglects the fact, repeatedly emphasised by Buber, that not every apostrophe or saying of "Thou," in poetry as in everyday life, announces an unreserved turning of the being towards the other or, as Bloom puts it, a "confrontation of life with life [...]." As Christ, according to Matthew, says, in a comment of which Buber surely approved: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (7:21).

If noticing the unstable role of language in I-Thou relation goes some way towards explaining why literary applications of Buber's philosophy of dialogue have tended to be somewhat unsatisfactory, it does so by uncovering a problem. How are we to identify I-Thou utterances in literature? As Buber makes clear, we cannot assume that I-Thou relation is unfailingly signalled by the saying of "Thou," since although it is possible to turn towards the other as a Thou in and by means of language or silently "in spirit" and with the whole being, which may then be represented in language, it is, it seems, also possible to "turn" linguistically *without* turning. The poststructuralist reaction of critics such as Jonathan Culler against religious construals of lyrical address as espoused, for example, by Harold Bloom appears to involve a related, if far more radical, awareness of this latter sort of rhetorical duplicity – seeing apostrophe as a puppeted turning of words – though, since it refuses a priori the possibility of the sort of communion that Buber describes and Bloom sees as represented in lyric poetry, it exalts such "rhetorical" turning, to the exclusion of any other form of turning, dethroning one extreme or undifferentiated reading with another. Yet might not Bloom and Culler *both* be right, if seen as correcting each other's exclusions? The following section seeks to answer the foregoing questions concerning differences in the act of apostrophe, ahead of our more detailed examination of Buber's philosophy of dialogue.

III
A Step Backwards

One of the most disappointing features of Jonathan Culler's writing on apostrophe is its elision of differences in the use of the figure. His determination to see the trope as primarily concerned with its figurative predicament – as questioning, celebrating or in denial about its own impossibility – leads him not only to ignore most of the differences which make apostrophes interesting, reducing them to, or only focusing on those that obviously exhibit, a few of its textual characteristics, but, as we saw in the previous chapter, it also leads him to turn away from those apostrophes that trouble the conclusions he is trying to prove. Nevertheless, in various ways, his writing suggests certain differences that he does not explicitly acknowledge. The first of these, we have noticed already. In his essay "Changes in the Study of the Lyric," Culler appears to concede, whilst trying to conceal his concession, that some apostrophes are naturalistic whereas others are extravagant "flights" from everyday speech.[5] Secondly, on various occasions, Culler enigmatically alludes to the "success" of the figure: "if it [apostrophe] works, it produces a fictive, discursive event" (1981, 153). And again, shortly afterwards: "We know too little about apostrophes to assert what actually happens when an apostrophe succeeds" (1981, 153). Though he does not say anything about what he means by "success," or "working," neither does he say anything about apostrophic "failure" (which his remarks obviously posit the possibility of) nor about apostrophes which do not *try* to "succeed." Finally, the examples selected and invented by Culler similarly suggest certain significant differences, which his general argument seeks to elide. Let us consider the invented example offered by Culler at the start of his argument as a way of illustrating his claim that the figure is inherently embarrassing and compare it with a random selection of other apostrophes:

> If we posit for this essay, "Apostrophe," a communicative process linking an "authorial voice" and the readers of *The Pursuit of Signs*, an apostrophe seems to mark a deflection of the message: O mysterious apostrophe, teach us to understand your workings! Show us your varied talents here!
> Such apostrophes may complicate or disrupt the circuit of communication, raising questions about who is the addressee, but above all they are embarrassing: embarrassing to me

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[5] See above, pp. 22–3.

and to you. Even an apostrophe delivered during a lecture on apostrophe, whose title might have prepared listeners for occasional apostrophes, will provoke titters.

(1981, 135)

There are, however, few titters, I presume, when reading Byron's apostrophe to his absent and

estranged daughter in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, for example:

> Is thy face like thy mother's, my fair child!
> Ada! sole daughter of my house and heart?
> When last I saw thy young blue eyes they smiled,
> And then we parted, – not as now we part,
> But with a hope.

(III, 1)

Or when reading one of Tennyson's many apostrophes to the deceased Hallam:

> Be near me when my light is low,
> When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick
> And tingle; and the heart is sick,
> And all the wheels of Being slow.
>
> Be near me when the sensuous frame
> Is rack'd with pangs that conquer trust;
> And Time, a maniac scattering dust,
> And Life, a Fury slinging flame.
>
> Be near me when my faith is dry,
> And men the flies of latter spring,
> That lay their eggs, and sting and sing
> And weave their petty cells and die.
>
> Be near me when I fade away,
> To point the term of human strife,
> And on the low dark verge of life
> The twilight of eternal day.

(L)

Or Milton's apostrophe to light in *Paradise Lost*:

> Thus with the Year
> Seasons return, but not to me returns
> Day, or the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn,
> Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summer's Rose,
> Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
> But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
> Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men

Cut off, and for the Book of knowledge fair
Presented with a Universal blank
Of Nature's works to mee expung'd and raz'd,
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
So much the rather thou Celestial light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

(III, 40–55)[6]

The same is true, if we turn to sacred literature, of the highly apostrophic Book of Psalms, for

example, as of The Song of Solomon:

Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord.
Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.
If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

(Psalm 103)

Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with
one of thy eyes, with one chain of thy neck.
How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine!
and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!
Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue;
and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.

(The Song of Solomon, 4:9–11)

Clearly, then, as Geoffrey de Vinsauf observed, "apostrophe may change her face" (1971, 50).

What is the difference between Culler's illustration and the examples we have quoted? J.

Douglas Kneale offers the following helpful comments on Culler's example:

Since Longinus, the prerequisite for a sublime apostrophe or prosopopoeia has been passion or
elevated emotion in the speaker or writer; without the rhetorical *sine qua non* both figures are
in danger of falling from the sublime to the ridiculous. "How ridiculous," Coleridge is reported
as saying, "would it seem in a state of comparative insensibility to employ a figure used only
by a person under the highest emotion, such as the impersonation of an abstract being, and an
apostrophe to it" (*Shakespearean Criticism* 2: 103). Wordsworth, who is frequently thought of
as dismissing prosopopoeia altogether in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, makes an important

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[6] Such effects are obviously not limited to poetry; here, for instance, is De Quincey's moving and memorable
apostrophe, uttered whilst recounting a dream in which he is reunited with the sixteen-year-old orphan and
prostitute Ann, who saved his life, and whom he never saw again:

Her face was the same as when I saw it last, and yet again how different! Seventeen years ago, when the
lamp-light fell upon her face, as for the last time I kissed her lips (lips, Ann, that to me were not
polluted), her eyes were streaming with tears: the tears were now wiped away [...].

(1956, 429)

yet traditional qualification: personifications, he writes, "are, indeed, a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion, and I have made use of them as such" [...]. Hence it goes without saying that Culler's deliberately corny example of apostrophe in "Apostrophe" [quoted above] fails precisely because it lacks this one prerequisite. The point is that no figure is inherently embarrassing; only bad figures are so.

(1999, 14)

Why do Culler and others completely disregard the traditional insistence upon the criterion of propriety as outlined by Kneale? If we are to give our assent to such differences – and they would seem to be useful and to correspond to something – we need to examine more precisely their nature and provenance as well as possible objections to them. Let us begin by looking at the most outspoken proponents of such considerations: namely, the Romantics.

"The true voice of feeling" and "false beauty proceeding from art"

Of the many polemical oppositions established by the Romantics, one of the most influential *and* controversial is undoubtedly the attempt to draw a line between a "proper" and an "improper" use of rhetoric.[7] To be sure, "rhetoric" had begun to be something of a dirty word quite early on in the eighteenth-century, and, as we shall illustrate in the following section, such distinctions form part of a very long tradition, with precedents in classical oratory and religious history as well as in poetry. Nevertheless, it was the Romantics, and most particularly Wordsworth and Coleridge, who in their reaction against, and demonisation of, neo-classical rhetoric most emphatically attempted in theory and practice to distinguish between a "legitimate" and "illegitimate" use of rhetorical figures with respect to the criterion of propriety.[8] On account of its central relevance to the present discussion, it

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[7] Needless to say, it is not only Modernism's avowed desire to "escape" from emotion or recent critics' insistence upon the rhetorical character of *all* writing that are opposed to such a separation; Byron, for example, compared to his contemporaries, is differently situated towards the issue of rhetoric, as seen in his defence of neo-classical verse, which exists alongside his indebtedness to Shakespeare as a Romantic model. Byron's peculiarity amongst the Romantics (excepting perhaps Shelley) lies in the fact that he sees no need to make the separation – of such importance to other writers of the period – between eighteenth-century and Shakespearean or biblical models of usage, whilst at the same time preserving the differences between them and employing both modes in his poetry.
[8] To Wordsworth, according to Wimsatt and Brooks, it was "an issue between artifice and nature. [...] To Coleridge it seemed more like an issue between propriety and impropriety, congruity and incongruity" (1957,

will be useful to quote in full the famous section from Wordsworth's Preface alluded to above by Kneale:

> The Reader will find that personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur in these volumes; and, I hope, are utterly rejected as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose. I have proposed to myself to imitate, and, as far as is possible, to adopt the very language of men; and assuredly such personifications do not make any natural or regular part of that language. They are, indeed, a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion, and I have made use of them as such; but I have endeavoured utterly to reject them as a mechanical device of style, or as a family language which Writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription. I have wished to keep my Reader in the company of flesh and blood, persuaded that by so doing I shall interest him.
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> (*LB*, 161)

The immediate object of Wordsworth's censure was, as we know, the conventionalised use of personification, a characteristic source or feature of which is apostrophe.[9] The rationale behind Wordsworth's argument is usefully summed up by M. H. Abrams:

> In his discussion of the style of valid poetry, Wordsworth took special exception to the personification of abstract ideas, "a mechanical device of style," except (this, as always, is his ruling sanction) as they are "occasionally prompted by passion."
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> [...] Wordsworth's indignation stems from the fact that he himself viewed with a religious reverence those experiences in which he gave a moral life and feeling "to every natural form, rock, fruit, or flower"; these were the results of his "creative sensibility," and the sovereign resource of his own poetry in its crowning passages. The unforgivable sin of the eighteenth-century poet, therefore, was to use such personification as a rhetorical convention. To Wordsworth's point of view, this dared to alter a natural object in cold blood, without justification in the power of natural and spontaneous passion to enter into, and so remake, the facts it perceives.
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> (1958, 291–2)

In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge makes the same distinction but does so with particular reference to the apostrophe:[10]

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354). Keats, of course, also, in his drafting of *Hyperion*, wished to distinguish (though, interestingly, had trouble doing so) between "false beauty proceeding from art" and "the true voice of feeling" (*KL*, 384–5)).

[9] It has been argued both that prosopopoeia implies apostrophe, and that apostrophe implies prosopopoeia: according to James J. Paxson (paraphrasing Paul de Man), the apostrophe "engenders a prosopopeia because the linguistic structure of the apostrophic utterance assumes or predicates a responsive human consciousness in inanimate objects" (1994, 52). J. Hillis Miller makes the corollary claim: "A prosopopeia is usually at least implicitly an apostrophe, an invocation, an attempt to bring back something that was presumably present but no longer is present" (1990, 238). Indeed, the two tropes are so closely aligned that J. Douglas Kneale can argue, with a certain legitimacy, that "what Culler's essay is really about is not apostrophe, but prosopopoeia" (1999, 13).

[10] It is worth noting that Coleridge subtly complicates, in agreeing with, Wordsworth's argument, in more openly acknowledging the inevitable involvement of artistic consciousness.

Through the same processes and by the same creative energy will the poet distinguish the degree and kind of the excitement produced by the very act of poetic composition. As intuitively he will know what differences of style it at once inspires and justifies; what intermixture of conscious volition is natural to that state; and in what instances such figures and colors of speech degenerate into mere creatures of an arbitrary purpose, cold technical artifices of ornament or connection. For even as truth is its own light and evidence, discovering at once itself and falsehood, so is it the prerogative of poetic genius to distinguish by parental instinct its proper offspring from the changelings which the gnomes of vanity or the fairies of fashion may have laid in its cradle or called by its names. [...] We find no difficulty in admitting as excellent, and as the legitimate language of poetic fervor self-impassioned, Donne's apostrophe to the Sun in the second stanza of his "Progress of the Soul" [quotes poem]

As little difficulty do we find in excluding from the honors of unaffected warmth and elevation the madness prepence of pseudo-poesy, or the startling hysteric of weakness over-exerting itself which bursts on the unprepared reader in sundry odes and apostrophes to abstract terms. Such are the Odes to Jealousy, to Hope, to Oblivion and the like, in Dodsley's collection and the magazines of that day, which seldom fail to remind me of an Oxford copy of verses on the two Suttons, commencing with:

Inoculation, heavenly maid! descend![11]

(*BL*, 1975, 218–9)

The ways in which James Beattie's "Essay on Poetry and Music" (first published in 1776) anticipates Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* have often been noted.[12] One of the most obvious parallels, and the subject of most relevance to us here, is their treatment of the use of rhetorical figures in poetry. Beattie's comments are of particular interest on account of his specification of pragmatic criteria for determining what constitutes, and the limits of, propriety:

Apostrophe, or a sudden diversion of speech from one person to another person or thing, is a figure nearly related to the former [personification]. Poets sometimes make use of it, in order to help out their verse, or merely to give variety to their style: but on other occasions it is to be considered as rather a trick of art, than an effort of nature. It is most natural, and most pathetic, when the person or thing to whom the apostrophe is made, and for whose sake we give a new direction to our speech, is in our eyes eminently distinguished for good or evil, or raises within us some sudden and powerful emotion, such as the hearer would acquiesce in, or at least acknowledge to be reasonable. But this, like the other pathetic figures, must be used with great prudence. For if, instead of calling forth the hearer's sympathy, it should only betray the levity of the speaker, or such wanderings of his mind as neither the subject nor the occasion would lead one to expect, it will create disgust, instead of approbation. The orator, therefore, must not attempt the passionate apostrophe, till the minds of the hearers be prepared to join in it.[13]

(1975, vol. 1, 552)

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[11] As George Watson points out, Coleridge is in fact mistaken in supposing that inoculation is personified in the Suttons' poem. The opening lines, referring to the actions of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, run as follows: "Inoculation, heaven-instructed maid, / She woo'd from Turkey's shores to Britain's aid" (Watson: 1975, 219).
[12] See, for instance, Abrams: 1984, 3–24.
[13] See also Beattie's comments on the figure in "Elements of Moral Science," Part IV, 1, "Tropes and Figures" (1975, vol. 2, 475–7).

Wordsworth, Coleridge and Beattie all distinguish, then, between anthropomorphic figures which are used as a "device of style," "a trick of art" or "cold technical artifices of ornament or connection" and those which are "prompted by passion" or are to be considered "an effort of nature." Although such distinctions have been called into question by twentieth-century discussions of art, the Romantics must have meant something by them. In an attempt to prevent this "something" from being lost, it may be instructive to suspend for the moment our disbelief, and investigate what, if any, support there is for such distinctions outside of Romantic writing.

Sacred and Profane Precedents

Approximate precedents for the Romantic distinction with respect to apostrophe between "the true voice of feeling" and "false beauty proceeding from art" may be found in classical rhetoric and Christian history. What form do these distinctions take, and what is the rationale behind them? Let us begin with classical rhetoric.

The two most detailed accounts of apostrophe in classical rhetoric are provided by Quintilian and the author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.[14] The most extensive of these, and the one of most relevance to our present discussion is Quintilian's. The author first has cause to mention apostrophe in his discussion of the *exordium* in Book IV of the *Institutio Oratoria*, ahead of his discussion of figures in Book IX, in which the more frequently quoted and slightly expanded definition of apostrophe occurs. Though peripheral to his larger discussion, his comments on the figure are of central interest to ours:

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[14] Surprisingly, none of the other major Greek and Roman rhetoricians refer to the figure of apostrophe explicitly. Aristotle talks generally about "the appeal to the audience," and "capturing the hearer's attention," though he does so without mentioning apostrophe by name (1932, 223; 224). Demetrius' *On Style* (*Peri Ermeneias*), which, in contrast to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, contains an analysis of specific, named rhetorical figures, includes several quotations involving apostrophes (see, for example, his discussion of "expletive particles" and "redoubling" (1982, 337; 391), but does not treat of the figure itself. Similarly, whilst all of Quintilian's illustrations of apostrophe are taken from Cicero's works, Cicero himself only includes a passing and unnamed reference to the figure amongst a long list of other figures in *Orator*, and then only to a less prevalent and allied variety of apostrophe: "The orator, then, whom we are trying to discover, will make frequent use of the following figures: [...] he will divert the attention of the audience from the point at issue" (1939, 413).

The figure which the Greeks call *apostrophe*, by which is meant the diversion of our words to address some person other than the judge, is entirely banned by some rhetoricians as far as the *exordium* is concerned, and for this they have some reason, since it would certainly seem to be more natural that we should specially address ourselves to those whose favour we desire to win. Occasionally however some striking expression of thought is necessary in the *exordium* which can be given greater point and vehemence if addressed to some person other than the judge.

(1920, vol. 2, 41)

Quintilian then goes on to explain why this should be the case, offering an example from Cicero's *Pro Ligario*:

His [Cicero's] speech would have been much less effective, if any other figure had been used, as will be all the more clearly realised, if the whole of that most vigorous passage "You are, then, in possession, Tubero, of the most valuable advantage that can fall to an accuser etc." be altered so as to be addressed to the judge. For it is a real and most unnatural diversion of the passage, which destroys its whole force, if we say "Tubero is then in possession of the most valuable advantage that can fall to an accuser." In the original form Cicero attacks his opponent and presses him hard, in the passage as altered he would merely have pointed out a fact.

(1920, vol. 2, 43)

In conceding the sense of but still disagreeing with his opponents' reasoning, Quintilian significantly complicates the issue of propriety, and foreshadows his treatment of "proper" and "improper" uses of the figure. Apostrophe, he recognises, is in a sense a species of digression, in that it entails a diversion from that which is, or logically should be, the main focus of concern. In another sense, however, according to Quintilian, *description* in such a situation, in place of apostrophe, would constitute an "unnatural diversion." Apostrophe, Quintilian seems to saying, is at once aberrant, illogical, natural and appropriate. What are we to make of this?

In defending the propriety of apostrophe in the *exordium*, Quintilian subtly alters whilst appearing to employ the criterion put forward by his opponents, according to which the figure's propriety is assessed, thus proving his point on his opponents' terms.[15] What is of significance to our investigation is that in doing so, Quintilian introduces a distinction between the logical and *emotional* appropriateness of apostrophic utterances. To turn away from the judge and the present in a judicial context, whilst clearly falling short of lunacy, would certainly seem to be illogical; yet such an act

might be *emotionally* appropriate – and more effective – and is, therefore, in Quintilian's terms, justified.[16]

When in Book IX Quintilian recurs to the emotional justification of exclamatory figures, he makes an explicit distinction between apostrophes (or exclamations[17]) which are of emotional origin and those which are "artfully designed." Commenting on the unattributed address "Gape now, wide earth," Quintilian writes:

> To this some give the name of *exclamation*, and include it among *figures of speech*. When, however, such exclamations are genuine [vera], they do not come under the head of our present topic [figures of speech]; it is only those which are simulated and artfully designed [arte composita] which can with any certainty be regarded as *figures*.
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> (1920, vol. 3, 389)

In the following chapter, Quintilian more precisely defines the nature of that which he opposes to "simulated and artfully designed" exclamations:

> The only figure of speech mentioned in [the *ad Herennium*], which I should prefer to regard as a figure of thought owing to its emotional character, is *exclamation*.
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> (1920, vol. 3, 503)[18]

Although the author of the *ad Herennium* does not explicitly distinguish between apostrophes in the way that Quintilian does, he clearly implies a distinction which anticipates Quintilian's in his comments on the propriety:

> If we use Apostrophe in its proper place, sparingly, and when the importance of the subject seems to demand it, we shall instil in the hearer as much indignation as we desire.
>
> ([Cicero]: 1954, vol. 1, 285)

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[15] *Nam prorsus esse hoc magis secundum* naturam *confitendum est, ut eos alloquamur potissimum, quos conciliare nobis studemus. [...] tum enim* vera aversa videatur *oratio et languescat vis omnis"* (1920, vol. 2, 40; 42 (emphasis added)).

[16] If we take into account Quintilian's subsequent definition of the figure, we can see that the sanctioning of apostrophes according to the criterion of emotional propriety extends beyond mere illogicality into the openly counter-rational: the apostrophes used by Quintilian to illustrate the figure are addressed, firstly, to the speaker's adversary – "What was that sword of yours doing, Tubero, in the field of Pharsalus?" – secondly, to inanimate, natural phenomena – "For I appeal to you, hills and groves of Alba," – and, thirdly, to abstractions – "O Porcian and Sempronian laws" (1920, vol. 3, 397).

[17] Quintilian follows the author of the *ad Herennium* in conflating the terms "exclamation" and "apostrophe" in his discussion of propriety.

[18] Quintilian's distinction between "figures of thought" and "figures of speech," though frequently repeated, is notoriously vague and controversial. For Quintilian's account, see *Institutio Oratoria*, VII and IX; for a recent and detailed discussion of the issue, see "The End of Rhetoric," in Todorov (1982, 84–110).

We might also note, finally, that Quintilian's distinction between apostrophes is endorsed by more general classical precepts on the issue of propriety. Aristotle, for example, writes:

> Your language will be appropriate if it expresses (1) emotion and (2) character, and if it is (3) in proportion with the subject. By proportion is meant that weighty matters shall not be treated in a slipshod way, nor trivial matters in a solemn way; nor should ornamental epithets be attached to commonplace nouns, or the effect will be comic, as in the poetry of Cleonphon. He used such phrases as absurd as it would be to say "O Lady Fig-tree!"
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> (1932, 197)

Unfortunately, one of the passages in *On Sublimity* not to survive apparently dealt with the subject of emotion, or more precisely, faults incident to emotion;[19] however, in an earlier section, Longinus concurs, in passing, with Aristotle:

> As in the human body, so also in diction swellings are bad things, mere flabby insincerities that will probably produce an effect opposite to that intended [...].
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> (1965, 103)[20]

Three points may be drawn from our brief look at classical writing on the subject of apostrophe and rhetorical propriety. First of all, it is possible to see in Quintilian's distinction between "genuine" exclamations of "emotional character" and those which are "simulated and artfully designed" a precedent for the canonical Romantic distinction between figures which are "prompted by passion" and those which are used as a "device of style." In the second place, we may note that classical writing on the subject of propriety with respect to the use of rhetorical figures in part concurs though in part disagrees with Culler's writing on apostrophe and embarrassment. Writers such as Aristotle and Longinus concur with Culler in arguing that the use of figures, such as apostrophe, which are associated with emotion and sublimity, *may* be "absurd" or "comic" (Aristotle) and *may* "threaten

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[19] The subject is announced and deferred at the end of III, 5.

[20] Two further references to the figure are made by Longinus in *On Sublimity*. The first is an example from Demosthenes, which is used by Longinus as an illustration of how figures may be productive of sublimity (1965, 125). The second reference to the figure occurs in the section on "Polyptoton: Interchange of Singular and Plural" (132 ff). Although, again, in both sections the focus is upon the *effect* of the figure, as opposed to what it expresses, Longinus' comments echo Quintilian's characterisation of the apostrophe as simultaneously natural and irrational. In Longinus' first example, the utterance is clearly in one sense illogical, in that the audience's ancestors who fought at Marathon are deified by Demosthenes' oath; nonetheless, such a counter-rational sense of reality is considered *emotionally* appropriate, and sanctioned by the circumstances in which the oath is uttered.

us with the reverse of our aim" (Longinus),[21] though – as Wordsworth and Coleridge would later concur – they differ from Culler in arguing that this is only *part* of the story, and that such embarrassment comes about when the use of the figure is not "in proportion with the subject" (Aristotle).[22] Finally, the aforementioned parallels notwithstanding, we should note the fundamental *difference* between classical and Romantic thinking on the subject of rhetorical propriety (famously delineated by Abrams (1958)); namely, that classical rhetoric – in contrast, generally speaking, to Romantic writing – in aiming to teach, delight and move (Cicero: 1949, 357), is primarily concerned with the *effect* of as opposed to what is *expressed* by emotive figures.

The Romantics' preoccupation with the intention or expression of the interior self, which comes to be set over against classical oratory's concern with "external" effects, leads us towards the second precedent for the former's distinction between rhetorical figures which are "prompted by passion" and those that are used as a "device of style." This second precedent is to be found, more diffusely, in a religious tradition as opposed to or not merely in the works of individual writers. That tradition is Protestantism.

Summarily speaking, at the centre of the Reformation lies a radically pared down concentration upon the unmediated relationship between the individual and God. This devaluation, if not outright rejection, of the role of the clergy, the sacraments, the saints and so on reflected a more general suspicion in matters of belief of the external, the communal, the mediated and the ritualised, and a concomitant valorisation of the interior, the im-mediate and the extempore. Drawing on the work of Mary Douglas, Stephen Sykes identifies three phases in the "move away from ritualism" for which Protestantism is largely responsible (1996, 161): "First is contempt of external ritual forms; second is the private internalizing of religious experience; and third, the move towards humanist philanthropy" (1996, 161). Focusing on the second of these, he continues:

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[21] Quintilian seems to be making a similar point when he talks of the "almost hazardous" use of animistic metaphor: "above all effects of extraordinary sublimity are produced when the theme is exalted by a bold and almost hazardous metaphor and inanimate objects are given life and action" (1920, vol. 3, 307).
[22] Joseph Priestley similarly speaks of the "ridiculousness" of apostrophes which have nothing to occasion them, which he distinguishes from those which are contextually justified (interestingly, including a special caution respecting its use or overuse (in oratory) by Englishmen) (1968, 113–4). Priestley also talks at the end of the lecture about the particular importance of propriety in relation to apostrophe: "These cautions are given in this

The emphasis on interiority is unmistakable in the Reformation. Luther classically developed a separation between physical or external, and spiritual or internal Christianity. [...] Externals belong to the realm of works. Justification by faith alone is the secret work of God upon the heart of humankind. Externals of all kind are of the devil unless preceded by the life-changing, interior transformation of one's standing before God. Once it is established that worship, including sacramental worship, is not offered in the hope that it will appear meritorious in God's sight, it ceases to be vain. Calvin's commentary on "vain repetition" makes precisely this point:

> Christ is checking the folly of those who, to persuade God, and to win him over, pour out a great flood of speech. This is not opposed to the teaching that persistence in prayer wins frequent approval in Scripture. When we come to pray with serious intention, the tongue does not outrun the heart, nor is God's favour secured by an empty flow of words, but rather, the longings which the devout heart sends out like arrowshoots are those that reach to heaven. This condemns, of course, the superstition of those who trust they will win merit with God for long mutterings.
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> (1996, 161–2)

There is obviously nothing revolutionary about seeing the act of worship as involving both the heart and the tongue or about insisting on the primacy of the former. This is precisely Aquinas's position (1964a, 107). What *is* revolutionary and of importance to our discussion is the setting of the tongue *over against* the heart, as alternative options or opposites, rather than seeing them, as Aquinas does, as different but unified aspects of a single properly twofold act.[23] The polarisation of "heart" and "tongue," and the suspicion or denigration of the external – which is obviously born of the Protestant belief in justification by faith alone, and its corollary devaluation of works as in any way able to influence God – becomes even more pronounced with respect to ritual prayer. As Friedrich Heiler notes:

> The evangelical sects have protested with all their might against the binding of common prayer by prescribed rules and forms. The English Independents considered fixed prayer or a statutory liturgy as a denial of the Holy Spirit, as blasphemy against God. Even the Lord's Prayer was not excluded from this rejection of all formulated prayer. Milton, in his *Defensio pro populo Anglicano*, has expressed in eloquent terms the anti-liturgical spirit of these Independents. In Calvinism touched by the spirit of the sects free prayer predominates. The most radical form of free congregational prayer is seen in Quaker meetings. The Quakers demand not only prayer that is unrestricted by any formulation, they insist on prayer that is perfectly spontaneous, breaking forth in power out of inspired conditions. This Spirit-inspired

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place, because they peculiarly relate to those forms of address which express earnestness, extreme confidence in one's cause, and that quick conception and animated delivery natural to *extemporary* speaking" (1968, 115).

[23] Aquinas discusses the issue further in a later article on vocal prayer, the propriety and purpose of which he explains as follows: "Vocal praise is useless if it does not come from the heart, for one should praise God while meditating with affection upon his glorious works. Vocal praise, however, arouses the interior affection of the one praising and prompts others to praise God [...]. We praise God, not for his benefit, but for ours" (1964a, 247).

prayer of the Quaker meetings is a border-line form between purely individual prayer and collective public prayer.

(1932, 310–11)

The relevance of Protestantism's attitude towards the act of prayer to the larger discussion of this section should be obvious. The Reformation, like the Romantic revolution, sets itself against what it sees as the debased and inauthentic practices of its predecessors, and sees itself as a return to origins and authenticity in its rejection of the traditional accretions of ritualised practice in favour of simplicity, immediacy and spontaneity, all of which is born of and appraised according to a radically prioritised criterion (and altered conception) of sincerity. This is, of course, a very crude summary, which generalises considerable differences on both sides of the comparison, yet it serves, it is hoped, to highlight parallels which are real and important. More precisely, we can see in Calvin's (representatively Protestant) opposition, with respect to prayer, of the tongue's "empty flow of words" to the ecstatic "longings which the devout heart sends out like arrowshoots [...] that reach to heaven" a clear analogue of the Romantic distinction, with respect to the use of rhetorical figures, between those which are employed as a "device of style" and those which are "prompted by passion." Furthermore, we can also see in its radical dependence upon the criterion of sincerity ("the devout heart") that the Reformers' distinction between authentic and inauthentic utterances, though more general, comes closer to Romantic thinking than the classical writers considered earlier (who stressed, rather, the criterion of effect) on the use of rhetorical figures. The connection we are attempting to tease out between Protestantism and the first generation Romantics is made more explicitly, if also more generally, by Harold Bloom:

Like that of all the English Romantic poets, Hazlitt's religious background was in the tradition of Protestant dissent, the kind of nonconformist vision that descended from the Left Wing of England's Puritan movement. There is no more important point to be made about English Romantic poetry than this one, or indeed about English poetry in general, particularly since it has been deliberately obscured by most modern criticism. Though it is a displaced Protestantism astonishingly transformed by different kinds of humanism or naturalism, the poetry of the English Romantics is a kind of religious poetry, and the religion is in the Protestant line, though Calvin or Luther would have been horrified to contemplate it. [...] Not that literary critics have been engaged in a cultural-religious conspiracy, but there are at least two main traditions of English poetry, and what distinguishes them are not only aesthetic considerations but conscious differences in religion and politics. One line, and it is the central

one, is Protestant, radical, and Miltonic-Romantic; the other is Catholic, conservative, and by its claims, classical. [...]

The main characteristic of English religious dissent was its insistence on intellectual and spiritual independence, on the right of private judgement in questions of morality, on the inner light within each soul, by which alone Scripture was to be read – and most of all, on allowing no barrier or intermediary to come between a man and his God.

(1971, xvii–xviii)

What conclusions can we draw from the findings of this section? Jonathan Culler's writing on apostrophe betrays the existence of certain distinctions in the use of the figure which his argument elides, without, however, providing any justification for doing so. In view of the fact that the sort of distinctions we are talking about are manifestly useful, and having seen in this section that they are not only recognised by Romantic writing, but also have clear precedents both in classical oratory and Christian history, it seems reasonable to contemplate their retrieval. If we are to do so, however, we need first of all to consider the case against them.

The Romanticisation of Rhetoric

As we all know, there is no art without art. And Romantic poems – to speak in the "demystifying" idiom of Iago – are obviously made of words as well. Attempting to distinguish between "emotion" and "artifice" or, as Keats puts it, "the true voice of feeling" and "false beauty proceeding from art" in poetry might therefore seem to be something of a category mistake. Indeed, the modern mind is as likely to side with Wilde, who, with justice and brilliantly purgative wit, contended that the proper aim of art is *lying*, that is, "the telling of beautiful untrue things" (1994, 1091), (although the force of his critique and the fact that it was prompted suggest that not everyone would agree). And if this is true of art in general, it is most especially true of Romantic art: "[f]or poetry knows all too well how, the more sincere a literal expression of self (of feelings, beliefs, etc.) or a telling of one's own story, the more conventionalized and the more copied from a tattered paradigm it will be" (Hollander: 1988, 4). Or as Wilde puts it: "to be natural [...] is such a difficult pose to keep up" (1994, 519). Poststructuralist criticism, generally speaking, has tended to embody a similarly – and often equally radical – anti-

Romantic view of art, correctly drawing attention to the necessity of rhetoric in all forms of writing. In poetry, then, the raw, the cooked and "the cooked" are all cooked. Surely, therefore, Romantic distinctions of the sort we have been discussing are untenable?

As they stand, this would certainly seem to be the case. Might we not, however, having taken cognisance of the poststructuralist critique, and the salutary reaction of the Aesthetic Movement, salvage – and *want* to salvage – such distinctions in a modified form? Are the differences perceived by the Romantics so uninteresting and insubstantial that we can dispense with them without loss? Obviously, I wish to suggest that the answer to the second of these questions is no. How, then, might such distinctions be reconceived, with respect to apostrophe, in a way that satisfies poststructuralist objections, and yet retains their usefulness and remains in touch with their original conception?

There are two levels to our proposal. The first of these – following Coleridge's more chary construal of the distinction between Romantic and neo-classical use of figures, based upon the criteria of congruity and propriety (rather than "sincerity" and "natural" or passionate spontaneity) – "softens" or delimits whilst nonetheless concurring with Wordsworth's conception[24] of the difference between figures which are "prompted by passion" and those that are used as a "device of style," though it offers us a way of more objectively distinguishing between differences in the use of apostrophe.[25] At a second level, we propose that these differences may be linked to Martin Buber's distinction, expounded in his philosophy of dialogue, between I-Thou and I-It modes of engagement. Our reason for wanting to do this is that Buber's philosophical paradigm, we suggest, not only offers an extensive and compelling account of the events that the act of apostrophe in poetry may represent, but also reconceives and extends, whilst remaining in touch with, Romantic distinctions with respect to the figure's usage. Our argument is thus at one level conventional and modest in its claims, and at another level more radical and speculative. What sort of distinction, more exactly, are we proposing, and what are its bases?

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[24] "In the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge tells us that he agrees with Wordsworth's attack against the 'falsity' in the modern poetic style, attributable to the use of figures and metaphors which have been 'stripped of their justifying reasons' and 'converted into mere artifices of connection and ornament.' He disagrees, however, with certain parts of the reasoning on which Wordsworth based his attack" (Abrams: 1984, 12).

[25] In his lecture on *Romeo and Juliet*, Coleridge puts forward a usefully succinct definition of propriety, describing Shakespeare's "conceits" as "completely justifiable," in "belonging to the state, age, or feeling of the individual" (*CSPP*, 250).

Borrowing our terms from Luigi Pirandello's essay *On Humour*, I wish to propose a distinction

between "Romantic" and "rhetorical" use of apostrophe.[26] It should be emphasised immediately that

this is a *contrastive* distinction, which is not intended to contradict what was said earlier about recent

criticism's insistence upon the necessity of rhetoric in all writing. Rather, it is offered as a way of

helping us to talk about the "predominance" of certain characteristics – to invoke Jakobson's helpful

approach to distinguishing the different functions of language (1960, 22) – which may vary

considerably from utterance to utterance, and exist *in spite of* identities at a formal or figurative level.

One of the major problems with literary Theory, as Valentine Cunningham insightfully observes, is its

tendency to "shrink" or diminish texts,

> by reducing them to formulae, to the formulaic, to the status only of the model, of models of
> literary function, even of literature at large, but still only a model. [...] Mess, contingency,
> overflow, surplus, somebody doing something a bit different with the old forms, being
> different from the next author, the next text, the text before this one in an *oeuvre*, any
> resistance to being reduced or limited to some given model – all the singularities and
> variations that ordinary readers actually look for in the next novel (say) they take off the
> bookshop shelf [...] – are not what Theorized reading is seeking, unless, of course, it can
> Theorize these surpluses and extras and thus grant then Theoretical sameness too. [...] Theory
> goes in for more of the same, and such describing inevitably involves a reduction of writing to
> just one, or a mere few, features. Here's yet another case of the aporetic, or whatever: a
> stunning one, maybe, but still just one more. Theory monodicizes, monodicizes texts,
> monodicizes readers.
>
> (2002, 122–3)

Cunningham's criticism applies to most of the recent writing on apostrophe, which has impoverished

while enlightening us about the figure. Apostrophes in literature are patently not *all* embarrassing or

"about" the frustrations of their figurative predicament – though obviously we have learned a great

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[26] Pirandello distinguishes between "rhetorical irony" and "romantic irony" (1960, 7), defining the former as essentially imitative and conventional, following "the external rules of traditional literary education" and bound by "the yoke of the classical intellectualistic poetics" (1960, 32), and the latter as that which "*dismantles*, splits and disrupts" (1960, 31), and which is a creative "revolt" against such conventionalised composition (1960, 32). Parallel distinctions have been proposed with respect to personification by, amongst others, Joseph Priestley and Henry Home, Lord Kames. In his *Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*, Priestley distinguishes between "serious" and "rhetorical" personification (1968, 254); and in his *Elements of Criticism*, Lord Kames makes a distinction between "passionate" and "descriptive" personification (1970, vol. 3, 64), where, to use James J. Paxson's gloss on Kames's types, "passionate" personification "involves the invention of characters in a discourse," and "arises out of genuine and sincere agitated passions," whereas "descriptive" personification "is mere rhetorical ornament" (1994, 27). More recently, Geoffrey Hartman has drawn attention to similar differences, with respect to invocation, which he relates to larger patterns in literary history. Writing of Gray's apostrophe to the River Thames in his ode "On a Distant Prospect of Eton College," Hartman observes: "Father Thames is eloquently mute, there is no formal prosopopeia, and the invocation is purely rhetorical and does not expect an answer. An inauthentic figure of speech becomes an authentic figure of silence" (1970, 316).

deal about the trope from accounts which have attempted to sustain such claims. Seeing them as such is not unlike sitting too close to the television screen and insisting that everything is made up of – and therefore only "really" is – a collection of tiny coloured dots. The anthropologist Mary Douglas, writing over thirty years ago on the subject of ritual, saw the need to differentiate between ritual and what she designates "ritualised ritual" in an attempt counter a comparably impoverished conception of ritual:

> Primitive religions are fortunate in that they cannot carry a dead weight of "ritualised" ritual (to adopt the sociologist's usage). Therefore anthropologists have not needed so far to consider the difference between external symbolic forms and internal states. It is fair enough that "ritualised" ritual should fall into contempt. But it is illogical to despise all ritual, all symbolic action as such. To use the word ritual to mean empty symbols of conformity, leaving us with no word to stand for symbols of genuine conformity, is seriously disabling to the sociology of religion.
>
> (1970, 3)

Our proposed distinction between "Romantic" and "rhetorical" apostrophe represents a similar attempt, in the face of the currently dominant "monodicizing" readings of the figure, to preserve the difference, evidently of such importance to the Romantics, between rhetoric and "rhetorical" rhetoric.

What, more precisely, are the bases of our proposed distinction? In his highly informative article "Apostrophe in Milton's Sonnets," referred to earlier, Michael Spiller proposes a parallel distinction between apostrophes, and offers the following useful explanation:

> In addressing further this very social trope, of which Milton was so fond, it may be useful to distinguish between weak and strong apostrophe [...]. The distinction between weak and strong apostrophe depends upon the figure of *prosopopoeia,* so commonly associated with it in rhetorical manuals of the time. When the speaker addresses a figure not properly human, using a *prosopopoeia* to anthropomorphise it, we have a weak apostrophe, in which the "feigning of a person" [...] is patent; the more vigorous the *prosopopoeia,* the greater the extent to which the addressee is imagined as existing externally apart from the speaker and reader, and the stronger the reader's sense of having lost the speaker's attention to another person.
>
> (1991, 479)

Spiller's account has a number of virtues. Firstly, whilst his distinction between apostrophes appears to correlate with those quoted earlier – on the use of rhetorical figures in general or on the related trope of personification – by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Beattie, Priestley, Kames and others, it is based upon the apparent degree of attention accorded to or engagement with the addressee rather than the

problematic criteria of "emotion" and "sincerity." Spiller's definition of the difference between

apostrophes therefore offers us a way refining our criterion of propriety or congruity, and appears to

confirm our contention that it is both possible and worthwhile to reconceive Romantic distinctions

respecting the use of rhetorical figures in a way that remains in touch with whilst avoiding the

problematic character of their original conception. Secondly, Spiller's use of the terms "strong" and

"weak" underlines the important fact, alluded to earlier, that the differences we wish to highlight are a

matter of predominance or *degree*.[27] Plainly, then, we are not suggesting that all apostrophes fit neatly

into one or other of our notional categories. On the contrary, we expect there to be all sorts of

overlaps, ambiguities and medial cases. One of the advantages of categorical distinctions, however, is

that they help us to talk about that which is *in*distinct. The principle of "gradience," as employed by

linguistics, is enlightening in this connection. Here is how its proponents Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech

and Svartvik explain the principle and its uses:

> Grammar is to some extent an indeterminate system. Categories and structures, for example,
> often do not have neat boundaries. Grammarians are tempted to overlook such uncertainties or
> to pretend that they do not exist. Our guiding principle in this grammar, however, will be to
> acknowledge them, and where appropriate to explore them through the study of
> GRADIENCE. A gradient is a scale which relates two categories of description [...] in terms
> of degrees of similarity and contrast. At the ends of the scale are items which belong clearly to
> one category or to another; intermediate positions on the scale are taken by "in-between" cases
> – items which fail, in different degrees, to satisfy the criteria for one or the other category.
>
> (1985, 90)

The relationship between "Romantic" and "rhetorical" apostrophe may, we propose, be viewed in a

similar way. This would allow us the usefulness of marking off certain paradigmatic cases from

others, whilst nonetheless recognising the existence of, and helping us to characterise, all sorts of

equivocal or intermediate cases.

There is one final feature of Spiller's definition that is of relevance to our argument. His

judiciously tentative criterion for distinguishing between apostrophes – "the more vigorous the

prosopopoeia, the greater the extent to which the addressee is imagined as existing externally apart

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[27] In spite of the advantages of Spiller's terminology, we have preferred the terms "Romantic" and "rhetorical"
primarily because the differences between apostrophes do not appear to be exhaustively accounted for as more or
less of a single feature, decisive though this is in many cases. As we shall argue in the final section of this
chapter, the act of invocation may be seen as a ritualised or quasi-liturgical act, which seems to involve

from the speaker and reader, and the stronger *the reader's sense* of having lost the speaker's attention to another person" (italics added) – alerts us to the element of subjectivity in such distinctions. Propriety, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, and what one reader might consider "appropriate," "vigorous" or "an actual conviction," to use Kames's phrase, might obviously appear otherwise to another reader. Such "problems" are obviously endemic to literary criticism. Though awareness of this fact should urge us to be cautious and sensitive in attempting to differentiate between literary phenomena, it need not, I think, mean having to abandon the enterprise altogether. Joseph Priestley's description of the problem and pragmatic response to it is, I believe, both sensible and workable:

> As the relish for this figure [personification] must depend upon the liveliness of the imagination, which is extremely various in different persons, and indeed very variable in the same person, it must be impossible for any one person to give rules whereby to judge in what cases any precise degree of it is proper. All that can be done is to note, by a regard to the general state and feelings of the human mind, the circumstances in which we imagine they will be generally judged proper or improper.
>
> (1968, 251)[28]

Having said something about the way in which we propose to distinguish between Romantic and rhetorical apostrophe, it will be useful, to conclude the present section, to comment briefly on our linking of these differences to Buber's philosophy of dialogue. Two questions may raised about our doing so which need to be addressed at the outset. In the first place, if Buber's distinction between I-Thou and I-It utterances is based upon the difference between second person address and third person description, what sense does it make to link this distinction to two different types of apostrophe, both of which are formally second person utterances?

As we noticed earlier, the difference between I-Thou and I-It utterances is a matter of differences in the act of confrontation or as J. Neville Ward puts it, "the amount of oneself" one puts

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something like "strong" apostrophe *and* something like "weak" apostrophe, without being exactly something in between.

[28] It may be recalled that the criteria put forward by Coleridge and Beattie for distinguishing between "proper" and "improper" usage of rhetorical figures, whilst differing from one another in certain respects, have a common pragmatic basis: Coleridge, for example, talks of a "parental instinct," whereby the poet may distinguish between "its proper offspring from the changelings which the gnomes of vanity or the fairies of fashion may have laid in its cradle or called by its names"; and Beattie, emphasising the consensual nature of the poet's judgement, sees the normative sympathy or assent of the audience as setting the standards of propriety: apostrophe, he writes, is most natural "when the person or thing to whom the apostrophe is made [...] is in our eyes eminently distinguished for good or evil, or raises within us some sudden and powerful emotion, such as the hearer would

into the encounter (1976, 113). It is *not* a matter of the words one uses; as Buber insists, "[t]he form of the words proves nothing. [...] many a spoken *Thou* indicates fundamentally an *It*, addressed as *Thou* only from habit and obtuseness, and many a spoken *It* fundamentally a *Thou*" (1944, 62). A second person utterance may therefore belie a mode of I-It experience, just as a third person utterance may harbour an I-Thou address. Spiller's definition of the difference between apostrophes as depending upon "the extent to which the addressee is imagined as existing externally apart from the speaker and reader, and the stronger the reader's sense of having lost the speaker's attention to another person" would therefore seem to be consonant with Buber's definition of the difference between I-Thou and I-It modes.

The second question which may be raised about our linking of differences in poetic apostrophes to Buber's philosophical paradigm is related to our earlier comments on "emotion" and "sincerity" in art and our discussion in the previous chapter of the figurative character of apostrophe. If, as we argued at the start of this section, "Romantic" and "rhetorical" apostrophes are *both* artistic constructions, are we not, in linking them to an ontological theory, and attempting to identify one with the unreserved turning of the self to the other (upon which I-Thou relation depends), and the other with the withholding and detachment of self (which characterises I-It experience), falling prey to the sort of naive realism we were at pains to reject?

The answer is no. What we are proposing in identifying differences in poetic apostrophes with Buber's ontological paradigm is *not* that apostrophes in poetry "are" either I-Thou or I-It utterances – though, as we argued in Part One, there is no logical reason why I-Thou utterances (as first person consonant acts of address) may *not* occur in literature – but rather that "Romantic" and "rhetorical" apostrophes may be seen as *representations* or *artistic depictions* of I-Thou and I-It modes of relation. Buber's philosophy of dialogue is therefore of relevance to the consideration of apostrophes in literature because, we believe, it offers an unusually profound and sustained meditation upon the phenomena that such utterances represent.

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acquiesce in, or at least acknowledge to be reasonable." The sensitivity that attends to such pragmatic boundaries

IV
I and Thou

The following section offers an outline of an alternative theological account, based on Buber's philosophy of dialogue, of what takes place when we apostrophise. There are three basic dimensions to this, which obviously form part of a single event, but which may be considered separately for the sake of clarity. Thus we may ask: What occurs (1) to the "I" (2) to the "Thou" and (3) *between* the "I" and the "Thou" when we apostrophise? The first and longest subsection "Sinister and Beneficent Ekstasis" examines the self's "taking leave of" itself in apostrophic relation and the generativity of the I-Thou utterance. "From Stones to Stars" and "A Slight Fit of Madness" consider the variety of phenomena that might be addressed, the controversial contention that in addressing any particular finite Thou we are also addressing the eternal Thou, and the sense of presence, sentience and responsivity that the act of apostrophe appears to confer. Lastly, the subsection "Giving and Receiving: of that which 'Hath no Beginning'" looks at the nature and paradoxical advent of that which occurs "between" an I and a Thou.

Sinister and Beneficent Ekstasis

In his well-known essay "Autobiography as De-Facement," Paul de Man claims that the act of giving life and voice to that which is not living – what James J. Paxson refers to as "apostrophic prosopopoeia" (1994, 12) – entails a corollary silencing and extinction of the speaking self in what might be described as a moment of sinister ekstasis:

> The omissions [in Wordsworth's quotation] from the Milton sonnet offer one way to account for the threat. In the elided six lines Milton speaks of the burden that Shakespeare's

is, I take it, part of what Valentine Cunningham means by "tact."

"easy numbers" represent for those who are, like all of us, capable only of "slow-endeavouring art." He then goes on to say

> Then thou our fancy of itself bereaving
> Dost make us marble with too much conceiving.

Isabel MacCaffrey paraphrases the two difficult lines as follows: "our imaginations are rapt 'out of ourselves' leaving behind our soulless bodies like statues." "Doth make us marble," in the *Essay on Epitaphs*, cannot fail to evoke the latent threat that inhabits prosopopeia, namely that by making the dead speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies, by the same token, that the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death. The surmise of the "Pause, Traveller!" thus acquires a sinister connotation that is not only the prefiguration of one's own mortality but our actual entry into the frozen world of the dead.

(1984, 78)

Martin Buber makes the contrary claim. The act of addressing the other as a Thou – which likewise involves ecstatically reaching beyond or "stepping outside of" the self – irrespective of whether that other is apparently absent, inanimate or deceased, does not, for Buber, entail a silencing or extinction but rather a *coming into being* of the self:

> I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*.
> All real living is meeting.

(1944, 11)

Uncannily, Coleridge says almost exactly the same thing:

> No I without a Thou, no Thou without a law from Him, to whom I and Thou stand in the same relation.

(Cited in: McFarland: 1969, 238)

Concomitantly, uninterrupted I-It experience, for Buber, entails a "deactualisation" of the "I" (*das entwirklichte ich*): "the *It*-world, left to itself, untouched and unthawed by the emergence of any You" becomes "alienated and turns into an incubus" and "the I of man is deactualised" (1996, 111).[29]

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[29] This generativity or coming into being of the self in I-Thou address, and its reversal in the failure to enter into such relation has obvious correlatives in Christian theology. Augustine, for example, as Phillip Blond reminds us,

> wrote of *magis esse*, a plenitude of being that the soul encounters when it turns towards God and *minus esse*, a privation of being, its lessening when the soul turns away from it origin in God and risks thereby becoming nihilated (*inanescere*). For Augustine the soul that turns away from God consorts with the lowest level of bare existence, a life that leads to nothingness (*tendere ad nihilum*).

(Blond: 1998, 8)

In what sense might the act of I-Thou address be described as an ek-static act? According to Buber, I-Thou relation is not something that happens *within* the self; instead, it takes place in – and constitutes the realm of – "the between" (*das Zwischen*):

> What is peculiarly characteristic of the human world is above all that something takes place between one being and another the like of which can be found nowhere in nature. Language is only a sign and a means for it, all achievement of the spirit has been incited by it. Man is made man by it; but on its way it does not merely unfold, it also decays and withers away. It is rooted in one being turning to another as another, as this particular other being, in order to communicate with it in a sphere which is common to them but which reaches out beyond the special sphere of each. I call this sphere, which is established with the existence of man as man but which is conceptually still uncomprehended, the sphere of "between." Though being realized in very different degrees, it is a primal category of human reality. [...]
> "Between" is not an auxiliary construction, but the real place and bearer of what happens between men; it has received no specific attention because, in distinction from the individual soul and its context, it does not exhibit a smooth continuity, but is ever and again re-constituted in accordance with men's meetings with one another.
>
> (1969, 203)

According to Buber, then, the self in relation does not, as it were, keep itself to itself, but "emigrates into" – and thereby establishes – the realm of the between.[30] The self thus reaches *outside of* the self, and is not "contained" or enclosed by itself, but transgresses its own limits in relation with the other, coming paradoxically *into* being in stepping ecstatically *outside of* itself.

This sense of I-Thou relation as transport or ekstasis is clarified if we consider more exactly to what it is opposed. The two modes of being in Buber's philosophy of dialogue are: relation (*Beziehung*) and experience (*Erfahrung*). Whilst the point is obviously lost in translation, in his account of what is meant by the latter, Buber draws attention by means of a play on words to the relationship between the word for "experience" (*erfahren*) and the word for "travel" (*fahren*): "*Der Mensch befährt die Fläche der Dinge und erfährt sie*" (1997, 9); "Man travels over the surface of things and experiences them" (1944, 5). As Walter Kaufmann comments in his note on this line:

> These words [*erfahren* and *Erfahrung*] are so common that it has hardly ever occurred to anyone that they are closely related to *fahren*, an equally familiar word that means to drive or go. *Befahren* means to drive over the surface of something. The effect of the German sentence is to make the reader suddenly aware of the possibility that *erfahren* might literally mean finding out by going or driving, or possibly by travelling. But by further linking *erfahren* and *befahren* Buber manages to suggest that experience stays on the surface.

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[30] The phrase in quotation marks is Merleau-Ponty's (2000, 139).

Buber's distinction between I-Thou relation and I-It experience thus sets up an opposition between two forms of "travelling" and two forms of knowing. Whereas experience (*Erfahrung*) might appear to yield knowledge as a result of its travels, and relation (*Beziehung*) may appear to involve stasis and discover no knowledge, for Buber, it is the *latter* that involves transport and hence also disclosure (transport *outside of* the self, and disclosure in unreservedly confronting or meeting the other), and the *former* that entails never setting out and never really "knowing" – in anything like the biblical sense – the other: "Those who experience do not participate in the world. For the experience is 'in them' and not between them and the world" (Buber: 1996, 56). I-It experience is therefore a travelling which is in fact stasis, and I-Thou relation a stasis which gives way to transport or *ek*-stasis.

Buber's claim – and de Man's negation of it – obviously forms part of a long religious and literary tradition.[31] Clearly, this is not the place for a detailed review of that tradition; however, it may help us to understand Buber's conception of ecstatic relation if we see it in connection with some of the more famous antecedent theoretical accounts of ekstasis.[32]

Whilst the basis for a theory of ecstatic being may be found in Plato's discussion of the soul[33] and its (longing for) separation from the body in the *Republic* (§611–12) and, at greater length, in the *Phaedo* (§62–71; 80–6), probably the two most famous foundational accounts of ecstatic experience within Christianity and Greco-Roman religious philosophy (excluding the teachings of Christ Himself) are provided by St Paul and Plotinus, respectively. The former writes in his second letter to the Corinthians:

> It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

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[31] De Man's adoption and negation or partial suppression of a religious argument is characteristic of his criticism, whose refusals and preoccupations suggest that its author was a little more than half in love with death. In his reading of literature, de Man seeks out, or is drawn to, and desires over and again to deny or exclude the positive side of religious claims. And though the critic was, of course, too knowing and urbane to protest too much, there *is* something intriguing about the need he evidently felt continually to deny and find corroboration of his denial of the claims of orthodox belief.

[32] For a useful "historical sketch of European mysticism from the beginning of the Christian era to the death of Blake," see the Appendix of this title in Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness.*

[33] Perhaps confusingly for us, what the Greeks meant by "soul" was an amalgamation of the "true self," "human reason" or "intellect" and "'life principle' or source of vital energy" (Gallop: 1999, xvi).

I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

(12:1–5)[34]

Plotinus's Neoplatonic account of ekstasis, which was written in the third century AD but owes nothing to Christianity, occurs at the close of the sixth *Ennead*, where he describes the mystical union of the soul with "the One" as: "another kind of seeing, a being out of oneself and simplifying and giving oneself over and pressing towards contact and rest" (1988, 343). In this state, he writes,

He [the seer] was one himself, with no distinction in himself either in relation to himself or to other things – for there was no movement in him and he had no emotion, no desire for anything else when he had made the ascent – but there was not even any reason or thought, and he himself was not there, if we must even say this; but he was as if carried away or possessed by a god [...].

(1988, 341–3)

Perhaps the most influential theoretical account of ekstasis, however – at least as far as Christianity is concerned – is to be found in Denys the Areopagite's *On the Divine Names*, which draws upon and brilliantly integrates the writings of St Paul and Plotinus.[35]

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[34] Paul more generally saw living in faith as involving a process of death and ecstatic rebirth. As he writes to the Galatians: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (2:20); and similarly to the Colossians: "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (3:3); and, finally, earlier on in his second letter to the Corinthians: "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (5:6–8). The idea of faith as a form of living in ekstasis is elaborated both by Luther and St Francis of Sales. "Authentic Christian spirituality," according to the former, "is characterised by some sort of mystical elevation, an elevation that raises us beyond ourselves and is always accompanied by the humble awareness of the spiritual poverty of our existence outside that state of elevation, which puts us outside of ourselves in the place of the Son and thus in communion with the Father. Such elevation happens to us in the event of baptism, but also in each commemoration of our baptism in the act of faith. According to Luther faith is trust in God that places us outside ourselves" (Pannenberg: 1996, 86). In his *Treatise on the Love of God*, St Francis distinguishes three kinds of "sacred ecstasy"; the third of these, which he describes as "all holy, all worthy of love" and "the crown of the other two" is "the ecstasy of act and life" (1997: 299).

[35] Augustine, of course, accomplishes a similar task in his *Confessions*, in which he outlines the influence of "the Platonists" and the Epistles of St Paul on his conversion to Christianity (Book VII), and describes, within the same Book, an experience of "Plotinion" ecstasy which he underwent at that time (Chapter 17). Two books later, after the "completion" of his conversion in the Milanese garden, Augustine recounts the second ecstatic vision recorded in the *Confessions* – which subtly but significantly differs from the first – which occurs in conversation with and shortly before the death of his mother (Book IX, Chapter 10).

If the experience of ekstasis, in Plotinus's philosophy, is a rare occurrence (we are told by Porphyry that Plotinus experienced ecstatic union on four occasions), and primarily a matter of our returning and responding in contemplation to the emanations from the One (though he does also describe the "horizontal" inter-communion of souls within the Good, and Nature's "dreamlike" contemplation of the One), according to Denys, it is a continual and universal process. Given the apparent correspondence on this point with Buber's philosophy of dialogue, it is worthwhile sketching out Denys's claims in a little more detail.

Denys's boldest claim, from a metaphysical point of view, concerns the paradox of Divine ekstasis, by means of which he explains God's providential love for creation:

> And we must dare to affirm (for 'tis the truth) that the Creator of the Universe Himself, in His Beautiful and Good Yearning towards the Universe, is through the excessive yearning of His Goodness, transported outside of Himself in His providential activities towards all things that have being, and is touched by the sweet spell of Goodness, Love and Yearning, and so is drawn from His transcendent throne above all things, to dwell within the heart of all things, through a super-essential and ecstatic power whereby He yet stays within Himself.
>
> (106)

According to Denys, the yearning for the Divine which leads to ekstasis is common to all things (93), so that in stepping outside of ourselves, we imitate and meet the Divine, stepping outside of Itself:

> And the Divine Yearning brings ecstasy, not allowing them that are touched thereby to belong unto themselves but only to the objects of their affection. This principle is shown by superior things through their providential care for their inferiors, and by those which are co-ordinate through their mutual bond uniting them, and by the inferior though their diviner tendency towards the highest. And hence the great Paul, constrained by the Divine Yearning, and having received a share in its ecstatic power, says, with inspired utterance, "I live, and yet not I but Christ liveth in me": true Sweetheart that he was and (as he says himself) being beside himself unto God, and not possessing his own life but possessing and loving the life of Him for Whom he yearned.
>
> (105–6)

Finally, for Denys – as the foregoing quotation implies – the experience of ekstasis may occur "horizontally," between created entities (though if God indwells and is bespoken by everything, then "horizontal" is also "vertical" communion). This sense in reaching and "feeling" outside of ourselves of things reaching outside of themselves towards us is adumbrated by Denys in his description of the third of the three motions of the soul:

And it [the soul] moves straight forward when it does not enter into itself to feel the stirrings of its spiritual unity [...] but goes forth unto the things around it and feels an influence coming even from the outward world, as from a rich abundance of cunning tokens, drawing it unto the simple unity of contemplative acts.

$(99)^{36}$

Bold as Denys's claims undoubtedly are, they are approvingly cited by Thomas Aquinas, and incorporated into his own account of ecstasy in the *Summa Theologiæ*.[37] Aquinas's exposition covers six points of inquiry, which, on account of the range of relevant issues they raise, it will be useful to outline briefly.

The first point asks "whether," in ecstasy, "a man's soul is carried away to divine realities"? (1969, 95). What concerns Aquinas in this article is what it means or whether it makes any sense to say that a person is "carried away." This is, firstly, a matter of whether it is "in line with a man's nature" to be "raised to divine realities" (since, if it is, this would not, strictly speaking, be ecstasy, as this is defined (following Peter Lombard) as "an elevation from a state in accordance with nature towards that which is above nature, by the power of a superior nature"); secondly, whether it belongs to "the mode and worth of a man" to be so uplifted; and, lastly, whether or no the experience of ecstasy "connotes a certain violence" (1969, 95). Aquinas concludes that it *is* correct to speak of a person's being carried away to divine realities as ecstasy since, he argues, whilst it is "natural for a man to tend towards the divine by an apprehension of sense objects," that "condition in which a person is uplifted to the divine with an abstraction from the senses is *not* natural to man" (1969, 97; emphasis added). It follows from this that though it "belongs to the mode and worth of a man to be lifted up to the divine because man was created in the image of God," given that "the divine goodness infinitely surpasses human capacities, man needs to be supernaturally helped to attain this good," which "takes place in any bestowal of grace" (1969, 97). Finally, whilst the mind's being lifted up in this way is "above the capacities of nature," it is not "against nature" (1969, 97) and hence not "violent," since (according to Aristotle) violence is only done "when the principle is external and the sufferer confers

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[36] Aristotle seems to be proposing a similar conception of the soul as radically open to and in some sort of continuity with that which is outside of the self in his famous claim in *De Anima* that "the soul is in a way all existing things" (1952, 664).

[37] Aquinas considers the subject of ecstasy under two different headings, namely, in relation to "Love and Desire" (1a, 2æ, 28, 3) and "Mysticism and Miracle" (2a, 2æ, 175).

nothing to it" (95), whereas in the case of the lifting up of the mind of man to divine realities, the act is consonant with "the end to which man's nature and tendency is ordered" (99), and to which he himself therefore, voluntarily and naturally, contributes (95–7).

The second article in Aquinas's account deals with "whether ecstasy relates to a faculty of knowledge or an appetitive power." Aquinas's complex conclusion, summarily stated, is that, if considered in terms of the *object* to which a man is drawn, ecstasy relates to the intellective rather than the appetitive powers; though, if considered in terms of its *cause*, ecstasy may be related to the affective as well as the appetitive powers (99–101). Complicatedly, the appetitive, however, may be subdivided into the intellective appetite (which is "higher" and termed "will") and the sense appetite (which is "lower" and termed "sensitive"), so that, according to Thomas, ecstasy may be a falling *beneath* oneself as well as an elevation *above* oneself.

The third article concerns "whether Paul when 'rapt to heaven' saw God's essence." Aquinas's answer is guarded but affirmative. Basing his conclusion on the authority of Augustine, and his reading of Paul's enigmatic claim to have "heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter," he says that "it is better to say that he did see God in his essence" (105). Thomas makes it clear, however, that contemplation of divine truth "in its essence" in this life is exceptional and akin to prophecy. There are, he specifies, three ways in which the human mind may be "rapt up by God to contemplate divine truth," of which this is the most privileged. The other ways are, firstly, "to contemplate it by certain imaginative comparisons," and, secondly, "to contemplate it by its effects upon the intellect" (105).

Aquinas's fourth point of inquiry concerns "whether St Paul in ecstasy was abstracted from his senses." Concurring once again with Augustine, who writes that "[u]nless one dies in some way to this life, either completely leaving the body, or turned away and abstracted from the bodily senses, one cannot be raised to that vision" (109), Aquinas affirms:

> the intellect of man, in its this-life state, must be abstracted from the senses if it is to see the divine essence. For by no image can the essence of God be seen; it cannot even be seen by any created intellectual idea, because the essence of God infinitely exceeds not only all bodily realities (images are among these), but also all spiritual creatures.
>
> (109)

The penultimate point of inquiry relatedly asks "whether in that state [of ecstasy] St Paul's soul was wholly separate from his body." Aquinas's answer is qualified but negative, insisting on a degree or form of rather than absolute separation:

> Because the soul is united to the body as its own natural form, it is in keeping for the soul to have a natural aptitude for understanding by turning to images. This natural aptitude is not taken away by the divine power in ecstasy, because the state of man is not altered [...]. As long as the state of ecstasy endures, an actual turning to images and sense-objects is removed from the soul, lest it should impede its elevation to that which excels all images [...]. And so in ecstasy there was no need for the soul to be so separated from the body as not to be united to it as a kind of form. It was needful however that St Paul's intellect should be abstracted from images and the perception of sense objects.
>
> (113)

Aquinas's final point of inquiry concerns what Paul himself *knew* about the experience of ecstasy, asking specifically: "whether St Paul did not know whether or not his soul was separated from his body." Aquinas states first of all that the Apostle "knows something, namely that he was caught 'up to the third heaven'; and [...] was ignorant of something, namely 'whether in the body or out of the body'" (115). More precisely: he "knew that he was rapt up as regards his soul and not as regards his body, but was in ignorance how his soul was related to his body, i.e. whether it was or was not with a body during the course of his ecstasy" (115). Thomas then considers various interpretations of the Apostle's "not knowing," only to conclude with Augustine, however, that those "who propound an opinion on this subject speak more from conjecture than from certitude" (117).

Whilst our review of theoretical writing on the subject of ekstasis could, of course, be extended in a number of directions, the authors we have looked at so far furnish us with sufficient material to be able revealingly to compare and contrast Buber's conception of ecstatic relation with other traditional accounts of ekstasis. In what ways, then, does Buber's account differ from and coincide with those we have outlined?

Several issues emerge as pertinent. The first of these comes into view in comparing Buber's conception of I-Thou relation with the ekstasis of mysticism. Buber frequently and emphatically insisted that he was *not* a mystic and that I-Thou relation was *not* a mystical experience. The fact that it was *necessary* frequently and emphatically to gainsay the contention suggests that there must at least be a certain resemblance or commonality. Though, as Chesterton once remarked, "a fine distinction

can be a flat contradiction" (1956, 70). This may be true of the similarity between Buber's conception of ecstatic relation and the ekstasis of mysticism.

Broadly speaking, the fundamental difference between the two is that whereas the mystic seeks a loss of self and absorption into or undifferentiated unity with "the One" (Plotinus), I-Thou relation, according to Buber, *preserves*, even as it bridges, the difference between the self and the other. Buber, however, we should note, also speaks of "participating in" things (*Anteil an der Welt haben* (1997, 9)), which belongs to relation, implying thereby that we participate in things in meeting them outside of themselves. This preservation of difference obviously distinguishes monism from theism.[38] The other important difference, emphasised by Buber, is that whereas mysticism attempts to attain union through renunciation and a turning *away* from or annulment of the actual (the word "mysticism" derives from the Greek *myein*, which means "to close" (the eyes or ears) (Barnstone: 1983, 7)), I-Thou relation, according to Buber, involves an unreserved *openness* and turning *towards* the other, *embracing* the actual, in all its actuality.[39]

In spite of such differences, there is an important way in which Plotinus's Neoplatonic account of mystical ekstasis and Denys's Christianised interpretation coincide with Buber's conception of I-Thou relation. Whilst Buber places considerably more emphasis on the fact that I-Thou relation is a universal or "three-way" thing (between man and God, God and man, and man and man (or creature and creature)), as we have seen, Plotinus and Denys also both talk of "horizontal" as well as "vertical" ekstasis. We can therefore also see that the notion of *reciprocal* relation – which is again obviously emphasised and radicalised in Buber's account – is foreshadowed in the writing of Plotinus and Denys, both of whom (though in different ways) see the ekstasis of man in the direction of God as an *answering* ekstasis, which meets and is made possible by a Divine ekstasis, addressing and sustaining us. We also, lastly, noticed that this principle is extended in Denys's account, as it is in Buber's, so that *all* things – not just man and God – are seen as departing from (without effacing) themselves in ekstasis.

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[38] As Willis Barnstone defines it, monists "seek total, [theists] partial, union with God. The monists are often pantheists (God is one and every where), and in seeking union with God become God. But for the theists there always remains a dualism of man or woman and God: therefore, even at the moment of union, man or woman adheres to but is not absorbed by God. There remain two identities" (1983, 8).

[39] For an extended discussion of the relationship between Buber's philosophy of dialogue and mysticism, see Hugo Bergman (1967).

If we turn to the account of ekstasis offered by Aquinas, and compare it to Buber's philosophy of dialogue, a number of further points emerge. First of all, Aquinas's comments concerning the question of whether it is within our nature to be raised *above* our nature (and whether, if our being "carried away" from ourselves is dependent upon that which is *outside* of ourselves, this does not "connote a certain violence") appear to correlate with Buber's contention that the moment of relation can neither be brought about by means of nor without our will, but is instead dependent upon "grace" (1944, 11). Secondly, there seem to be interesting parallels between Aquinas's guarded and carefully qualified conclusions on the subject of whether St Paul, when "rapt to heaven," saw God's essence and Buber's similarly bold yet guardedly metaphorical claim that I-Thou relation involves a looking out "towards the fringe of the eternal Thou" (1944, 6). Related to this, Thomas's insistence that the moment of revelation involves a concomitant "abstraction from the senses" appears to be consonant with Buber's insistence that the reality disclosed in I-Thou relation is inaccessible to I-It knowledge. Finally, Aquinas's conclusion that St Paul's experience of revelatory ekstasis involved both knowledge *and* ignorance, and the Apostle's own testimony that in being "caught up into paradise" he heard words which were "unspeakable" upon his return (2 Corinthians 12:4) both appear to coincide with Buber's claim that what occurs or is revealed in I-Thou relation may be meaningfully received but neither "known" nor expressed (Buber: 1944, 109–11).

Having identified a number of provisional parallels, to which will return in subsequent sections, we may conclude our comparison by drawing attention to two silences or lacunae that are brought to light by our consideration of traditional theoretical accounts of ekstasis. One is to be found in Buber's account of I-Thou relation, the other in de Man's comments on prosopopoeic apostrophe.

In the accounts of ekstasis put forward by Aquinas and Francis de Sales, we find a distinction – which is evidently of importance to both writers – between "intellective" or "sacred" and "sensual" ekstasis (Aquinas: 1969, 101; de Sales: 1997, 294). In this manner, both writers introduce an *ethical* criterion into their discussion, and distinguish between ecstasy which is an elevation above oneself and

that which is a falling beneath oneself. Such distinctions and considerations of the ethical import of relation are notably absent from Buber's *I and Thou*.[40]

Turning to our second point: as we noticed earlier, de Man's description of the "sinister" ekstasis that the act of prosopopoeic apostrophe supposedly entails – that our being rapt "out of ourselves" involves being "frozen in [our] own death" – belongs to or borrows from an extensive religious tradition. Augustine and Aquinas, for example – following the writings of St Paul – both refer to ekstasis as a proleptic experience of death. Augustine, as we have seen, insists that "[u]nless one dies in some way to this life, [...] one cannot be raised to that vision" (cited in Aquinas: 1969, 109). Thomas, also writing about Paul's being "caught up into paradise," and the possibility of the Apostle's soul being prematurely separated from his body, similarly comments: "There is no objection to calling ecstasy a death produced by the special intervention of God" (1969, 117). Needless to say, however, the "death" referred to by these writers is only justified as a metaphor by the other-worldly experience to which it gives way. De Man's argument is therefore really *half* an argument, in that the critic adopts the first part of a religious or metaphysical claim whilst suppressing the conclusion upon which it conceptually depends. This is obviously not to say that what de Man says cannot be true – like Buber's claim, it cannot be verified – but rather that his disbelief is strangely enamoured of and indebted to belief.

Whilst the verification of either claim is neither possible nor strictly our business here, we need, however, to ask, how relevant and useful is Buber's argument when it comes to poetry?

I wish to contend that the complex of claims made in Buber's philosophy of dialogue – that in the act of confronting the other as a Thou, the self reaches ecstatically outside of the self, answering and revealing the ekstasis of the other, and brings into existence a mode of relation, which preserves whilst bridging the difference between them, and simultaneously involves intimations of, and relation with, that which is *beyond* them – offers us a compelling theoretical account of what appear to be some of the central and recurrent concerns of many of the most canonical Romantic poems. We

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[40] It should be immediately added that Buber was, of course, *profoundly* concerned with the ethics of man's relationship with man, which he explores in a range of publications on community, education and philosophical anthropology. The criticism abbreviatedly alluded to above – which has been pointedly formulated by Levinas and others, pertains, however, to the concentration in *I and Thou* on the ontology of relation, and the uncritical privilege it is accorded as a mode of being, at the expense – according to Buber's critics – of a sufficient

cannot, of course, here do anything more than offer a few representative examples in support of this claim; however, if our contention is borne out by these examples, the wider relevance of Buber's model may be inferred.

Obviously, not every example we have chosen exhibits all of the features we have, somewhat artificially, itemised (in accordance with the principle of "gradience" mentioned earlier), though, equally, most of them evidence more than the one feature they have been chosen to illustrate. The poems we have selected to exemplify the ecstatic coming into being of the self in relation are by Byron and Coleridge. The principal reason for choosing these particular texts – *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and "Dejection: an Ode" – is that both poems offer analytical reflections on the moments of relation that they represent. Our consideration of Byron's treatment of ecstatic relation requires some general introduction in order to clear away certain misleading associations.

For obvious reasons, but with less obvious costs, the stanzas we shall focus on from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* have come to be known, somewhat disparagingly, as the "Wordsworthian" stanzas. To be fair to such disparagement, it has to be acknowledged that Byron was himself a little flip about – though attached to – the Canto from which they are taken. Writing to Moore in 1817, he said: "I am glad you like it; it is a fine indistinct piece of poetical desolation, and my favourite. I was half mad during the time of its composition, between metaphysics, mountains, lakes, love unextinguishable, thoughts unutterable, and the nightmare of my own delinquencies" (*BLJ*, vol. 5, 165).[41] Yet Byron had a habit of being rather flip about (what is considered to be) some of his *best* poetry, and, as we know, about poetry in general. We should therefore be wary about the status we attribute to such disparagement. Some of the mud – originally cast by Wordsworth himself[42] – has nevertheless stuck, and there is a lingering tendency to measure the Canto's merits against Wordsworth's achievement, and to see its "metaphysics" as the poet's trying on of another's clothes

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recognition of the need and alterity of the other. Unfortunately, there is no space to go into such criticism any further here.

[41] Some years later, in conversation with Medwin, Byron sounded even more distanced and sniffy, saying: "Shelley, when I was in Switzerland, used to dose me with Wordsworth physic even to nausea" (cited in: Marchand: 1965, 53).

[42] Wordsworth – according to Moore's record of the conversation – claimed: "the whole third canto of 'Childe Harold' founded on his style and sentiments. The feeling of natural objects which is there expressed, not caught by B. from nature herself, but from him (Wordsworth), and spoiled in the transmission. 'Tintern Abbey' the source of it all" (cited in: Marchand: 1965, 52).

which do not really suit him.[43] The comparison is obvious and warranted, yet it is also distracting, since, as a result, the central stanzas on Lake Geneva have come to be seen as neither organically related to the poem as a whole nor as telling us anything essential about Byron. I wish to argue, however, that the poem's Alpine "Wordsworthian" stanzas may be seen as exemplifying and as a – manifestly indebted – reflection on something that is not only central to the poem but also to Byron's poetry in general. This something is the irruption of apostrophic ekstasis.

Byron is the poet of calling out – of calling, to recall Aphra Behn's admirable phrase, with "out-stretch'd voice." His writing is filled with invocations which carry their speakers outside of themselves towards what they address. *Manfred* centres around a series of invocations. *Cain* begins with communal prayer. *Heaven and Earth* has, in its opening scene, an invocation lasting ninety-eight lines. *Marino Faliero* ends with a climactic apostrophic curse lasting seventy-three lines. *Sardanapalus*, also, ends with a shorter but equally climactic invocation. Though if Byron's dramas are littered with acts of calling out, his two major long poems – *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan* – whilst obviously narratives, are even more intensely apostrophic. For a number of reasons, we shall focus on the treatment of ecstatic relation in the former.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage is a poem about *Erfahrung* and *Beziehung*. It is a poem according to our earlier explanation of these terms, about the experience of travelling and the travelling of experience but also about the transport involved in relation. It is, we might say, a poem about geographical and ontological "emigrations." In what sense ontological?

One of the most remarkable things about *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is the way in which its world is inhabited – haunted even – by beings which are *between* being and non-being, by things which seem to exist *outside of* themselves or "in" other things. It is a world of things in ekstasis. Vincent Newey has drawn attention to the fact that the "early stanzas of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in both references to Harold and reflections of the poet *in propria persona*, delineate a whole range of ontological states in which the mind has become divorced from 'actuality'" (1998, 153). This is true – if we understand by the "actual" the punctual, material appearance of a thing, since the poem calls

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[43] Jerome McGann, for example, comments that the "Wordsworthian/Shelleyan motifs in the poem are more aimed for than convincing, for Byron was never so alive to the secret ministries of Nature as were the other Romantics" (1980, 300).

radically into question what it is we mean by "is" – not only of Harold and the narrator (though it is *pre-eminently* true of the latter) but of *all sorts* of things in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. People, places, natural phenomena and works of art are continually perceived as ecstatically exceeding themselves, as refusing to keep themselves to themselves. The poem also presents us with a world – if we may extend the analogy implied in Newey's comment – not only of "divorce" but of illicit cohabiting, profound unconsummated longing, and promiscuous *infidelity* to the "actual." To turn Leavis's famously unfair charge against Shelley to Byron's advantage, the narrator in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* has a remarkably *firm* grasp of the "*non*-actual." This sense of ecstatic being seems both to be the cause of, and to occur in, the act of apostrophe.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage is filled with irruptions of apostrophic calling, which carry the speaker outside of himself in reaching for relation with the – often apparently unreachable – other. What is particularly interesting about the irruptions of voice in the poem is the peculiarly elegiac character of so many of them, which informs but does not extinguish the vitality they seem both to bespeak and bestow. This sense of elegy has a number of obvious sources.

A striking number of the apostrophes in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* are addressed either to the absent or deceased – Ada (III, 1 and 115–8), Wingfield (I, 19), Edleston (II, 9 and 95), Major Howard (III, 30); or to places which, as the narrator says of himself in the penultimate stanza of the poem, are "not now / That which [they] have been" – Parnassus (I, 60–3), Greece (II, 85–91), Venice (IV, 17), Italy (IV, 55), Rome (IV, 78–9) and so on. In confronting such things, the poet is painfully aware that something has been lost or is lacking. Yet, as we have suggested, somehow, to him, these things exceed or are not exhausted by their absence, past-ness or lack of life. "Twined with my heart, and can I deem thee dead / When busy Memory flashes on my brain?" the narrator asks, suddenly apostrophising Edleston (II, 9). "Though here no more Apollo haunts his grot, / And thou, the Muses' seat, art now their grave, / Some gentle spirit still pervades the spot," he says in his equally sudden apostrophe to Parnassus (I, 62). For this reason, he calls "with outstretched voice," though, for this reason, his calling is elegiac. The case is slightly different with natural phenomena. Here, too, we find a "yes" and a "no," though this has more to do with Byron's acute sense of our mixed and conflicting nature. As Manfred says:

> How beautiful is all this visible world!
> How glorious in its action and itself!
> But we, who name ourselves its sovereigns, we
> Half dust, half deity, alike unfit
> To sink or soar, with our mix'd essence make
> A conflict of its elements [...].
>
> (I, 37–42)

This has an important bearing on our discussion of ecstatic relation.

Whilst for both Byron and Wordsworth, nature manifestly offers some sort of "escape," it is important to distinguish what it is she offers escape *from*. Whereas, for Wordsworth, nature affords refuge from the "weariness," the "fretful stir" and "the fever of the world" ("Tintern Abbey"), for Byron, she seems to offer escape from the self and from *human nature*. Wordsworth, of course, finds in relation with nature moments of escape from the mortal self, when – in a process which prefigures our death and alludes to our creation – "we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul" ("Tintern Abbey"[44]), and Byron, to be sure, also seeks refuge from the "crushing crowd" and the "contentious world," in which we are "doomed to inflict or bear" (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, III, 69 and 71). Yet the violent loathing of the human "clay" and the excoriating sense of sin – these things are Byron's, not Wordsworth's. And they are harder to escape.

It is this piercing sense of human and individual fallenness – of the "chain / Which galled for ever, fettering though unseen, / And heavy though it clanked not" (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, III, 9) which, for Byron, forms the "no" out of which every "yes" must rise. It is, however, Byron's profound sense of loss and fallenness that makes his awareness of the coming into being, and the being carried outside of oneself, in relation so keen. This is why, in turn, his apostrophes in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* are of such interest to our discussion. Let us take a look, then, at the familiar Alpine stanzas and the poem's account of ecstatic relation. Here is the first of the "metaphysical" stanzas:

> I live not in myself, but I become

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[44] "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis, 2:7). We might here note the "ecstatic" parallel between God's bestowal of Himself as spirit, by means of which man is brought to life, and the divine kenosis of the Incarnation, by which means man may be brought to *eternal* life. From a Christian perspective, our ekstasis thus, on the one hand, "reverses" in imitating the divine ekstasis of our creation, though, on the other hand, this "reversal" allows us proleptically to partake of the resurrection made possible by the kenotic ekstasis of the Incarnation.

Portion of that around me; and to me
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
Of human cities torture: I can see
Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be
A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
Class'd among creatures, when the soul can flee,
And with the sky – the peak – the heaving plain
Of ocean, or the stars, mingle – and not in vain.

(III, 72)

The stanzas on Lake Geneva, we suggested, are of particular interest because they intersperse the address of natural phenomena (the lake, the stars, the mountains and so forth) with what appears to be a commentary or a *reflection* on the mode of relation that such apostrophes announce. If this is the case, what do Byron's stanzas tell us about I-Thou relation?

What we notice first of all is that it is obviously an *ecstatic* experience – "I live not in myself, but I become / Portion of that around me." It will be noticed, in addition, that Byron concurs with Buber in asserting that it is paradoxically in stepping *outside of* the self that the self comes *into* being: "And thus I am absorb'd, and this is life" (III, 73).[45] This sense of becoming or coming into being is emphasised by the enjambment in the initial assertion – "I live not in myself, but I become" – which passingly suggests intransitive becoming, and in doing so sets itself in opposition to the antecedent "live not," thereby devaluing quotidian non-ecstatic being. There is, furthermore, a suggestion, three stanzas later, that the moment of relation involves an experience of *reciprocal* ekstasis:

Are not the mountains, waves and skies a part
Of me and of my soul, as I of them?

(III, 75)

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[45] Byron describes the act of creation in similar terms at the start of the Canto:

'Tis to create, and in creating live
A being more intense, that we endow
With form our fancy, gaining as we give
The life we image, even as I do now.
What am I? Nothing: but not so art thou,
Soul of my thought!

(III, 6)

To adapt Dante's remarkable coinage, quoted in our epigraph, things seem to "in-him" him as he "in-thems" them (this would obviously be prettier in Italian: *Se loro s'inegliassero, come lui s'ineglina*).[46] Byron's intriguing assertion that high mountains are a "feeling" (perhaps echoing Wordsworth's similar usage in "Tintern Abbey," 78–81) might, relatedly, be interpreted, especially in the light of the subsequent speculation – "shall I not / Feel all I see, less dazzling, but more warm? / The bodiless thought? the Spirit of each spot?" – as positing the sort of reciprocal, radical openness or disembodied sensitivity that is described by Denys (the soul "goes forth unto the things around it and feels an influence coming even from the outward world") and implied in Aristotle's claim that the soul is "in a manner all things." Finally, it should not escape notice that a number of questions are asked in and raised by the first part of Byron's commentary (stanzas 72–5). This is interesting in itself. Two points, however, are worth drawing out.

Byron's description of ecstatic relation seems in some ways to verge on, if not actually shade over into, an assertion of mystical – that is, monistic – union: "And thus I am absorb'd"; "I become / Portion of that around me." If this were the case, it would seem to differ from Buber's account of I-Thou relation in a crucial respect. This impression is, however, I think, controverted, firstly, by the fact that the poet does not talk in terms of "the One," into which the self is undifferentiatedly annihilated, and, secondly, by the fact that even in his description of union, he consistently retains – and shows no *desire* to relinquish – the sense of difference between the speaking self and the particular other: the poet, that is, still speaks of "I" and "me" even when these participate in or are participated in by the other.[47]

The other question that is raised by Byron's account concerns the way in which he appears to use the words "mind" (74), "soul" (72, 75) and "I" (72) interchangeably to describe what it is that

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[46] It might also be noted that Fontanier's "ecstatic" definition of apostrophe, somewhat dismissively cited by Culler (see p. 17 above), actually seems to fit remarkably well with the experience described by Byron:

> what can give rise to apostrophe? It can only be feeling, and only the feeling stirred up within the heart until it breaks out and spreads itself about on the outside, as if acting on its own ... [as if it were] the spontaneous impulse of a powerfully moved soul!

[47] Even the assertion "And thus I am absorb'd, and this is life" – which seems to be the strongest point in favour of a monist reading – by no means necessitates a dissolution of self. On the contrary, its "thus" refers back to the preceding stanza (meaning "in this way") in which the soul is said to "mingle," whilst, however, remaining a "soul," with a range of *differentiated* phenomena – "the sky, the peak, the heaving plain" and so on – which likewise show no sign of giving up *their* differentiation.

leaves the "carnal life" behind, and the enigmatic claim that concludes stanza 72 that such ecstatic relation is "not in vain." In the first case, it is the proliferation of terms, in the second case, the *lack* of any specification, that is confusing. Whilst we might, of course, dismiss this as indifference or vagueness on Byron's part, it is interesting that the things about which the poet seems to be unsettled or silent relate to the matters *within* knowledge that Aquinas and Buber insist that we are *unable* to know about; namely, whilst, according to Aquinas, it was possible for Paul to know *that* he was rapt up to "divine realities," he was *unable* to know precisely what part of him was and what part of him was not "carried away" in the experience of ecstasy; and, likewise, according to Buber, whilst we might come away from the moment of I-Thou relation assured of its value and meaningfulness, we are unable to "know" or *disclose* this value or meaning.[48]

If we turn our attention to the second part or recommencement of Byron's commentary, just over ten stanzas later, we find an extension and clarification of the earlier section. Here are the two most important stanzas:

> All heaven and earth are still – though not in sleep,
> But breathless, as we grow when feeling most;
> And silent, as we stand in thoughts too deep: –
> All heaven and earth are still: from the high host
> Of stars, to the lulled lake and mountain-coast,
> All is concentered in a life intense,
> Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,
> But hath a part of being, and a sense
> Of that which is of all Creator and defence.
>
> (89)

> Then stirs the feeling infinite, so felt
> In solitude, where we are least alone;

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[48] Shortly before the end of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the narrator comes even closer to Buber's (or St Paul's) position in this respect:

> I love not man the less, but Nature more,
> From these our interviews, in which I steal
> From all that I may be, or have been before,
> To mingle with the Universe, and feel
> What I can ne'er express, yet can not all conceal.
>
> (IV, 187)

In these lines, the narrator reaffirms what he said about ecstatic relation in the stanzas on Lake Geneva, repeating his description of a mode of "feeling" which hovers between a straightforward interior emotional response and a paradoxical sense of disembodied "exterior" feeling, though whichever it was – whether in the body or out of the body – it is something which, as Buber contends, can neither be articulated nor ignored.

A truth, which through our being then doth melt,
And purifies from self: it is a tone,
The soul and source of music, which makes known
Eternal harmony, and sheds a charm,
Like to the fabled Cytherea's zone,
Binding all things with beauty; – 'twould disarm
The spectre Death, had he substantial power to harm.

(90)

Compared to the preceding account of ecstatic relation, these stanzas appear remarkable for their orthodox theism. At the centre of this is the principle of *analogia entis* (which holds that, however dimly it is perceived by us, creaturely being is related to and participates in divine Being), and the insistence – which this principle underwrites – on the transcendence as well as the immanence of the Divine:

All is concentered in a life intense,
Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,
But hath a part of being, and a sense
Of that which is of all Creator and defence.

All of creation, it is argued, participates in and is indwelt by but is nonetheless clearly distinguished from its Creator, who is eternal, all-loving and stronger than death.

In spite of the apparent shift in these stanzas from something like mysticism (bearing Chesterton's caveat in mind) to more orthodox theism, Byron is careful to indicate the continuity between the earlier account of ecstatic relation and the later theistic view of the cosmos, and to connect both of these to the apostrophes with which they are interspersed, by the recurrence of certain natural phenomena – the mountains, the stars, the lake, the sky – as objects of address and in the accounts which *reflect* upon such acts of address. The poet thus, over the course of the Alpine stanzas, enters into apostrophic relation with a range of natural phenomena, meditates on the nature of his relationship with these phenomena, and then considers the issue of relatedness as such within a theistic construal of the world.

What is important about this connection with and extension of the earlier commentary is that it confirms our rejection of the appearance of monism in Byron's account of ecstatic relation, in setting the whole sense of inter-communion within a larger explicitly theistic framework; and, more

generally, it provides a metaphysical basis for the act of counter-rational apostrophe. This is not to suggest that Byron is espousing a doctrinal position, but rather to emphasise the underlying coherence of his thinking, even if this only emerges in exploration.

Our account of the Alpine stanzas and of Byron's portrayal of ecstatic relation would obviously be incomplete if we were to leave out the doubts and the dramatic withdrawal that occur in stanzas 96 an 97, which question but appear to be precipitated by the preceding confidence in ecstatic or relational modes of being. In stanza 96, the poet addresses though seems to be troubled by and withdrawing from whilst nevertheless drawn to the mode of relation, enumerating the natural phenomena in a way that undermines our sense of unreserved confrontation, and asking about their end in a way that suggests detached I-It interrogation:

> Sky, mountains, river, winds, lake, lightnings! ye,
> With night, and clouds, and thunder, and a soul
> To make these felt and feeling, well may be
> Things that have made me watchful; the far roll
> Of your departing voices, is the knoll
> Of what in me is sleepless, – if I rest.
> But where of ye, O tempests! is the goal?
> Are ye like those within the human breast?
> Or do ye find at length, like eagles, some high nest?

The first few lines of this stanza offer a brilliantly fluid description of what appears to take place in the moment of relation. The paratactic co-ordination and the enjambment of the second line suggestively allow the "soul" the appearance of belonging to the items in the preceding list (indeed, there is nothing that syntactically argues *against* such a reading, nor would it be claiming anything more than the poet explicitly claimed a few stanzas earlier, where he says that "not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost, / But hath a part of being, and a sense / Of that which is of all Creator and defence"); the ambiguity of the word "feeling" (whether it functions as a noun or a verb -- and hence whether the named phenomena are "doing" the feeling or registered *as* a feeling – both of which claims have already been made in the poem) relatedly leaves open several possibilities: are the natural phenomena endowed with a soul and hence capable of feeling? does the human soul *endow* them with feeling? (where endowment may include giving them for our perception what they in fact already possess) or does the soul, in being

freed from the body, as the poet speculated in stanza 74, relate to things by means of and perceive them *as* feeling? It is, however, the perceptive brilliance of the observations that suggests that the speaker is detachedly reflecting on rather than actually being *involved in* relation.

This withdrawal culminates in the extraordinary account in the following stanza of the poet's violently coterminous desire for and silencing of ex-pression of self:

> Could I embody and unbosom now
> That which is most within me, – could I wreak
> My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
> Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak,
> All that I would have sought, and all I seek,
> Bear, know, feel, and yet breathe – into one word,
> And that one word were lightning, I would speak;
> But as it is, I live and die unheard,
> With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword.

Here the speaker forcefully describes but seems to feel curiously incapable of doing what it is he has *been* doing. The lightning-like externalisation of his "most" interior self (for which he again notably cannot settle on a word – "Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings") precisely describes the experience of ecstatic being depicted in the earlier stanzas. How can we account for this change? Does it not suggest a lack of conviction, and that the earlier metaphysical postures were "borrowed" after all? Two explanations suggest themselves which do not endorse this impression. The first is offered by the poet himself earlier in the Canto:

> Could he have kept his spirit to that flight,
> He had been happy; but this clay will sink
> Its spark immortal, envying it the light
> To which it mounts, as if to break the link
> That keeps us from yon heaven which woos us to its brink.
>
> (14)

As Bernard Beatty has noted, Byron is aware that "the energy which shapes a strong assertion or powerful feeling is often used up in its own articulation and will then flow in the opposite direction" (1987, 22). After the freedom found in ecstatic relation from the "clay-cold bonds which round our being cling" (III, 73), exultantly described in the earlier stanzas, that which had been left behind returns with a vengeance. The poet feels not only "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd" within and by himself,

desiring the ecstatic release of expression, he feels, even more constrictingly, that since expression is finite embodiment that such "release" would mean confinement, *too*.

The second explanation – which is compatible with the first – is suggested by Buber's account of I-Thou relation. According to Buber, relation cannot be consciously *willed* or indefinitely sustained,[49] however, neither, he argues, can the self transcend the self *outside of* relation. If this is true, it would explain why, in *desiring* the ecstatic release of expression, the poem's speaker is *necessarily* outside of relation and unable to enter into it.

Does not Byron's earlier argument – concerning the inevitable confinement of self in expression – *in any case*, however, preclude the transport (of self outside of self) in speaking that the poet desires? and hence *in spite of* our counter-arguments discredit the experience he earlier affirmed? The following insightful comments by Jean-Luc Marion in his discussion of Denys and "the discourse of praise" may help to explain how Byron's "yes" and (extreme) "no" respecting ecstatic relation may *both* be valid:

> Praise indeed functions as a performative ("I praise you ..."), but as a performative that, instead of making things with words, elaborates with words gifts ("I praise you as y, y', y'', etc.) Praise plays as a performative all the more that it more radically sets the statement outside of the one stating. On this condition alone, the statement assumes enough consistency to merit the dignity of a gift – to traverse distance. Consequently, at the limit, the discourse of praise does not reabsorb the statement within its performance by the speaker, but absorbs the speaker in the performance of the gift through the statement. Such an ecstasy of the speaker who relies on his own product in order, in giving it, to give himself with it (in a "short ladder" to oneself that does not cease to land, and that continues to grow longer to the point that one finally recognizes in it Jacob's ladder, where angels climb and descend) manifests nothing less than the kenosis proper to distance.
>
> (2001, 190–1)

Whilst it may be true that one cannot "express" the self im-mediately, that is to say, "without" or outside of expression, and whilst it may also be true, as Byron's speaker seems to feel and fear, that every word would only mean a *different* confinement of – and therefore fail to express – the self, this does not mean that the self is condemned to its own finite confinement, and cannot be carried outside of itself towards the other in speech. Another alternative is brought into view by Marion's comments. The self, as Marion suggests, may be *given*, and carried outside of itself in the giving of speech. A gift,

however, to be a gift, must obviously be given *to* another. (And though Marion is talking about "praise," he is talking about utterances that are "aimed at" and *addressed to* the other (2001, 190)). Thus, in reaching out and giving the our speech to the other, our speech gives us and carries us with it. Paul Celan talks about poetry in a similar way: "The poem is lonely. It is *en route*. Its author stays with it" (1986, 49); or, more literally translated: "Its author is given with it" ("*Wer es [das Gedicht] schreibt, bleibt ihm mitgegeben*" (Celan: 1968, 144)).

What, then, could we say, on the basis of our analysis, is Byron's attitude toward ecstatic relation? Like many things in Byron, it is, to use Keats's phrase, "a thing of yes and no." This is not, we have argued, because Byron – to use his own phrase – was flirting with Wordsworth's muse, and did not have his heart (or his head) in what he was doing. Rather, it has more to do with the peculiar combination of "yes" and "no" – which *give rise to* rather than negate each other – out of which *most* of Byron's poetry is born. Even here, however, we need to differentiate. In contrast to the "yes" and "no" of some of the apostrophes in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in which both responses seem to be *simultaneously* operative, and the poet's sense of relation is flooded with a sense of loss – what we might refer to as Byron's elegiac Thou – his attitude towards ecstatic relation in the commentary that runs through the Lake Geneva stanzas seems to exhibit an alteration *from* "yes" *to* "no." This should not, however, be seen as a "no" which effaces the antecedent "yes"; neither should the "no" be viewed as a resting place, whether final or otherwise. In *The Island*, written seven years after *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto III, in the last year of the poet's life – and, we might add, when he would hardly be described as under the influence of Wordsworth – Byron's attitude towards ecstatic relation is exactly what it was in the exultant stanzas on Lake Geneva:

> the devotee
> Lives not in earth, but in his ecstasy;
> Around him days and worlds are heedless driven,
> His soul is gone before his dust to heaven.
> Is love less potent? No – his path is trod,
> Alike uplifted gloriously to God;
> Or link'd to all we know of heaven below,
> The other better self, whose joy or woe
> Is more than ours; the all-absorbing flame

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[49] Aquinas, also, it will be recalled, argues that one cannot as it were carry *oneself* away, but must – though one must be willing – be carried.

Which, kindled by another, grows the same,
Wrapt in one blaze; the pure, yet funereal pile,
Where gentle hearts, like Bramins, sit and smile.
How often we forget all time, when lone,
Admiring Nature's universal throne,
Her woods, her wilds, her waters, the intense
Reply of *hers* to our intelligence!
Live not the stars and mountains? Are the waves
Without a spirit? Are the dropping caves
Without a feeling in their silent tears?
No, no; – they woo and clasp us to their spheres,
Dissolve this clog and clod of clay before
Its hour, and merge our soul in the great shore.
Strip off this false and fond identity! –
Who thinks of self when gazing on the sky?
And who, though gazing lower, ever thought,
In the young moments ere the heart is taught
Time's lesson, of man's baseness or his own?
All nature is his realm, and love his throne.

(II, XVI, 370–97)

Here, again, we find it asserted that ecstatic being involves coming *into* being, that man lives "not in earth, but in his ecstasy" (the second "in" includes the meaning "as a result of" but also, in the manner of Buber's "between," "within" or "inside" (his outside-ness)); here, again, we find – with reference to the same phenomena – questions about the animism of the natural world: "Live not the stars and mountains? Are the waves / Without a spirit? Are the dropping caves / Without a feeling in their silent tears?" Though, on this occasion, the poet does not leave things open, but boldly answers: "No, no; – they woo and clasp us to their spheres [...]."[50] The assertion of reciprocity is also even more explicit in the later poem, both in the line just quoted and the preceding description of "the intense / Reply of *hers* to our intelligence!"[51] Clearly, then, Byron's "yes" is and *remains* a "yes," in spite of his "no" (which is, equally, a *real* "no").

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[50] Byron's use of the word "spheres" interestingly suggests a sense of celestial ordering, by means of which all things are interconnected and analogically give way to the Divine.

[51] We might also note that Byron's lines once again describe a sense of ecstatic union which appears to annihilate but in fact subtly preserves the difference between the self and the other. Whilst the poet speaks of the "all-absorbing flame / Which, kindled by another, grows the same, / Wrapt in one blaze," it is nonetheless where "gentle hearts, like Bramins" *in plural* sit. Similarly, though the poet subsequently says of natural phenomena that they "Strip off this false and fond identity!" and, asks rhetorically, "Who thinks of self when gazing on the sky?" the first of these utterances is – as the lines' elliptical co-ordination makes clear – but a rephrasing of the earlier clause – "Dissolve this clog and clod of clay before / Its hour," implying that beneath this "fond and false" identity, is another "genuine" identity; and the second presupposes that thinking of "the self" is at least a *possibility* – even though it is rhetorically suggested that this is not done – which in turn presupposes the *existence* of selfhood. Though this might appear to be splitting hairs, it is both important and orthodox to draw

If Byron's account of ecstatic relation may be defended against the charge of inauthenticity, in spite of its essentially compound character, this is not at the expense of making it contradictory or undecided. Whilst Byron, unlike Buber, neither set out from nor sought to establish a settled philosophical position, and is more exploratory where Buber is expository, he does nonetheless evince a consistent bias or propensity, which, though obviously differing from Buber's doctrinal stance, would seem to permit a degree of generalisation and justify the comparison even though it is incomplete. Indeed, Byron's "no" – his consciousness that "the clog and clog of clay" that "will sink / Its spark immortal," – whilst unmistakably informed by an intense Calvinistic sense of being "Guilty of dust and sin" (Herbert, "Love III"), is in certain respects the counterpart of Buber's – manifestly more neutral and philosophically settled – conception of I-It experience, which is one half of *his* two-sided view of human being. I-Thou relation and I-It experience are opposite and mutually exclusive, though it is no contradiction nor a result of indecision to hold that they are both real. The same is true, I think, of Byron's openness towards ecstatic relation in spite of his sense of the "clay-cold bonds which round our being cling": whilst "the clay will sink / Its spark immortal, envying it the light / To which it mounts," it *is* nonetheless "impregnate with divinity," and contains – without being able to contain – "Spirits which soar from ruin" (IV, 55).

Whilst the general relevance of Buber's philosophy of dialogue to poetic and especially Romantic construals of ecstatic relation should be emerging to view, it will be useful to augment our understanding of the latter by briefly considering another canonical Romantic account. Coleridge's "Dejection: an Ode" is of particular interest to our discussion since, like Byron's Alpine stanzas, it reflects upon the coming and going of the relational mode it dramatically represents. Like Byron's

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such distinctions. We find, for example, precisely this almost paradoxical insistence upon the preservation of difference within (uninterrupted) union in the theology of Denys. As he writes in *On the Divine Names*:

> The Super-Essential Unity of God [...] exceedeth (so we declare) not only the unions of material bodies, but even those of the Souls and of Intelligences, which these Godlike and celestial Luminaries in perfect mutual interpenetration supernaturally and without confusion possess, through a participation corresponding to their individual powers of participating in the All-Transcendent Unity.
>
> (71)

This difficult passage is glossed by C. E. Rolt as follows: "Material things are merged by being united (*e.g.* drops of water). Souls or angels being united through love (whereby they participate in God) are not merged but remain distinct even while being, as it were, fused into a single spiritual unity more perfect than the fusion of water with wine. The Persons of the Trinity are still more perfectly united and at the same time still more utterly distinct" (71).

poem, it therefore also – for us, enlighteningly – explores the *failure* as well as the attainment of relation. If, however, Byron's stanzas on Lake Geneva exhibit a movement from affirmation to withdrawal and alienation, Coleridge's poem evinces the reverse trajectory, even if its alienation is more stifled than manifest, and its affirmation more precarious and inchoate. Let us briefly reconsider, then, this generative trajectory and the poet's explanation of it, and see how it compares to what Buber says about the modes of relation and experience.

To employ the distinction coined in the previous chapter, Coleridge's poem is apostrophaic, in being addressed as a whole to the palimpsestically surviving "Lady," though it makes relatively little use of explicit or vocative apostrophe until the final two stanzas, in which there is a sudden intensification of apostrophic activity and a variety of addressees (the speaker's thoughts, the wind – addressed variously as "Mad Lutanist," "Actor" and "might Poet" – Sleep, and then, finally, "Dear Lady" again). Indeed, our sense of the poem as apostrophaic, if in fact we have a sense of this at all, would seem to come more from the knowledge of the poem's "growth" out of "A Letter to —, April 4, 1802. – Sunday Evening" than from the later poem itself, which only reveals that it *has* an addressee in the second stanza.[52] There thus appears to be a correlation between the speaker's regeneration and his mode of relating to the world, as signalled in the movement from (predominantly) I-It to (predominantly) I-Thou discourse. Let us examine this alteration a little more closely.

The first three stanzas of the poem create an impression of the speaker's profound and sustained dis-involvement, emphasising on the one hand, the lack of any traffic between the interior and the exterior – "A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief, / Which finds no natural outlet or relief" (22–3) – whilst making it clear that such intercourse was normal before – "Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed, / And sent my soul abroad" (17–18) – and, on the other hand, a seeing which is devoid of "feeling," and which dissects the landscape and divests it of any sense of unity and life:

> And still I gaze – and with how blank an eye!
> And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,

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[52] Coleridge, significantly, removed the explicit apostrophe from the opening section of the earlier poem (whilst, excepting the addition of the later stanza's final four lines, altering nothing else of any importance), changing "O! Sara! that the Gust ev'n now were swelling" to "And oh! that even now the gust were swelling [...]."

That give away their motion to the stars;
Those stars, that glide behind them or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:
Yon crescent Moon as fixed as if it grew
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;
I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel how beautiful they are!

(30–38)

The succession of asyndetic clauses and the postposition to the point of virtual dislocation of the subject and verb which ostensibly govern them ("I see") reflect at a syntactic level the speaker's detachment and dis-integrating mode of engagement, "Viewing all objects [...] / In disconnexion dead and spiritless" (*The Excursion*, IV, 961–2).

The final line of this stanza is so familiar that it is easy to overlook how strange it is. What does it mean to *feel* how beautiful something is? Of course, it may simply refer to a dilated interior registering of beauty, but is there not a suggestion, as we saw in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, of the soul or the self's feeling of things *outside of* the self in ecstatic relation? Such a state of feeling in ekstasis is described in the climactic final lines of "France. An Ode":

I stood and gazed, my temples bare,
And shot my being through earth, sea and air,
Possessing all things with intensest love,
O Liberty! my spirit felt thee there.

Coleridge's dejection therefore seems in essence to be a state of disconnection, which is characterised as an inability to reach outside of the self and ecstatically encounter the other. He seems to be mourning, that is, his inability to enter into I-Thou relation and his entrapment within I-It experience.

It is hard to say what causes the change in the poem, though it is clear that one occurs (and that it, curiously, occurs in the process of investigating its *non*-occurrence). It is also clear – both to the reader and poet – that this change must be an overthrow, to some degree, of the poet's disconnection,[53] which, as we have suggested, is essentially presented as a lack of any *transgression* of self, in which the soul is "sent abroad" and thereby able to "feel" not merely see the other with his

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[53] As Michael O'Neill notes, the "achievement of the poem is to find 'outlet' and 'relief' while remaining aware of something within that is resistant to 'outlet' and 'relief'" (1997, 65).

"being" in ecstatic relation. We also noted earlier on that the regeneration of the speaker in the second half of the poem is accompanied by a movement into or intensification of apostrophic discourse, which appears to signal an alteration in the speaker's mode of relating to the world, culminating in the final benedictory stanza:

> 'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:
> Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!
> Visit her, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing,
> And may this storm be but a mountain-birth,
> May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling
> Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!
> With light heart may she rise,
> Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,
> Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice;
> To her may all things live, from pole to pole,
> Their life the eddying of her living soul!
> O simple spirit, guided from above,
> Dear Lady! friend devoutest of my choice,
> Thus mayest thou ever, evermore rejoice.
>
> (126–9)

Whilst the speaker apparently still feels himself in some sense outside of what he wishes the "Lady," saying somewhat portentously "small thoughts have I of sleep," and imagining an animated universe – as he does in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" – from the point of view of another person, his wishing reveals that he is nevertheless in touch with in being able to imagine (again) a world imbued with life and relation: "May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling / Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!" It therefore appears to be possible to argue that the poem's dramatic trajectory exhibits an inchoate or incipient movement out of experience and into relation.

How does our reading of this dramatic trajectory in the light of Buber's philosophy of dialogue accord with the poem's own theoretical reflections? Let us take a look at the familiar but crucial stanza concerned:

> O Lady! we receive but what we give,
> And in our life alone does Nature live:
> Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
> And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
> Than that inanimate cold world allowed
> To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,

Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth –
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

(47–58)

Coleridge distinguishes two modes of being or ways of relating to the world, which are fundamentally opposed to one another, and which appear to correlate with Buber's modes of experience and relation. As it is in Buber's philosophy, the world that is encountered in these two modes is utterly different, though it is the *mode of relation* that brings about this difference. The first of these modes, which correlates with Buber's conception of I-It experience, is associated with "the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd," and is identified with what Coleridge describes as an "inanimate cold world [...]."[54] The second mode, which correlates with Buber's conception of I-Thou relation, by contrast, is identified with a world in which nature "lives." Beyond this basic correlation, a number of more specific parallels emerge as well as certain interesting shades of difference.

According to both writers, the relational mode involves a transgression of self and an ecstatic movement towards the other: "from the soul itself must issue forth / A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud / [...] / And from the soul itself must there be sent / A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth [...]." For both writers, also, this moment of ecstatic relation is generative. Contrary to what Paul de Man claims in his comments on prosopopoeic apostrophe, for Coleridge – as for Byron and Wordsworth – the poet or perceiver *participates in* the life he bestows; since, if, as the poet argues, "we receive but what we give," the extravagant bestowal of life in relation must entail an equally extravagant return donation. This beneficent reciprocity of ecstatic donation – what Byron describes as "gaining as we give" – is vividly described by Coleridge in "To William Wordsworth," where he describes "moments awful," in Wordsworth's poem,

Now in thy inner life, and now abroad,

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[54] The word "anxious" – which derives from the word *angere*, meaning "to choke" – would appear to be a particularly appropriate choice of word to describe Coleridge's alienated state of self-constriction, and highlights its connection with Buber's notion of I-It experience, which he defines as a partial and withheld engagement, in which the self is impeded from setting foot outside of the self.

> When power streamed from thee, and thy soul received
> The light reflected, as a light bestowed [...].
>
> (17–19)

Coleridge is here giving back to Wordsworth his own slightly divergent construal of the reciprocity involved in ecstatic donation (Wordsworth, as we shall see, viewed nature's role as less passively reflective, emphasising what he had received from "*her* overflowing soul" (*The Prelude*, II, 416 (emphasis added)), however, we should note that the "as" in the final line combines both the more chary sense of "as though it were" but also the bolder meaning of "as it would from" or "with the same effect as," emphasising that even such reflexive donation is real and *efficacious* donation.

Before we, finally, consider an important difference between Buber and Coleridge – or the Romantics, more generally – on the subject of ecstatic relation, it is worth drawing attention to one further point that is raised in Coleridge's reflections, which subtly relates his account of ekstasis to that put forward by Denys in his *On the Divine Names*.

In the second of the central reflective stanzas in "Dejection: an Ode," Coleridge identifies the "beautiful and beauty-making power" which radically opens up in streaming forth from the self to that which is outside of it as "joy" (ref). The significance of Coleridge's claim to our discussion is brought to light by Stephen Prickett in his study of Wordsworth and Coleridge. According to Prickett, Coleridge's conception of joy and its association with creativity was crucially indebted to the Wesleys (1970, 103–7), to whom joy

> was not primarily an attribute of man at all, but of God's – and in particular, of God's in Creation. Joy was thought of as the divine concomitant of creativity. Man's joy came from sharing in the joy of his Master. In this, man was only echoing the entire cosmos.
>
> (1970, 103)

If Prickett is correct, and his argument is convincing, Coleridge is implicitly associating man's ecstatic response to nature with God's ecstatic relationship with Creation, and thereby seems to accord with Denys's *theological* construal of ekstasis.[55] This connection is interesting not least because if man in

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[55] Byron more explicitly concurs with Denys, drawing attention to the parallel between human and Divine ekstasis in *The Giaour*:

> Yes, Love indeed is light from heaven;
> A spark of that immortal fire

stepping outside of himself imitates the Divine stepping outside of *Its* self, and if, as Denys (and Marion, after him) argues, the Divine in stepping outside of Itself nevertheless does not *give up* Itself, it suggest that we too may paradoxically retain or remain whilst going *outside of* ourselves.[56]

This brings us, finally, to an important difference between Romantic accounts of ecstatic relation and Buber's philosophy of dialogue. Whilst the issue is too large to go into here, and will be separately treated in the section entitled "A Slight Fit of Madness," it is worth raising at this point, since it is so clearly brought into view by Coleridge's poem. The matter may be formulated as follows. Whilst, for Buber, the sense of animism or reciprocity that is involved in confronting the absent or inanimate other as a Thou does not exist outside of relation, this would seem to be different from claiming, as both Wordsworth and Coleridge, for example, do, that the sense of life and unity with and within nature is "bestowed" or *created* by the perceiver. Coleridge, especially, as we have seen, appears to suggest that any sense we have of life in nature is "lent" to it by us – "in our life alone does nature live" – and that the sense of reciprocity that is involved in relation is a "reflection" of the life that we bestow – "power streamed from thee, and thy soul received / The light reflected, as a light bestowed [...]."[57] The difference is not a trivial one. At stake is the issue of truth or the reality of that which is discovered in relation.

> With angels shared, by Alla given,
> To lift from earth our low desire.
> Devotion wafts the mind above,
> But Heaven itself descends in love;
> A feeling from the Godhead caught,
> To wean from self each sordid thought;
> A ray of him who form'd the whole;
> A Glory circling round the soul!

(II, 1131–40)

Here, Byron connects, as he does in the extract from *The Island* quoted above, religious ecstasy and the ecstasy of love – the former "wafts the mind above," the latter lifts our low desire "from earth" – seeing the latter especially as caused by, responding to and *imitating* Heaven's ecstatic descent from and continuing existence outside of Itself.

[56] Marion eloquently puts the matter as follows: "As ecstatic origin, charity does not demean itself when it goes out of itself, since it is defined precisely by that ecstasy. Or again, charity does not leave itself when it goes out of itself, since it gives itself as that which gives itself" (2001, 165).

[57] Coleridge makes the point even more clearly in a well-known letter to his brother: "I devote myself [...] in poetry, to elevate the imagination & set the affections in right tune by the beauty of the inanimate impregnated, as with a living soul, by the presence of Life" (*CL*, I, 238). Wordsworth, of course, argues similarly in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. In answer to his question "What is a Poet?" he writes:

> a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and *habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.*

Leaving this issue aside, then, for the moment, what can we conclude from the foregoing section? We began by looking at Paul de Man's brief but influential reading of the act of prosopopoeic apostrophe, which, as we saw, draws upon but turns against a distinguished religious and literary tradition, and, in affirming a bit – but not a lot – of transcendence, contending that such apostrophes involve a "sinister" ekstasis, attempts to foreclose the possibility of certain Romantic claims concerning the relationship between man and nature. Buber's *I and Thou*, by contrast, allows us to leave this possibility unforeclosed, and offers us a way of theoretically reconsidering such claims whilst taking them seriously on their own terms. It was the aim of this section to examine the relevance and usefulness of Buber's account with respect to two of its central claims – that the act of I-Thou address involves a coming into being of the self, and that the moment of relation is an ecstatic event. What were our findings?

Concentrating on poems by Byron and Coleridge, partly because they offer commentaries on their own apostrophic processes, and partly because both of them deal with the *failure* as well as the achievement of relation, and hence may be expected to provide the most balanced and *critical* assessment of such events (for these reasons they were preferred over Keats and Wordsworth, for example, who – in very different ways – are more consistently and affirmatively concerned with ecstatic states), we found that both writers concur with Buber and with each other on a number of crucial points, though they both also raise interesting questions about and suggest complications of Buber's account. To be more specific: whilst the two writers find willed entry into relation impossible, and offer manifestly differing descriptions of dejected and cauterising entrapment within the world of experience, they both clearly describe the moment of relation as an ecstatic experience, unambiguously affirming the occurrence of what Wordsworth describes as the "ennobling interchange / Of action from within and from without" (XII, 376–7) – Coleridge, as we saw, passionately upholds its possibility even when it presently eludes him. This sense of ecstatic being in relation with the other appears to be underlined, we noted, by the two writers' "Dionysian" suggestion – whether affirmed as occurring or mourned as known but lost – of the self or soul's "feeling" *outside of* the self. Both writers, similarly, contrary to what Paul de Man says about the experience, describe the moment of

ecstatic relation as a coming *into* being and as a *generative* event. And if any chiasmus is found in the intercourse that takes place between the animate and the apparently inanimate, it is a *donative* chiasmus or reciprocity, in which the perceiver receives "the light reflected, as a light bestowed," gaining as he gives. In addition, we observed a parallel connection – implicit in Coleridge, explicit in Byron – of man's reaching outside of himself in relation with the Divine's reaching outside of *Itself* – whilst paradoxically remaining *in* Itself – in love and the (ongoing) act of Creation. Wordsworth, we noticed, relatedly connects his description of the soul's visionary transcendence with God's ecstatic bestowal of Himself in bringing man to life. Such a view of man's ekstasis as not only answering but as also *imitating* divine ekstasis is, as we shall illustrate later, also consonant with Buber's conception of I-Thou relation.

What differences did our discussion uncover? Both Byron and Coleridge raise questions about, while appearing to diverge from, Buber's account of relation. The emergence in Byron's poetry of what we described as an elegiac Thou – which bespeaks a sense of relation flooded with a consciousness of loss – appears to question the exclusive opposition of I-Thou and I-It modes. Finally, we noticed that Coleridge's emphasis on the role of *creative* perception in the moment of relation, endorsed and elaborated amongst others by Wordsworth, seems to differ from Buber's account of I-Thou relation as a *revelatory* event. Both of these issues will be taken up in the following sections.

"From Stones to Stars"[58]

Before we examine what "happens" to the other in the moment of I-Thou relation, we need to consider what this other might be. According to Buber, there are three "spheres in which the world of relation arises" (Buber: 1944, 6). These are "our life with nature," "our life with men," and "our life with intelligible forms" (*geistigen Wesenheiten*) (Buber: 1944, 6).[59] Towards the end of *I and Thou*, Buber

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[58] Buber: 1970, 173.
[59] Pamela Vermes comments: "Of the three spheres of relation, the region of the *geistige Wesenheiten* is probably the least well known, no doubt partly owing to the variety of ways in which this term has been done

prioritises the sphere of "our life with men" over the other two,[60] describing it as "the main portal, into whose opening the two side-gates lead, and in which they are included" (1944, 103); nevertheless, in each case, Buber argues that the act of addressing the other as a Thou, irrespective of its knowledge or our knowledge of its knowledge of being addressed, establishes reciprocal relation.[61] Not surprisingly perhaps, this claim has been the source of considerable dispute.[62] How can an inanimate object or "beings and things that confront us in nature" (Buber: 1996, 172) partake in reciprocal relation? Emil Fackenheim explains the issue as follows:

> relation is, above all, mutual. The Other is for me, but I am also for the Other. I do something to the Other, but the Other also does something to me. This happens in the relation of dialogue, which is a relation of address and response-to-address. The Other addresses me and responds to my address; that is, even if the Other happens to be a lifeless speechless object, it is treated as one treats a person.
>
> It would, to be sure, be gross anthropomorphizing to assert that the lifeless object *is* a person; that a tree or a stone can be an *I* to themselves and I a *Thou* to them. But it is not anthropomorphic to assert that I can be an *I* to myself, and the tree or stone a *Thou* to me. From the standpoint of one partner at least, the human partner, *I-Thou* relations are possible, not only with other human beings, but with anything whatever. This is not to say that such relations are easy, or possible to anyone, or possible at any time. It is merely to say that there are no a priori limitations to the possible partners I may have in an *I-Thou* relationship.
>
> (1967, 279)

Buber's own answer treats of the different spheres separately, and at considerable length, though part of his answer concerning the most obviously problematic case, namely non-human entities, may be taken as expressing his general position. Talking of "those realms of nature which lack the spontaneity we share with animals," he writes:

> It is part of our concept of the plant that it cannot react to our actions upon it, that it cannot "reply." Yet this does not mean that we meet no reciprocity at all in this sphere. We find here not the deed of posture of an individual being but a reciprocity of being itself – a reciprocity that has nothing except being.
>
> (1996, 173)

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into English. Sometimes it is rendered 'intelligible forms', sometimes 'spiritual beings' (R. Gregor Smith in the first and second editions of *I and Thou*, respectively). Sometimes it appears as 'forms of the spirit' or simply 'forms' (R. E. Wood). Sometimes we find it as 'intelligible essences' (Maurice Friedman). One or two of these are more acceptable than the others, but none is exactly right. Yet it is hard to think of an improvement" (1994, 204).

[60] This priority becomes almost an exclusive focus in Buber's subsequent work; see, for example, *Between Man and Man*.

[61] It is noteworthy that the two formative I-Thou encounters mentioned by Buber in his "Autobiographical Fragments" are with a horse and a tree.

[62] Such was the puzzled response to what Buber describes as "the great problem of mutuality" (Schilpp and Friedman: 1967, 707) that a Postscript discussing the issue was added to the book's second edition.

A parallel or "harder" explanation of the ekstatic reciprocity of the non-human is put forward by Denys, who, as we saw in the first section of this chapter, talks of the "influence coming even from the outward world, as from a rich abundance of cunning tokens," which the soul in ekstasis "feels" and by which it is drawn outside of itself (99). Denys elaborates this claim in several places, explaining that all things, according to their own capacity (a characteristic Dionysion proviso), are turned towards and "yearn" for the Divine:

> And like as Goodness draweth all things to Itself, and is the great Attractive Power which unites things that are sundered [...]; and like as all things desire It as their beginning, their cohesive power and end; and like as 'tis the Good [...] from which all things are made and are [...]; and like as in the Good all things subsist, being kept and controlled in an almighty Receptacle; and like as unto the Good all things are turned (as unto the proper End of each); and like as after the Good all things do yearn – those that have mind and reason seeking It by knowledge, those that have perception seeking It by perception, those that have no perception seeking It by the natural movement of their vital instinct, and those that are without life and have mere existence seeking It by their aptitude for that bare participation whence this mere existence is there – even so doth the light [...] draw together all things and attract them unto Itself: those that can see, those that have motion, those that receive Its light and warmth, those that are merely held in being by Its rays [...].
>
> (93)

As Denys goes on to explain, it is on account of this "yearning" – which is caused by and imitates the "Divine Yearning," and which draws things "horizontally" as well as "vertically" towards one another (101) – that all things are carried outside of and cease to "belong" to themselves:

> And the Divine Yearning brings ecstasy, not allowing them that are touched thereby to belong unto themselves but only to the objects of their affection.
>
> (105)

We have already noticed a number of descriptions of such reciprocal ekstasis in the poetry of Byron, Wordsworth and Coleridge, and will return to the issue in our consideration of giving and receiving. It should therefore suffice to illustrate the relevance of such claims to poetry and Romantic writing in particular if we limit ourselves here to a few short examples.

Wordsworth, we pointed out in our earlier discussion, talks in *The Prelude* of the innate tendency of things to exceed themselves, in a manner that is consistent with Denys's claim, describing

what he had received from "Nature's overflowing soul" (II, 416).[63] This claim is expanded in the famous fragment "There is an active principle," which, as Duncan Wu notes, would have comprised one of the central statements of *The Recluse* had it been completed (1994, 298):

> There is an active principle alive
> In all things – in all natures, in the flowers
> And in the trees, in every pebbly stone
> That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,
> The moving waters, and the invisible air.
> All beings have their properties which spread
> Beyond themselves, a power by which they make
> Some other being conscious of their life –
> Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
> No chasm, no solitude. From link to link
> It circulates, the soul of all the worlds.
>
> (1–11)

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[63] There are a number of passages in *The Prelude* which bear a striking resemblance to parts of Denys's *On the Divine Names*. Consider, for example, the following extract from Book II of Wordsworth's poem:

> I felt the sentiment of being spread
> O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
> O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of human thought
> And human knowledge, to the human eye
> Invisible, yet liveth to the heart,
> O'er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings,
> Or beats the gladsome air, o'er all that glides
> Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself
> And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not
> If such my transports were, for in all things
> I saw one life, and felt that it was joy.
>
> (450–60)

Which might be compared to the following passage from *On the Divine Names*:

> so can they [men's souls] (according to their measure) participate in the illuminations which stream from above and share the bounteous gift (as far as their power extends) and attain all the other privileges which we have recounted in our book, *Concerning the Soul*. Yea, and the same is true, if it must needs be said, concerning even the irrational souls, or living creatures, which cleave unto the air, or tread the earth, or crawl upon the ground, and those which live among the waters or possess an amphibious life, and all that live buried and covered in the earth – in a word all that possess a sensitive soul or life. All these are endowed with soul and life because the Good exists.
>
> (89)

Wordsworth's 1850 alteration of the final lines of the passage quoted above makes it even more Dionysion in its balancing of a teleologically ordered Immanence against the transcendence of its Creator, in whom all things nonetheless participate:

> Wonder not
> If high the transport, great the joy I felt,
> Communing in this sort through earth and heaven
> With every form of creature, as it looked
> Towards the Uncreated with a countenance

Here, Wordsworth describes things' ecstatic transgression of themselves as a reaching out *towards* other things, which as Catherine Pickstock says of apostrophe in another context, "*invokes* and *attracts*" (1998, 193). This would seem to imply that the sort of visionary mode that is described in "Tintern Abbey," when we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul," which, as we noted earlier, is explicitly connected by the poet to God's ecstatic bestowal of Himself in bringing man to life, is a *response* to the ecstatic being of things, whose properties or "cunning tokens" are "spread / Beyond themselves" drawing us towards them, and making us "conscious of their life [...]." Byron, we recall – whose description of all created phenomena as "concentered in a life intense," and having "a part of being, and a sense / Of that which is of all Creator and defence" also seems to coincide in certain respects with Denys's account – similarly talks of the way in which things in nature "woo and clasp us to their spheres" (*The Island*, II, XVI, 389), "seducing" us to step outside of ourselves by means of their own ekstasis.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable accounts of the ekstasis of things, however, is provided by Hopkins, who throughout his poetry coined a whole range of compound verbs in an attempt to express the way in which things seem to reach outside of themselves and make "the internal external" (Coleridge, *BL*, II, 258). To cite a selection: he says that the "grandeur of God" will "flame out, like shining from shook foil" ("God's Grandeur," 2); the stars are described as "wafting him [God] out" (*The Wreck of the Deutschland*, 5); the poet in the same poem "whirled out wings that spell" (3); God in nature "fathers forth" ("Pied Beauty," 10); self "flashes off frame and face" ("To what serves Mortal Beauty," 11), and fire "breaks forth from" the windhover ("The Windhover," 10). The poet's philosophy of a world in ekstasis is, however, most clearly stated in the sonnet "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame [...]." Here is the octave:

> As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame,
> As tumbled over rim in round well
> Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
> Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
> Each mortal thing does one and the same:
> Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
> Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,

Of adoration, with an eye of love.

Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*

According to Hopkins, everything in being is in *ekstatic* being, and in being itself *exceeds* itself: "Each mortal thing does one and the same: / Deals out that being indoors each one dwells [...]." The radical nature of what Hopkins is saying is indicated, though also perhaps disguised, by the apparently homely epithet "indoors," which conveys a sense of the ease and normality with which things step outside of themselves; as Chesterton remarks, with his usual sense and wit – writing of the relationship between mind and matter in Aquinas – "it is the natural activity of what is inside the house to find out what is outside of the house" (1956, 154). Hopkins also makes clear in his coining of the verb "to selve" that the self is not effaced or "spent" but remains *in tact* in stepping outside of itself. Finally, we may note that, for Hopkins, being – which the poem stresses means being in ekstasis – is every thing's teleology: "*myself* it speaks and spells, / Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*" Things are therefore fulfilling their purpose in being themselves being *outside of* themselves.[64]

According to Buber, I-Thou relation with that which is non-human is not limited to natural phenomena, but extends to human artefacts. Since it is only a matter of extending the same argument to a different realm, we may confine ourselves to a single illustration from poetry.[65] Whilst the narrator in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is rarely represented as verbally addressing works of art,[66] (though he does, of course, explicitly address cities insistently, as well as the tomb of Cecilia Metella (IV, 104)), he manifestly feels addressed *by* them, and has an arresting sense of *their* ecstatic being (their ekstasis brings his travelling to stasis), which is comparable to his earlier attitude towards nature in the stanzas on Lake Geneva. To take the most familiar example: in confronting the Apollo

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[64] This is complicated in the case of man, as the sestet unfolds, since the fulfilment of our being already paradoxically involves the ec-centric fulfilment of another's being (namely, that of Christ):

> I say more: the just man justices;
> Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
> Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is –
> Christ – for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
> Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
> To the Father through the features of men's faces.

Thus, we may say, in being outside of ourselves, we are being mostly ourselves in being mostly like Somebody Else.

[65] For a further example, see our discussion of Hart Crane's "To Brooklyn Bridge" below ("Hail Muse! et cetera").

[66] The narrator briefly addresses St Peter's, for instance (IV, 154), before his remarkable slow-motion description of relation in an address to the reader in third person discourse.

Belvedere, the narrator is struck by and describes the way in which its features "flash their full

lightnings by" (IV, 161), and how, having escaped the "tinge of years," it "breathes the flame with

which 'twas wrought" (IV, 163). Furthermore, though the statue is the product of human skill, the

narrator describes it – again in a way that parallels the earlier account of nature as in touch with and

disclosing the Divine – as having its source in and bespeaking that which is *beyond* the human:

> each conception was a heavenly guest –
> A ray of immortality [...]
>
> And if it be Prometheus stole from Heaven
> The fire which we endure, it was repaid
> By him to whom the energy was given
> Which this poetic marble hath array'd
> With an eternal glory – which, if made
> By human hands, is not of human thought [...].
>
> (IV, 162–3)[67]

There is one other addressee of which we have deliberately deferred consideration until now,

on account of its importance and complicated relationship to the other addressees. That is, of course,

God or the "eternal Thou." According to Buber, whenever we address any particular finite thing as a

Thou, we also address the eternal Thou:

> In every sphere in its own way, through each process of becoming that is present to us we look
> out toward the fringe of the eternal *Thou*; in each we are aware of a breath from the eternal
> *Thou*; in each *Thou* we address the eternal *Thou*.
>
> (1944, 6)

This is a difficult and important point, which has occasioned a certain amount of misunderstanding. It

will be recalled that it is on account of this point that Jonathan Culler deems Harold Bloom's use of

Buber's philosophy in his reading of Shelley to be inappropriate. Let us take another look what Culler

says:

> Harold Bloom, in the days when he thought that poetry was about poets' relationship
> to the world as well as their relationship to Milton, interpreted Shelley's major poems as

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[67] This sense of works of art as ecstatically addressing *us*, and as born of – and re-offering to the perceiver – a "mystery of alien ingress" has been brilliantly explored by George Steiner (from whom the foregoing quotation is taken (1979, 44)) in "'Critic'/'Reader'" and *Real Presences*.

manifestations of an *I–Thou* relationship to the universe, but he insisted that in addressing Mont Blanc or the West Wind Shelley is invoking an unseen power behind them, an ultimate Thou: "To invoke the Spirit that is in the west wind is not to invoke the wind or the autumn only." [...] Doctrinally, this is a thoroughly plausible interpretation, for the poems themselves display considerable interest in a pervasive unseen power. But in defining the true auditor the critic reduces the strangeness of apostrophe: while the poems directly address natural objects, the critic identifies the true addressee as a divine spirit. The student of apostrophe must resist this reduction. Whatever sort of pantheism the poems embody, when they address natural objects they formally will that these particular objects function as subjects; they perform the radical act of Keats's charioteer:

> The charioteer with wondrous gesture talks
> To the trees and mountains; and there soon appear
> Shapes of delight, of mystery, and fear [...].

(1981 139–40)

What Culler says here is perfectly true, and an important piece of cautionary advice. The problem with his criticism, however, is that he is disagreeing with something that Bloom did not say (and which Buber *certainly* does not say[68]). What Bloom actually says is: "To invoke the Spirit that is in the west wind is not to invoke the wind or the autumn *only*" (1969, 75; emphasis added). This is *not* to say that the wind or season is not addressed (if it were not wholeheartedly and exclusively addressed, it would not, by definition be an I-Thou utterance), neither is it correct to talk of a "true" (and thereby to posit a "false") auditor. The speaker addresses the addressee, and *in doing so* also addresses the eternal Thou.[69]

How is it possible, then, to maintain that the eternal Thou is also addressed whilst remaining faithful to the exclusive character of the particular address? Buber acknowledges in the Afterword to *I and Thou* that the issue is "supra-contradictory" (*übergegensätzlich*) (1996, 180), which is hardly surprising, as Buber points out, since God Himself is "supra-contradictory." Nevertheless, there are various ways in which we might attempt to clarify this paradox.

Buber's subtle reformulation of the claim at the start of Part 3 of *I and Thou* (the section that is most concerned with the discussion of God) offers us a clue as to how it might be understood:

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[68] Assessing the relevance of Buber's philosophy in assessing Bloom's reading and application of it is in any case obviously a dubious thing to do.

[69] Culler leaves out Bloom's subsequent, useful clarification of the point:

> To invoke the Spirit that is *in* the wind [emphasis added] is not to invoke the wind or the autumn only. Again the helpful analogue is in the Biblical poetry; the God of Job is not the God of the whirlwind or *in* the whirlwind, but He is God of the whirlwind *also*. This also is *Thou*, but this is not Thou.

(1969, 75)

The extended lines of relations meet in the eternal *Thou*.

    Every particular *Thou* is a glimpse through to the eternal *Thou*; by means of every particular *Thou* the primary word addresses the eternal *Thou*.

                                     (1944, 75)

It is notable here, in contrast to the other almost identical formulations of the claim (1944, 6 and 101), that Buber avoids the use of first person pronouns in each of the three important introductory formulations: in each case, the grammatical subject – that which "does" the meeting – is the utterance itself (the "extended lines of relations," do the "meeting," the "primary word" does the "addressing"). In other words, what Buber seems to be suggesting is that it is *our address* that addresses the eternal Thou. This is not to say that "we" do *not* address the eternal Thou – on the contrary, this is precisely what Buber asserts in the other two cases – it does, however, I think, represent a deliberate and important complication of what it means to say that "we address" the eternal Thou.

A second clue and complication is offered in the other repeated formulation of the claim:

In every sphere in its own way, through each process of becoming that is present to us we look out toward the fringe of the eternal *Thou*; in each we are aware of a breath from the eternal *Thou*; in each *Thou* we address the eternal *Thou*.

                                       (1944, 6)

The three consecutive statements appear to be presented as alternative or appositional formulations of the same claim, though there are significant differences between them. In the first two formulations, the relationship between the speaker and the eternal Thou is both metaphorical and synecdochic (we look towards "the fringe" of (*an den Saum blicken*), and we are aware of "a breath" (*wir vernehmen ein Wehen*) from the eternal Thou), whereas in the third case, it is direct ("we address the eternal Thou"). Furthermore, in the second formulation, our relationship with, or addressing of, the eternal Thou is described as being addressed *by* the eternal Thou ("in each we are aware of a breath from the eternal *Thou*"). These three apparently innocuous re-formulations – describing the act of addressing the eternal Thou by means of metaphor, synecdoche and as an act of *being* addressed – complicate the issue significantly, and reveal the paradoxical nature of our relatedness to God. The act of addressing the eternal Thou, Buber appears to saying, is mediated (we address one thing "in place of" another), synecdochic (we address a "part" instead of the whole), and yet also literal and direct ("we address the

eternal Thou"). That is, more radically, he seems to be suggesting that in the case of the eternal Thou, mediately addressing *is* directly addressing, and addressing a part *is* addressing the whole; just as the apparent equivalence of the three formulations suggests, as Buber says explicitly elsewhere, that giving *is* receiving (1944, 10; 11).

Uncovering the paradoxical character of Buber's formulations may appear to have led to a further complication of our earlier question; though, if it has, it has also brought us closer to an answer. Buber's deconstruction of the customary oppositions between mediation and immediacy, part and whole, giving and receiving, in his description of the act of addressing the eternal Thou is, I believe, explained by and intended to reveal the radically paradoxical nature of the eternal Thou, which places quotidian conceptions of "mediation," and "synecdoche" (as set over against im-mediacy and the whole of a thing) as well as giving and receiving under erasure. For what sense do terms such as metaphor and synecdoche make when thinking about our relation within finitude with Him from whom all things come, in whom all things dwell, and who dwells in all things?

In what sense, then, does this answer our question? How can it be that in exclusively addressing a particular finite other as a Thou we are also addressing the eternal Thou, without this involving any attenuation or translation of the finite Thou? If God, as Jews and Christians believe, is the source and sustainer of all that is, and the ground of possibility of all possible Thous, then He is always also *inherently* addressed when any particular Thou is addressed. We are, to borrow a phrase from Baudrillard, but addressing "God at one remove" (1987, 9). This does not, however, mean that we are permanently and irreparably cut off from God (though Jews and Christians and their various confessions would obviously differ as to the degree and conditions of any reparation of our separateness), yet neither does it mean that our radical separation and finitude count for nothing. It is, as Buber insists, a paradox: our relationship with the eternal Thou is mediated *and* im-mediate. It is clearly the case in all sorts of other quotidian contexts that in establishing relation "at one remove" or with part of a thing, we are also establishing relation with the whole. To take a banal example: in kissing someone's hand or mouth, we are not, certain ghoulish exceptions aside, merely kissing a hand or a mouth but are kissing the person also. Jesus, of course, insisted similarly: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew, 25:40).

Given the importance of such issues to our general argument, it may be useful to extend our discussion briefly beyond the explanations offered by Buber's account to include related ways of thinking about such claims from a Trinitarian perspective.

Christian theology, especially in its Augustinian and Thomist forms, offers a parallel explanation of the issue we have been discussing. The metaphysical and theological notion of "participation," which within Christian thought is most frequently associated with Aquinas, and which has been impressively restated by a number of contemporary Christian thinkers,[70] permits a "stronger" or more radical interpretation of Buber's contention that in addressing any particular finite Thou, we are also addressing the eternal Thou.

Very briefly, the theological notion of participation and the related concept of analogy are perhaps best understood in contrast with the position to which they are opposed and by which, historically, they were "superseded," namely, Scotist univocity.[71]

Duns Scotus contended, against Aquinas, in attempting to explain our knowledge of that which exceeds us, that things may be predicated univocally of man and God;[72] which is to say that the created and Creator, and the relationship between them, may be conceived of in terms of their common possession of a particular attribute, according to which they differ in degree, and which is thus "separated" from and idolatrously raised above God. As Catherine Pickstock writes:

> God is thus deemed "to be" in the same univocal manner as creatures, and although God is distinguished by an "intensity of being," He nonetheless remains within, or subordinate to the category of Being (which now becomes the sole object of metaphysics).
>
> (1998, 122)

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[70] "Participation," as the manifesto Introduction to the movement's eponymous volume announces, is the "central theological framework of radical orthodoxy [...]." This is, it is argued,

> because any alternative configuration perforce reserves a territory independent of God. The latter can lead only to nihilism (though in different guises). Participation, however, refuses any reserve of created territory, while allowing finite things their own integrity.
>
> (Milbank, Pickstock and Ward: 1999, 3)

[71] The story of the fall from participation and analogy into Scotist univocity, and its opening up of a secular space, which eventually led to contemporary nihilism has been recounted by various members of Radical Orthodoxy. See, for example, Blond: 1998; and Pickstock: 1998.

[72] As Scotus writes in *De Metaphysica*: "God cannot be known naturally unless being is univocal [*univocum*] to the created and the uncreated" (cited in Blond: 1998, 6).

According to Aquinas, however, created being can neither be compared to nor separated from divine being. Rather, our being at once belongs to, and yet is utterly different from the being of God. There is, for Aquinas, between man and God neither the proximity (implied in univocal predication) nor the separation (of created being, divine being and the category of Being (which appears to link but in fact sunders the two)) claimed by Scotus. For Thomas, the distance between man and God is so absolute that "[i]t is impossible to predicate anything univocally of God and creatures" (Aquinas: 1967, 63). Yet, according to the doctrine of participation, this distance is a distance *within* divine being. For Aquinas, as for the Fathers, there *is* no being apart from God; things are only in so far as they "are" in God. Our relationship with God thus depends more radically upon His donation of Himself (as we noted earlier, Aquinas approvingly quotes Denys's suggestion that just as the lover is "transported outside himself [...] *he who is the cause of all by his abounding loving kindness is in ecstasy by his providence for all things that exist*"(1967, 63)), and our knowledge of Him is limited to analogy. Phillip Blond has summed up the matter as follows:

> For Thomas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, that which is predicated of God can only be participated in by finite creatures via analogy. This analogical mode, whilst it accepts that we only come to have knowledge of God via His effects, understands that the reality of these effects belongs by priority to God, even though we only uncover God as the source of these effects after having experienced such effects without initially recognising their antecedent cause.
>
> (1998, 6)

The notion of participation thus respects the absolute difference between the created and Creator whilst at the same time maintaining our utter dependency and relatedness. The corollary notion of analogical relation similarly steers a middle course between univocal and equivocal predication ; as Peter Kreeft puts it, in his shortened edition of the *Summa*:

> If St. Thomas held that terms could be univocally predicated of God and creatures (i.e., mean the same thing when used to describe God and creatures, as predicates), he would have an anthropomorphic conception of God and a rationalistic conception of the human mind. If he held that all terms predicated of God and creatures were equivocal, he would be agnostic about God and skeptical about the human mind. Analogical predication fits between these two popular extremes. Univocal terms about God are negative, and positive terms about God are analogical.
>
> (Kreeft: 1993, 75)

The theological notion of participation obviously has a bearing on our more general discussion of the claim that addressing any particular Thou also involves addressing the eternal Thou. If God, as Aquinas and the Fathers maintain, is not only the source, sustainer, and end of all that is, but also, more radically, as the Incarnation supremely announces, participates in and is participated in by all that has being, then manifestly we have even more reason to think that when we address any particular finite Thou, we are simultaneously addressing the eternal Thou. Again, this does not involve any attenuation of or going beyond (even paradoxically as it goes beyond) the particular address. In one sense, in its address and encounter of the eternal Thou, the act of apostrophe reaches beyond the particular Thou; though, in another overriding sense – which does not negate the foregoing assertion but answers Culler's criticism of Bloom – it emphatically does *not*, since that which exceeds it is *part* of it. Indeed, if, as Catherine Pickstock contends, "[a] thing is fulfilling its telos when it is *copying God in its own manner*" (Milbank and Pickstock: 2001, 9), then the more we address a thing in its it-ness – which we supremely do in I-Thou address – the more we are paradoxically addressing God.

We might conclude by saying something briefly in this connection about Trinitarian prayer. All orthodox Christian prayer is offered to the Father, through the intermediate – and humanly realised – Thou of the Son. Thus, at once, the believer prays *to* and *through* Christ; which is to say that he or she prays to and through an Incarnate Thou to the eternal Thou. This obviously does not mean that Christ is some sort of ladder that we climb and then dispense with – He is the way but also the truth and the life – rather, when the believer prays to Christ, he or she is praying to Christ and to the Father *also*; for as Jesus tells us, "I am in the Father and the Father in me" (John, 14:11). It would, of course, be heretical to suggest that God is present in creation to anything like the degree that He became incarnate in Christ. Though, as we noted a moment ago, the Incarnation is obviously supposed paradigmatically to reveal the Infinite's ability to inhere in even as it exceeds the finite. It might therefore be argued, from a Christian perspective, that the act of turning one's whole being towards and addressing any finite thing is an albeit multiply fallen analogue of Trinitarian prayer.

There is another dimension of Trinitarian prayer which is of relevance to our present discussion, and which returns us to Wordsworth's description of the act of apostrophe in "Tintern

Abbey." Wordsworth, we saw, offers, though appears to equate, two subtly different descriptions of the act of apostrophe, which seems to suggest that the act of turning might be a turning of the self and a turning of that which is *other than* and yet *part of* the self:

> How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
> [...]
> How often has my spirit turned to thee!

This sense of the utterance as a turning of the "spirit", which is curiously also a turning of the self, strikingly corresponds to a Trinitarian conception of prayer. As St. Paul famously writes in Romans: "the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered" (VIII, 26). When the believer prays, then, from a Christian point of view, his or her prayers are not simply "theirs" or theirs alone.

Such a Trinitarian conception of prayer is obviously Christian rather than Jewish, in its recognition of distinct and yet identical persons in God; though it might be noted that, without asserting any such "formal" separation, Buber's description of the nature and advent of I-Thou relation comes suggestively close to the Christian position in asserting that the "*Thou* meets me through grace (*Gnaden*) – it is not found by seeking" (1944, 11). To Buber also, then, our ability to give ourselves to God in prayer is dependent upon God's prevenient gift of Himself to us (though, as we shall see, the events cannot be quite so simply sequentially separated).

There is one final way in which the act of apostrophising finite phenomena may be said to involve inherently addressing the eternal Thou, which more fully unites Jewish and Christian perspectives, and ties together a number of the foregoing accounts. According to Judeo-Christian belief, creation is, of course, the Word of God. As Buber puts it: "Creation is God's cry into the void" (Horwitz: 1978, 235). We are thus born of, addressed by and (according to the doctrine of participation) dwell within God's Word, which, as the Nicene Creed reminds us, is *eternally* uttered by God. We are therefore always already addressed by His Word – His eternal uttering of Himself towards us; as Wordsworth writes in *The Prelude*:

> my mind hath looked

Upon the speaking face of earth and heaven
As her prime teacher, intercourse with man
Established by the sovereign Intellect,
Who through that bodily image hath diffused
A soul divine which we participate,
A deathless spirit.

(V, 11–17)

From the point of view of the believer, when we turn towards and respond to any particular finite Thou, we are therefore (also) responding to Him whose anterior and inexhaustible Word addresses us. Patrick Diehl makes a similar point: "In Christian terms, prayer is one aspect of any believer's participation in the on-going dialogue that God initiated at the Creation" (Diehl: 1985, 33). Furthermore, if God's act of creative and sustaining love is to be understood as an *ecstatic* act, as Denys and Aquinas suggest, then in reaching outside of *our* selves in the act of apostrophe, we are in fact imitating and in doing so *giving ourselves back* to God. For, if we carry the logic of the preceding arguments a little further, if in the act of apostrophe we ecstatically reach outside of ourselves in a manner that resembles *God's* reaching outside of Himself in divine love, then we are paradoxically being most ourselves in standing *outside* of ourselves. This is because, if, as Pickstock argues, imitation (of the divine) is the highest form of authenticity,[73] such ecstatic reaching is the act in which we become most ourselves since it is the most like God's most *God*-like activity (for who, to risk one further paradox, can step outside of himself except for God?), and the more we become ourselves – in more closely "imitating" God – the more we give ourselves back to Him.

In all of the foregoing attempts to explain how it might be that we simultaneously address the eternal Thou in addressing any particular finite Thou, it has been argued that we do so *inherently* (not, of course, without our volition or assent, but not alone as a result of them): our *address* addresses the eternal Thou, *the Spirit* intercedes for us, and the eternal Thou addresses *us*. In other words, it happens whilst we are, as it were, doing something else (though that which we "incidentally" do is the condition of possibility for this something else, and this something else is but a copy of what we "incidentally" do, so that what we are doing and our "reason" for doing it are only disclosed in the *act*

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[73] "Aquinas seems to suggest that when on knows a thing, one does not know that thing as it is by itself, but only insofar as on meaningfully grasps it as imitating God. How very odd this seems, for one would normally regard imitation as a secondary and therefore less authentic operation of life, but here it becomes the highest form of authenticity attainable for material things. [...] However, the placing of imitation ahead of autonomy suggests

of doing it). It might, however, finally, also be argued that the act of addressing any particular finite Thou is more a witting sign of apophatic reserve and the fact that "we do not know how to pray as we ought."

If we believe in a God who hides Himself (Isaiah, 8:17), and who withholds His name (Exodus, 3:14), who is yet present at every level of our experience, and who may in His exceeding and encompassing of every *particular* thing be described as *omninominabile* (as Nicholas of Cusa and Denys suggest[74]), then might it not seem *proper* to address God synecdochically (though, as we have seen, the term is insufficient), through that which He has created? Might not this distancing most strictly reflect our knowledge of Him, and properly bespeak our fallen relation to Him?

Before the Fall, according to Milton, Adam and Eve began each day with a hymn to God in praise of creation (which begins by directly addressing God, and then, reverently addresses the created order, before again addressing God). Perhaps our imperfect and instinctive habit of addressing finite phenomena outside of such properly oriented acts of praise, and without the assurance of divine audition, is the fallen remainder and reminder of such direct communion.

"A Slight Fit of Madness"

In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant considers the act of prayer, "conceived as an *inner ritual* service of God and hence as a means of grace" to be "a superstitious delusion (a fetish-making)" (1998, 186). He distinguishes between "the *spirit of prayer*," which he describes as a "sincere wish to please God in all our doings and nondoings, i.e. the disposition, accompanying all our actions, to pursue these as though they occurred in the service of God," which "can and ought be done without ceasing," and the act of "cloth[ing] this wish in words and formulas (though it be only inwardly)" (1998, 186–7), of which he has the following to say:

that, for Aquinas, borrowing is the highest authenticity which can be attained. One must copy in order to be, and one continues only as a copy, never in one's own right" (Milbank and Pickstock: 2001, 10).
[74] Cited in Milbank: 1997, 114.

in the second [sense of prayer], as an *address*, a human being assumes that this supreme object is present in person, or at least he poses (even inwardly) as though he were convinced of its presence, reckoning that, suppose this is not so, his posing can at least do no harm but might rather gain him favor; hence sincerity cannot be found in as perfect a form in this latter (verbal) prayer as it can it the former (the pure spirit of prayer). – Anyone will find the truth of this last remark confirmed if he imagines a pious and well-meaning individual, but one otherwise limited with respect to these purified religious concepts, being caught unawares by somebody else, I do not say praying aloud, but gesturing in a way which indicates praying. Everyone will naturally expect, without my saying so, that this individual will fall into confusion or embarrassment, as those caught in a situation of which he should be ashamed. But why? Because a human being found talking to himself immediately gives rise to the suspicion that he is having a slight fit of madness; and so we would also judge him (not altogether unjustly) if, though alone, we find him occupied in practices or gestures that we expect only of one who sees somebody else before him, whereas this is not the case in the adduced example.

(1998, 186)

There are all sorts of things in this passage that are of interest to our discussion, some of which, however, it will be best to defer. What is of interest to us here is his claim that the act of prayer is embarrassing (to anyone caught doing it), and the assumption that not only the reader and the person doing the finding out but also the person caught in the act of prayer will consider it to be akin to, if not in fact, "a slight fit of madness."

Kant's view of prayer is interestingly similar to Jonathan Culler's view of apostrophe. Both take a strictly rationalistic view of "that which is" and of human behaviour: assuming that the act of talking to that which is not materially apparent – even if we are talking of God – is the same as talking to oneself; assuming that such behaviour is some sort of aberration that all normal people would be ashamed to be discovered doing ("Anyone will find the truth of this"); assuming that embarrassment is a "proof" of disbelief and a properly decisive criterion; and, finally, arguing (as Kant does in an earlier passage) that "the habit of taking a mere representation (of the imagination) for the presence of the thing itself" – again, even with respect to God – is "madness" (1998, 164). Having pointed out the problems with the first three assumptions in the previous chapter, it should not be necessary to say anything further about them here (though it is interesting to note that Kant, also, speaks about "normal human behaviour" as though he had never set foot in a church). The point that we have yet to consider – though it is obviously connected to the preceding discussion – is the contention, which is frequently

made in contemporary writing on the figure, that to take seriously the impression of presence or animism that the apostrophe appears to have the power to bestow is necessarily a delusion.

We might identify four basic interpretative positions with respect to prosopopoeic apostrophe. According to the first reading, the animism or presence it appears to bestow is fictional, irrational and embarrassing; according to the second, it is fictional and irrational but *not* embarrassing; according to the third, it is truthful and rational; and, according to the fourth reading, it is "fictional" *and* truthful.

The first interpretation is obviously the one favoured by the majority of recent critics writing on the figure. Barbara Johnson, for example, as we noted in the previous chapter, memorably describes apostrophe as "a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness" (1998, 221). Jonathan Culler similarly draws attention to the figure's "animate presuppositions," and the fact that the "vocative posits a relationship between two subjects even if the sentence denies the animism of what is addressed" (1981, 141). The apparently inescapable presupposition of animism is explained by Culler as follows:

> Just as the question "Have you stopped beating your wife?" thrusts its presuppositions on the listener with something of the force of an event against which he must struggle, so the presuppositions of apostrophe are a force to be reckoned with. A nicely self-reflexive example is Lamartine's apostrophic question, "Objets inanimés, avez-vous donc une âme?" [O inanimate objects, do you have a soul?], which presupposes a form of that which it asks about.
> (1981, 141)

According to such critics, then, apostrophe is, as Robert Horst puts it, "at bottom alchemical, [...] a formula, incantation, or spell designed to transmute one substance into another" (1992, 602).

One of the problems with such "demystifying" readings, as we noted towards the beginning of this chapter, is that they tend to ignore considerations of propriety, deeming the act to be embarrassing *per se*.[75] Thus, whilst Culler's reading of the figure seems to be borne out by and to help us read the arch apostrophes of a poet like Baudelaire, it would appear to have less to tell us about the apostrophes

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[75] Though it is in any case also possible to look at such apostrophes the other way round, so that whilst it might be argued that "the assertion of the sentence contradicts its presupposition," it is equally possible to argue that the act of address contradicts the assertion (and that the speaker appears to believe *in spite of* his disbelief) – he does, after all, address the objects.

in, say, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton or Wordsworth. The second position or reading of the figure is more helpful in this respect.

According to more "traditional" criticism, apostrophe is, first of all, recognised as being something that occurs outside of poetry (it will be recalled that Culler's exclusion of considerations of propriety both covers up and is covered up by the spurious claim that the figure is unnaturalistic), and hence interpretations of its occurrence in poetry are subject to considerations of mimetic propriety. One of the most familiar and yet still one of the most informative accounts on such matters is provided by Ruskin in his famous discussion of "pathetic fallacy" in *Modern Painters*. On account of its neglect in recent discussions of prosopopoeic apostrophe, it is worthwhile reminding ourselves of its details.

Although Ruskin considers *all* acts of animating the inanimate to be "morbid" and as "implying necessarily *some* degree of weakness in the character," he nonetheless distinguishes between "wilful fancy, which involves no real expectation that it will be believed," and "a fallacy caused by an excited state of feelings, making us, for the time, more or less irrational" (1898, vol. 3, 166; 176; 164).[76] In this respect, Ruskin's comments echo Kames's distinction between "passionate" and "descriptive" personification, referred to earlier in the chapter. Passionate personification, according to Kames, is derived from "an actual conviction, momentary indeed, of life and intelligence"; "descriptive" usage, on the other hand, "seldom or never comes up to a conviction, even momentary, of life and intelligence" (1970, vol. 3, 62). Despite Ruskin's general tone of disapproval, it is, in fact, only the first category of "wilful" fallacy that he considers to be improper; the second type of fallacy is, he argues – concurring with Wordsworth – acceptable when given sufficient cause; indeed, the *retention* of one's rationality in such circumstances is considered by Ruskin to be improper:

> there are always some subjects which *ought* to throw him [a great man] off his balance; some, by which his poor human capacity of thought should be conquered, and brought into the inaccurate and vague state of perception, so that the language of the highest inspiration becomes broken, obscure, and wild in metaphor, resembling that of the weaker man, overborne by weaker things.
>
> (1898, vol. 3, 168)

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[76] As mentioned earlier, Joseph Priestley makes a similar point, arguing that in "*serious personification*, the mind is under a temporary deception" (1968, 254.) See also Lecture XIII, in which he talks of "the mind [...] under a

Ruskin illustrates his argument with reference to an "irrational" description of the sea in Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* ("They rowed her in across the rolling foam – / The cruel, crawling foam").[77] Though Ruskin considers the "state of mind which attributes to it the sea these characters of a living creature" to be "one in which the reason is unhinged by grief" (1898, vol. 3, 165), he nonetheless concludes that

> so long as we see that the *feeling* is true, we pardon, or are even pleased by, the confessed fallacy of sight which it induces: we are pleased, for instance, with those lines of Kingsley's, above quoted, not because they fallaciously describe foam, but because they faithfully describe sorrow.[78]
>
> (*ibid.*, 169)

To sum up the second position, then: whilst Ruskin, like Culler, has no doubt about the fact that the rhetorical bestowal of animism is irrational and fallacious, he considers this, *un*like Culler, to be "proper" and *pleasing* rather than embarrassing. This is, of course, the apparently old-fashioned pleasure of seeing life recognisably depicted in art. It is, once again, rather the use of such figures *without contextual justification* of which Ruskin disapproves.

The third interpretative position is held by Martin Buber. Having said something in the preceding section about how an inanimate or absent object may, according to Buber, function as a subject, and how every I-Thou address involves addressing and being addressed by the eternal Thou, we may concentrate here upon how what Buber has to say about I-Thou relation differs from the positions we have looked at so far on the issues of presence and rationality. Buber's position on the first of these is perhaps best explained by comparing it to what Jonathan Culler says on the subject.

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temporary illusion, during which it actually conceived those things [inanimate objects], which were no moral agents, to be the proper objects of passion" (*ibid.*, 97).

[77] Such transferred epithets are, of course, very common (in "Good King Wenceslas," for example, the frost, we are told, "was cru – el") and though they may be a sign of heightened emotion or "conquered thought," clearly, they do not always imply an active sense of animism; Priestley notes towards the beginning of his Lecture on Personification that "this figure is become so general, that it is almost impossible to discourse about any thing, in the calmest manner in the world, without borrowing some part of our language from the regions of life and sense" (1968, 247–8.) It is the addition of "crawling" in Kingsley's description which appears to tilt the balance.

[78] It is worth noting, incidentally, that Ruskin's comments frequently echo Wordsworth and Coleridge's attitude towards eighteenth-century verse, both in the authors cited (contrasting Pope with Coleridge), and in the terms of his disapproval; there is, writes Ruskin, "no greater baseness in literature than the habit of using these metaphorical expressions in cool blood" (1898, vol. 3, 170); and later on: "bad writing may almost always [...] be known by its adoption of these fanciful metaphorical expressions as a sort of current coin" (*ibid.*, 174).

Oddly, in one sense, Culler's account is not so different from Buber's (though, of course, ultimately they are *absolutely* different). What they have in common is that they both see the act of addressing the other as a performative or constitutive act. As we have seen, Culler (implicitly) agrees with Buber – and, indeed, writes brilliantly on the subject – that the act of address is a "happening" or an *event*, which does not describe but *brings about* a certain state of affairs. The difference between them lies in the status assigned to this event. Here is how Culler explains what occurs:

> a poem may invoke objects, people, a detemporalized space with forms and forces which have pasts and futures but which are addressed as potential presences. Nothing need happen in an apostrophic poem, as the great Romantic odes amply demonstrate. Nothing need happen because the poem itself is to be the happening.
>
> The tension between the narrative and the apostrophic can be seen as the generative force behind a whole series of lyrics. One might identify, for example, as instances of the triumph of the apostrophic, poems, which, in a very common move, substitute a temporality of discourse for a referential temporality. In lyrics of this kind a temporal problem is posed: something once present has been lost or attenuated; this loss can be narrated but the temporal sequence is irreversible, like time itself. Apostrophes displace this irreversible structure by removing the opposition between presence and absence from empirical time and locating it in a discursive time. The temporal movement from A and B, internalized by apostrophe, becomes a reversible alternation between A' and B': a play of presence and absence governed not by time but by poetic power.
>
> (1981, 149–50)

Evidently, then, Culler and Buber agree that the act of addressing the other as a *Thou* makes something *happen*. Here, however, the similarities end. According to Culler, apostrophic poetry creates a textual or discursive temporality in which a fictional "play of presence and absence" displaces empirical presence and absence. This presence or relation is thus fictional (Culler's preferred term) in both senses – that is, occurring in art and impossible or having no counterpart in reality. According to Buber, however, the act of addressing the other as a *Thou* (not always or automatically, of course) does, *actually*, bring about relation and "real filled" presentness (1944, 12). The utterance thus signifies and instantiates a *reality* (which may occur or be depicted in writing). In other words, the temporality of art or writing, which Culler describes so well, is, to Buber, *mimetic*, in that it represents what actually occurs; or, to use Culler's terms, the temporality of discourse *is*, to Buber, a referential temporality.

If Buber disagrees with Culler and others on the question of presentness, he also disagrees

with critics such as Ruskin on the issue of rationality. Talking of the difference between I-It and I-

Thou modes, Buber explains:

> the difference [...] is by no means that between the "rational" and the "irrational," but between
> the reason that detaches itself from the other forces of the human person and declares itself to
> be sovereign and the reason that forms a part of the wholeness and unity of the human person
> and works, serves, and expresses itself within this wholeness and unity.
>
> (1967, 710)

In this sense, we may note in passing, Michael Spiller's definition of the difference between "strong"

and "weak" apostrophe, which corresponds to our distinction between Romantic and rhetorical usage,

accords with Buber's account, in that it is based upon the degree of *attention* given to or *involvement*

with the other, rather than being a matter of emotion as such.

The third position may thus be summed up as follows. Whilst from an exclusively secular

point of view, the act of addressing that which is empirically absent or inanimate signifies an irrational

alteration of the ontological status of that which is addressed, from another, equally orthodox, point of

view, such moments may be said to *discover* rather than to *perform* this change; that is to say, they

discover what is, to a believing Christian or Jew, in fact true and a permanent reality – that creation is

interpenetrated with Presence, and that personhood floods the universe – which we never quite forget,

but which we only directly encounter in such heightened moments of perception or being.[79] As

Langdon Gilkey writes in another context: "It is God's presence that evokes worship, not our doing of

worship that brings forth God" (1973, 65). And again:

> worship is not a self-generated activity; it is rather a response to the presence of the holy
> objectively experienced in our midst. It is not something that can be created or even evoked by

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[79] Kevin McGuirk suggests a similar, though less explicitly religious, reading of apostrophe in his discussion of
Seamus Heaney's *Field Work*:

> an apostrophised object is defined and, therefore, limited by the poet's act. What apostrophe serves to do
> first of all is to establish poetic presence and voice in an immediate fashion. Secondly, it removes the
> discourse from the constraints of referential time, as it works against causality, sequence, teleological
> meaning (Culler), and, therefore, against history. But what if the poet fully and consciously believes in
> the otherness of the "subject" he addresses – that, in other words, he is not bestowing subjectivity but
> merely presupposing it?
>
> (1994, 74–5)

us; as in revelation, it is *there* within its medium to be responded to (and that response is worship), or it is not there at all [...].
[...]
God is already there in our existence as its ultimate ground and its ultimate goal. The role of sacrament and word alike is not so much to create or insert that presence into nature but to bring that prior relation forth in awareness [...].

(1973, 64; 70)

Our fourth and final interpretation of apostrophe's apparent bestowal of animism brings us to the difference outlined earlier on between Buber and the Romantics. At the end of our discussion of ekstasis, we noticed that whilst they agree in seeing that which is disclosed in relation as wholly dependent upon the action of the perceiver, the former sees the moment of relation as *revealing* that which is otherwise not there, whereas the latter, as we adduced from comments made by Wordsworth and Coleridge, see relation as *creating* or actively fashioning that which is otherwise not the case. This difference would seem crucially to separate them with respect to the truth or reality of that which is brought into being. How decisive is this difference?

Let us consider the Romantics' position a little more closely. This may be introduced with reference to an early version of Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight,"[80] which is concerned with what takes place when and why we animate the inanimate:

> haply hence,
> That still the living spirit in our frame,
> Which loves not to behold a lifeless thing,
> Transfuses into all things its own Will,
> And its own pleasures; sometimes with deep faith,
> And sometimes with a wilful playfulness
> That stealing pardon from our common sense
> Smiles, as self-scornful, to disarm the scorn
> For these wild reliques of our childish Thought,
> That flit about, oft go, and oft return
> Not uninvited.

(*CPW*, 241)

Coleridge puts forward, and seems to give equal weight to, two apparently contradictory explanations of the curiously persistent tendency to animate the inanimate, one of which corresponds to Ruskin's "wilful fancy," the other appears to have more in common with Buber's position. We do so, he claims,

"sometimes with deep faith" and "[s]ometimes with a wilful playfulness"; or, to be more precise, it is "the living spirit in our frame" – that which, according to the story in Genesis, brought us to life, and exists ecstatically within us – rather than the self as such that does so. Indeed, according to Coleridge, the "living spirit" acts *in spite of* our rational selves, having as it were to excuse itself, apparently embarrassed in the face of our common sense for "these wild reliques of our childish Thought [...]." We may note in passing that this lends support to our earlier contention that embarrassment is merely the isolationist response of reason to that which we are nevertheless inclined to do. What is especially interesting about the extract, however, is that although the two different explanations are temporally kept apart ("sometimes [...] [s]ometimes"), they follow on from and explain the same activity as though there were no contradiction between them. Yet the first explanation – "sometimes with deep faith" – though it is left enigmatically unelaborated, might appear to be not only incompatible with the second explanation but also to offer a surprising account of the foregoing activity. Whilst according to the initial description, the sense of animism is something that is *brought about* – and ecstatically *transfused into* the lifeless thing – by the observer, his first explanation appears, without any sign of dissonance, to countermand the implication of delusion, and proleptically to contradict the second explanation, which reaffirms the sense of the alteration as a mere appearance brought about by our own playful imagining. It is as if to say we do it or make it up and then believe it. Is there any sense in such a contention? Is Coleridge's speaker not even more deluded – in knowing he is deluded and *still* being deluded – than the "enamoured rustic" in "Constancy to an Ideal Object," who "worships" the "fair hues" of the Brocken spectre, "Nor knows he makes the shadow, he pursues"?

To help us answer this question, let us widen our focus a little, and consider a longer extract on the same subject from *The Prelude*, which remained virtually unaltered in subsequent versions:

> 'Twere long to tell
> What spring and autumn, what the winter snows,
> The evening and the morning, what my dreams
> And what my waking thoughts, supplied to nurse
> That spirit of religious love in which
> I walked with Nature. But let this at least
> Be not forgotten, that I still retained

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[80] The poem was first published in 1798, and reissued with slight alterations in the *Poetical Register* for 1808-9, from which the above quotation is taken.

My first creative sensibility,
That by the regular action of the world
My soul was unsubdued. A plastic power
Abode with me, a forming hand, at times
Rebellious, acting in a devious mood,
A local spirit of its own, at war
With general tendency, but for the most
Subservient strictly to the external things
With which it communed. An auxiliar light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds,
The gentle breezes, fountains that ran on
Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed
A like dominion, and the midnight storm
Grew darker in the presence of my eye.
Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,
And hence my transport.
        Nor should this, perchance,
Pass unrecorded, that I still had loved
The exercise and produce of a toil,
Than analytic industry to me
More pleasing, and whose character I deem
Is more poetic as resembling more
Creative agency. The song would speak
Of that interminable building reared
By observation of affinities
In objects where no brotherhood exists
To passive minds. My seventeenth year was come
And, whether from this habit rooted now
So deeply in my mind, or from excess
In the great social principle of life
Coercing all things into sympathy,
To unorganic natures were transferred
My own enjoyments; or the power of truth
Coming in revelation, did converse
With things that really are; I, at this time,
Saw blessings spread around me like a sea.
Thus while the days flew by, and years passed on,
From Nature and her overflowing soul,
I had received so much, that all my thoughts
Were steeped in feeling; I was only then
Contented, when with bliss ineffable
I felt the sentiment of Being spread
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still;
O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart;
O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts and sings,
Or beats the gladsome air; o'er all that glides
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself,
And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not
If high the transport, great the joy I felt,
Communing in this sort through earth and heaven
With every form of creature, as it looked
Towards the Uncreated with a countenance
Of adoration, with an eye of love.

One song they sang, and it was audible,
Most audible, then, when the fleshly ear,
O'ercome by humblest prelude of that strain
Forgot her functions, and slept undisturbed.

(II, 371–434)

Wordsworth's account of the tendency to animate the apparently inanimate corresponds to though expands upon Coleridge's description in a number of enlightening ways. To begin with, Wordsworth describes the ecstatic communion with "external things" (386–7) that, as we saw in the poetry of Coleridge and Byron, constitutes the moment of I-Thou relation. We may note for the time being that although the process is presented as reciprocal, the descriptions of giving and receiving occur either side of the poet's exploratory account of his perception of animism in the natural world. In lines 387–395, he describes the "auxiliar light" that came from his mind and "[b]estowed new splendour" on natural phenomena, and in lines 415–7, he talks of that which he had received from "Nature and her overflowing soul [...]." We may also note that the life or "light" which is bestowed is, as it was in Coleridge's extract, a "spirit of its own" (384), and something that "abode" with him (382), rather than the self as such – though it is also paradoxically the very essence of self – which again, according to the creational economy to which Wordsworth alludes in "Tintern Abbey," is *itself* bestowed on man. (Wordsworth talks in the paragraph preceding these lines of the "superadded soul," which strengthened his mind with a "virtue not his own" (347–8).) Wordsworth's account of how this "spirit" relates with the natural world – describing it as a "plastic power," a "forming hand," an "auxiliar light" – furthermore, recalls Coleridge's description in "Dejection: an Ode," both of which make clear that the process is creative but not a creation *out of nothing*. Let us turn now to the central explanation of the poet's sense of animism in nature.

We used the word "exploratory" earlier on account of the passage's significant use of the coordinator "or":

My seventeenth year was come
And, whether from this habit rooted now
So deeply in my mind, or from excess
In the great social principle of life
Coercing all things into sympathy,
To unorganic natures were transferred

> My own enjoyments; or the power of truth
> Coming in revelation, did converse
> With things that really are; I, at this time,
> Saw blessings spread around me like a sea.

In common with the extract from "Frost at Midnight," Wordsworth's account of "the one life within us and abroad" puts forward and appears equally to endorse two apparently contradictory explanations. The first "or" links two different but compatible causes of the poet's tendency to coerce "all things into sympathy" and transfer his "own enjoyments" to "unorganic natures [...]." However, the poet then adds a further postpositive coordinator, which introduces a radically alternative explanation: "or the power of truth / Coming in revelation, did converse / With things that really are [...]." What is more, from this point on, the poet emphasises that which is *received* and *perceived* as opposed to being bestowed: "I, at this time, / *Saw* blessings spread around me like a sea," "with bliss ineffable / I *felt* the sentiment of Being spread / O'er all that moves," "in all things / I *saw* one life, and felt that it was joy" (emphasis in each case added). How are we to make sense of this?

We are, I think, offered a clue in the lines which immediately precede the poet's alternatives:

> The song would speak
> Of that interminable building reared
> By observation of affinities
> In objects where no brotherhood exists
> To passive minds.

The line-break that follows the verb "exists" momentarily, though palpably, draws attention to the possibility that such "affinities" or "brotherhood" may not in fact exist at all. The poet employs enjambment to a similar effect in Book I, with which the above example may be usefully compared. Following the famous boat-stealing episode, the poet writes of his sense of "unknown modes of being" and of the

> huge and mighty forms, that do not live
> Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
> By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

In both cases, I think the poet wishes us to know, by passingly alluding to though moving on beyond such objections, that he is *aware* of the obvious sceptical counter-arguments, yet he is nonetheless of another opinion. The importance of alluding to this possibility in the extract we have been examining, apart from the fact that it anticipates and wards off certain objections, is that the poet thereby introduces a third position, in addition to the two that the sentence makes clear, against which what he is saying may be compared. These positions are: such "affinities" or "brotherhood" do not exist; they do not exist to "common minds" (which he altered to "passive minds" in the 1850 version); and they *do* exist to uncommon or "active" minds. In other words, he is distinguishing existence, non-existence and *apparent* non-existence. The identification of this latter category helps explain the seeming contradiction in the explanations of "the one life within us and abroad" in the extracts by Wordsworth and Coleridge.

It helps, but it does not completely explain the apparent contradiction. If, as we are suggesting, according to Wordsworth and Coleridge, such "brotherhood" and "affinities" *do* exist or are in fact true, and only *appear* not to exist or rather *do not* exist to the "passive" mind – which would indicate a basic compatibility between Buber's position and that of the Romantics – how does this square with the repeated insistence on the role of creativity in such moments of relation?

Whilst it might at first sight appear to be something of a leap – though, if we are talking about revelation, it obviously is not – an aid to understanding this apparent contradiction may be found in writings of Thomas Aquinas. What is the relevance of Aquinas to our discussion of creativity and truth?

Although as we saw in his account of ecstasy, Aquinas maintains that it is possible for created minds in this life transiently to see the divine essence, this is, he makes clear, exceptional (2a 2æ. 171, 3 (1969)). Such exceptions aside, all human knowing, for Aquinas, following Aristotle, is in some sense "constructed" by us. That is to say, it is something to which the knower contributes or, as Milbank and Pickstock put it, it involves an "aesthetic moment" (2001, 11).

The obvious objection to this is that our "knowledge" then ceases to be coextensive with "the truth" or else is watered down into an emasculated – and effectively non-referring – notion of *subjective* truth. If we are at the same time judge, attorney and jury, preparing the evidence upon

which we must pronounce, how can reality get a fair hearing? Surely we cannot hold onto creativity

without letting go of truth? Aquinas, however, with characteristic lucidity, perceives a middle course

between knowing things as they are, in the Mind of God, and a parodic creativity *ex nihilo* in the mind

of man, which is in touch with truth whilst being "constructed" by man.[81] This balancing which is the

essence of creative perception is summed up by Chesterton:

> Note how [Aquinas's view of the relationship between the mind and "external fact"] avoids both pitfalls; the alternative abysses of impotence. The mind is not merely receptive, in the sense that it absorbs sensations like so much blotting-paper; on that sort of softness has been based all that cowardly materialism, which conceives man as wholly servile to his environment. On the other hand, the mind is not purely creative, in the sense that it paints pictures on the windows and then mistakes them for a landscape outside. But the mind is active, and its activity consists in following, so far as the will chooses to follow, the light outside that does really shine upon real landscapes.
>
> (1956, 155)

In view of the importance and subtlety of this notion of active perception, it will be useful to say a

little more about what it is or in what way we contribute to what is known, and how this remains in

touch with "the truth" of things. In his brilliant two-part study of the postmodern conception of the

subject and its arbitrary refusal of reciprocity and the soul, John Milbank provides an enlightening

summary of the ways in which the knower contributes to the known in the act of knowing it.

As Milbank observes, all human knowing is inescapably a matter of "construction,"

"speculation" and "mood or feeling" (2001, 346). Construction, because, as finite embodied creatures

– the exception of revelation in ekstasis aside (though even here the question remains, "whether in the

body or out of the body") – we cannot "know" outside of our finitude or embodiment. As Milbank

writes: "It is construction, not in the sense of an interior operation of a supposed *a priori* apparatus

upon sensory information, but rather in the sense of the exterior operation which mind and body

together perform upon the world" (2001, 346). In what sense does all human knowing involve

speculation? Milbank's answer requires more extensive quotation:

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[81] As Thomas Gilby O.P. notes, with reference to Aquinas's epistemology, "A thing in the mind is 'otherwise' than it is in fact, yet this does not mean that the mind is false as judging its object to be other than it is" (1967, 18).

Ever since Husserl, phenomenology has stressed that we only ever see aspects of a phenomenon – as when we can never see all sides of a cube at once – and that we see these aspects in a succession of temporal moments. [...] However, this is not simply a matter of seeing so far and no further: to the contrary, we only see the sides of the cube *as* sides of a cube, through an obscure inference of the hidden sides. To see a visible item at all, we must also in some way see in it what is invisible, if we are to see an item and establish its bounds. [...] If the invisible must be seen in order for the visible to be seen, then fundamental intuition is always contaminated by a certain element of conjecture which constructs imaginatively what does not appear, in order that there may be bounds to what does appear. Conjecture, one might say – or else judgement or interpretation. Yet this conjecture, intellectual faith assumes, is not arbitrary. Therefore, it does indeed still "see" – but only, as it were, through the telescope of interpretation. But we have a single word for this double reality, and the word is "speculation"; to speculate is at once to see, and riskily to exceed vision. In economic parlance that is all it is. But in theological parlance, the exceeding of vision is, and is alone, prior to the *eschaton*, vision. Now we see *per speculum in aenigmate*.

(2001, 346–7)

Finally, in what sense is knowing a matter of mood or feeling? Milbank explains the point as follows:

Different states of minds, different moods, may indeed "colour" what we see, but they also disclose different aspects of what we see, just as they are in some measure instigated by these aspects. Even the most objective scientific understanding is disclosed to the mood of calm detachment, linked to the lust for mastery. Other truths are disclosed only to love of the ideal and desire for the Good. And here once again, it is true that (as for Plato) *eros* sees, but only in so far as its sublime preference evokes the very light of the Good by which all may be truly seen.

(2001, 347)

Moving on to the second part of our question: if all human knowing is a matter of construction, speculation and mood or feeling, in what sense does this remain in touch with truth? Part of the answer has already been suggested in Milbank's comments on the non-arbitrary character of our speculation. According to Aquinas, our knowing is undergirded and guided by judgement and love. Indeed, for Aquinas, love is *itself* a form of knowing. And it is these two powers which grant our "speculations" a fallible and obscure but crucial degree of discernment and continuity with the way things are in the Mind of God. Creative or active perception is therefore not set over against but is in fact the *precondition* for our discerning truth. This point has been well made by Catherine Pickstock:

when the human intellect receives into itself the species of the material substances it knows, it does not know them in the manner of an arraignment of inert facts. Rather, it must always *judge* or *discern* whether they are true to themselves. [...] This means that even corresponding to finite objects is really only a corresponding to the Mind of God. In the first place, the mind must judge whether, for example, a tree is being true to itself, according to the mind's divine inner light of illumination. By doing this, the mind discerns or grasps an analogical proportion

of things to God, and finds here a manifestation of the invisible in the visible. [...] Here again, as with the ethical dimension of truth, one finds something very strange to the modern mind; for where [the modern mind] thinks of knowledge as an abasement of subjectivity before the inertly objective, Aquinas sustains, in knowing, a delicate balance between the objective and the subjective. If one requires a beautiful appearance in order to manifest the truth, then while it is indeed the objective that is registered, this registration is only made by the subjectively informed power of rightly desiring sight and judgement. There is, indeed, a certain "what" which pleases, but this "what" is only acknowledged as "pleasing." Likewise, the invisible really does shine through the visible, and yet this is only apparent for a subtle power of discernment; it is obviously not present in the manner of a "fact."

[...]

Now because the matter cannot get inside the mind, senses cannot provide the mind with awareness of singulars – rather, the senses have to be mediated by the imagination. Thus imaginary images of things here become an oblique mediating principle which provides a mysterious echo of material sensing in the intellect (or somewhere halfway between sense and intellect) and in this fashion we receive a notion of the singular and hence some awareness of the form/matter compound. Moreover, by virtue of the transparency of mediation, its presence in our intellect is mysteriously more than a fiction or figment. Because for Aquinas truth "corresponds" not by copying but by a new analogical realization of something in the mind in an inscrutable "proportion" to how it is in reality, the imagination can act creatively without fictional betrayal. Indeed, it *must* act creatively if it is to be "true."

(Milbank and Pickstock: 2001, 11; 15)

The relevance of these arguments to our discussion of Romantic poetry should be obvious. The apparent contradiction we observed in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge – where both writers seemed prepared to believe in the factual existence of something they were aware of having created – evidently need not be a contradiction at all.[82] Aquinas offers us a way of explaining how it might be that the life and reciprocity we bestow or creatively perceive may paradoxically, if analogously, signify that which is in fact the case. To create, it seems, may be to *reveal*.[83] As Keats famously says of the imagination, it "may be compared to Adam's dream – he awoke and found it truth" (*KL*, 67). Only, the mode of relation is a "dream" whose truth – without being compromised in

[82] In his fine study of the two poets in *Wordsworth and Coleridge: the Poetry of Growth*, Stephen Prickett draws attention to the centrality of this paradox in their theories of creativity. Prickett refers to two related phenomena of recurrent and symbolic importance to the poets – the rainbow and the Brocken spectre, both of which are "created" or *half*-created by the perceiver yet nonetheless factually exist – as emblematic of their thinking on creativity and perception. As Prickett writes: "For Wordsworth the rainbow was neither 'in' the mind, nor 'out there' in the material world, but was created by the coalition of both" (1970, 37). Prickett describes this encounter or "communion with the invisible world" (*The Prelude*, II, 105) as "sacramental" (1970, 42), a term we may use in designating a human "making" or figuring forth of that which is beyond the human to characterise our fourth interpretative position.

[83] Harold Bloom appears to mean something similar in his use of the term "mythopoeic perception" to describe the non-opposition of poetry or "making" (*poēsis*) and truth, in his reading of Shelley's poetry as exemplifying Buber's notion of I-Thou relation. Borrowing from the writing of Henri Frankfort and Mrs H. A. Frankfort on myth, Bloom defines "mythmaking poetry" – which he identifies with Buber's mode of relation – as a form of poetry that "proclaims a truth; a form of reasoning which transcends reasoning in that it wants to bring about the truth it proclaims" (1969, 3 (the quotation is from the Frankforts)).

its truthfulness – does not "exist" outside of the "dreaming" mode.[84] John Milbank sums up the matter nicely: "Since God is not an object in the world, he cannot be available to us before our response to him, but in this response – our work, our gift, our art, our hymn – he is already present" (Milbank and Pickstock: 2001, 58). To conclude, we may note that in our examination of the non-oppositional relationship between creativity and truth, the distance between Buber and the Romantics, respecting their explanations of "the one life within us and abroad," suggested by the latter's emphasis upon the active contribution of the perceiver, has narrowed significantly. Moreover, the residual emphasis which appears to separate the Romantics' position from Buber's philosophy, without, however, limiting their compatibility, may turn out *not* to be something "extra" in the former, but to suggest a way of supplementing something which has been perceived as lacking in the latter.[85]

Giving and Receiving: of that which "Hath no Beginning"

At various points in the present and preceding chapters, we have come upon questions concerning the paradoxical relationship between and reciprocity of giving and receiving. In Chapter 1, for example, we noted with reference to Augustine's solution to the *Meno* paradox that it is because of that "aspect of our being [...] which somehow already has something and yet does not have it" that we can move beyond the aporia of learning. In other words, we can give – and therefore receive (and therefore give) – because we have already in some measure received. Relatedly, in our discussion of the way in which addressing any particular Thou involved also addressing the eternal Thou, we noted that Buber appeared to equate the act of address with the act of *being* addressed, which seemed to suggest that giving somehow *is* receiving. And, finally, in the foregoing discussion of the presence and animism

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[84] Keats, it seems, was perhaps more aware of and fascinated by this fact than anyone. In his odes to a Nightingale and on a Grecian Urn, we find the speaker, rather like someone trying to look at the side of their own face, continually attempting to sneak up on his dreaming self with his waking faculties, trying as it were consciously to enjoy his lack of consciousness.

[85] Unfortunately, it is not possible to consider any further in how far Aquinas' "aesthetic" account of revelation and the Romantics' conception of "creative" perception may be seen as a way of supplementing Buber's I-Thou philosophy in order to defend it against recent criticism of its failure to take cognisance of the inevitably mediated nature of all meaningful encounter.

that apostrophe appears to have the power to bestow, we concluded that although in some sense such "presence" is always *already* present, in another sense, it is only subsequently *disclosed* by our response. Which is to say that although God's self-giving precedes and prompts, it appears only to be realised as a result of, *our* giving. Thus, on the one hand, it has been suggested that in order to give we must first receive; though, on the other hand, the reverse also seems to be true, namely, that to receive we have to give; and yet furthermore it has also been suggested that giving *is* receiving. The present section seeks to clarify this paradoxical relationship by expanding upon Buber's position, and by considering a number of poetic examples that deal with such issues.

There has recently been an exponential growth of interest in such matters, centring on the notion of the gift, which informs but obviously for reasons of space cannot be discussed in general here. What, then, is Buber's view of the matter?

In *I and Thou*, Buber consistently refuses to separate giving and receiving, meeting and being met, addressing and being addressed. Whether he is talking about relation with a finite Thou, the eternal Thou, or the relation which is the source of art, in each case, the mutual confrontation that takes place between the I and the Thou is described as reciprocally precipitating and yet the actions are also described as coterminous. Here is the section that deals with the issue most extensively:

> The *Thou* meets me through grace – it is not found by seeking. But my speaking of the primary word to it is an act of my being, is indeed *the* act of my being.
> The *Thou* meets me. But I step into direct relation with it. Hence the relation means being chosen and choosing, suffering and action in one; [...]
> The primary word *I-Thou* can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*.
> (1944, 11)

How can we make sense of what Buber says? How can it be that our being addressed appears at the same time to precipitate, coincide with, and be disclosed by, our address? Drawing upon the conclusions we have arrived at already, and upon what Buber says here and elsewhere, it is, I think, possible to show that all three of the foregoing claims may be simultaneously maintained without contradiction.

According to the first claim, our being addressed *precedes* our address; that is to say, we must receive before we can give. In what way does God's movement towards us precede our movement

towards Him? According to Buber, "the eternal Thou is eternally Thou"; it "can by its nature not become *It*," though "our nature compels us to draw it into the world and the talk of *It*" (1944, 100; 112). We are thus eternally and always already being addressed by God. As Buber writes: "The creation itself already means communication between Creator and creature" (1982, 195). Our *being created* is an act of communication. However, for various reasons, we are unaware of or unable (permanently) to realise this fact. This might be because of the "sacrifice and risk" (Buber: 1944, 10) that the moment of relation involves, "shattering security" and "tearing us away to dangerous extremes" (Buber: 1944, 34); as T. S. Eliot says, "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality" ("Burnt Norton," I, 42-3). It may, conversely, be because of our preference for the comfort and security (Buber: 1944, 33-4) or *melancholy* of I-It experience – "for despair is also an interesting feeling" (Buber: 1944, 45). Yet the failure to realise relation might equally come of *trying* (since the Thou "is not found by seeking" (Buber: 1944, 11)) or even because of our *consciousness* of what we are doing:

> in this our stage of subjectivized reflection not only the concentration of the one who prays, but also his spontaneity is assailed. The assailant is consciousness, the over-consciousness of the man here that he is praying, that he is *praying*, that *he* is praying. And the assailant appears to be invincible. The subjective knowledge of the one turning-towards about his turning-towards, this holding back of an I which does not enter into the action with the rest of the person, an I to which the action is an object – all this depossesses the moment [...].
> (Buber: 1957, 126)

In any case, what this means is that "[f]rom man's side there is no continuity, only from God's side" (Buber: 1982, 205). It is "we only who are not always there" (Buber: 1944, 99). Noticing this perpetual receding or eclipse (from our side) of the Thou's address, in spite of its prevenient and eternal occurrence, helps us to reconcile two of the apparently contradictory positions; namely, that our being addressed precedes and yet is also disclosed by our address.

As we saw in the previous section, our *realisation* of being addressed is dependent upon *our* address. Buber is quite categorical about this. Whilst I-Thou relation "can never take place through my agency," neither "can it ever take place without me" (Buber: 1944, 11). Nevertheless, our act of address *reveals* – or even in a sense *fashions* for our perception – that which is *already* there and occurring, that is, the Thou's address of us. As Buber writes: "Signs happen to us without respite,

living means being addressed, we would only need to present ourselves and to perceive" (1969, 10). Yet, "[e]ach of us is encased in an armour whose task is to ward off signs" (1969, 10). In this sense, then, it seems possible to assert without contradiction that our being addressed both precedes and is *disclosed by* our address.

This clarification of the "before" and "after" paradox also clearly indicates how the remaining position may – at least in part – be reconciled with the other two claims. We have seen how, in line with Buber's claim that God's address of us is only realised in our address of Him. It is therefore again permissible without contradiction to describe the two events as coterminous, whilst also maintaining that the one precedes the other. Indeed, Buber is so keen to stress the simultaneity of the two events that he is prepared – even by his own highly neologising standards – to employ a remarkably non-standard German formulation in order to make it clear. The penultimate line of the longer section quoted above on the contemporaneous interplay of giving and receiving, meeting and being met runs as follows in the German original:

Ich werde am Du; Ich werdend spreche ich Du.

(1997, 15)

Buber's "am Du" is, of course, unusual enough and a translator's minor nightmare, but the real oddity is the following attempt to create a continuous verb form, equivalent to the English –*ing*, by means of the coinage "*werdend*";[86] as Walter Kaufmann literally translates it: "becoming I, I say You" (Buber: 1996, 62).

This still leaves something unexplained, however. If our address of God precipitates to our awareness His address of us, what induces our address of Him? According to Buber, we cannot do so of our own volition, and yet surely we cannot be provoked by His address of us before we are aware of it. There seems, as it were, to be insufficient causality to go round. Either God's address of us instigates our address of Him *or* our address of Him reveals His (prevenient) address of us. They cannot logically both cause each other. They could not *both* precede each other, and yet neither would

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[86] The oddity is unapparent in the English translation, since the difference between simple and continuous forms, which is not registered in German, is obviously normal in English.

coincidence permit mutual causality. We seem to have arrived at an aporia within our account of the relationship between giving and receiving that once again corresponds to the problem of learning touched upon in the previous chapter. How can we affirm the contention that giving and receiving are reciprocally related, if neither simultaneity nor precedence, as we have conceived of it so far, can wholly account for it?

Buber offers us another way of understanding the paradoxical claim that our address discloses and yet is also instigated by our being addressed, which is remarkably similar to Augustine's response to the *Meno* problem. In *I and Thou*, Buber describes the historical evolution of I-It and I-Thou modes in primitive man and in infancy. In both cases (though he concentrates on infancy), Buber argues that "[i]n the beginning is relation" (1944, 27). In the case of the child, this might appear to be self-evident and uncontroversial. After all, as Buber writes, the "ante-natal life of the child is one of purely natural combination, bodily interaction and flowing from one to the other" (1944, 25). It would also appear to be consonant with recent (Lacanian) psychoanalytical accounts of the development of the subject, which only in through the "mirror stage" learns to recognise itself as distinct from the "(m)other" and *as* a subject. However, Buber's account of original relation involves an additional "metaphysical" element which takes it well beyond such biological or psychoanalytical conceptions of infant relation, and brings it closer to a Christian understanding of the self. It is this additional element that may help us answer some of the questions in our account of the relationship between giving and receiving.

When Buber says "[i]n the beginning is relation," he is not simply talking about the infant's behaviour, and its "instinct to make everything into a *Thou*, to give relation to the universe" (1944, 27); neither is he talking about ante-natal *biological* relation. Rather, he is talking about "a *category of being*, a readiness" (1944, 27 (emphasis added)). In other words, relation is not something we are born outside of and then subsequently *enter into*; we are, on the contrary, born with a *predisposition* towards relation, which we subsequently fall out of and only rediscover momentarily in later life. Relation is the mode in which we first engage with the world. As Buber explains:

It is simply not the case that the child first perceives an object, then, as it were, puts himself in relation with it. But the effort to establish relation comes first – the hand of the child arched out so that what is over against him may nestle under it; second is the actual relation, a saying of *Thou* without words, in the state preceding the word-form; the thing, like the *I*, is produced

late, arising after the original experiences have been split asunder and the connected partners separated. In the beginning is relation – as category of being, readiness, grasping form, mould for the soul [...].

<div align="right">(1944, 27 and 1970, 78 [translations combined])</div>

This is not the same as – though it might resemble – the solipsism of infancy described by psychoanalysis, that is, the infant's inability to distinguish between self and not-self. According to Buber's view of things, the infant's sense of "continuity" involves an "I" and a "Thou" rather than representing a projected extension of self.

The obvious question that this provokes is, how aware is the *child* of such differences? And if it is *not* aware, what sense does it make to posit them? In response to this, we might note that Buber would agree that the child is not conscious of the difference between an "I" and a "Thou," and that original relation occurs *prior* to such distinctions. What, however, such a position entails – and what Buber explicitly argues – is that the child is as little aware of *itself as an "I"* as it is aware of the other as other or Thou; Buber writes:

Already in the original relational event he speaks the primary word *I-Thou* in a natural way that precedes what may be termed visualisation of forms – that is, before he has recognised himself as *I*. The primary word *I-It*, on the other hand, is made possible at all only means of this recognition – by means, that is, of the separation of the *I*.

The first primary word can be resolved, certainly, into *I* and *Thou*, but it did not arise from their being set together; by its nature it precedes *I*.

<div align="right">(1944, 22)</div>

It would therefore seem that logic at least is on Buber's side, since it surely makes more sense to see such a state of affairs as relation between an "I" and a "Thou" of which the I is not aware than it would to see it as an I's projected extension of a self it is not aware of having.

Clearly, Buber's account of original relation has important implications for our general reading of apostrophe. If it is true, as Buber argues, that "[i]n the beginning is relation," then it might be argued that the "normative" non-apostrophic mode from which we turn is *itself* a turning away from the constant apostrophes of childhood, the memory of which makes later adult apostrophes seem like a *re*-turn. Indeed, if in the act of addressing any finite Thou, we are addressing the eternal Thou, then this is precisely what they are, since, from a religious perspective, one might say that the act of

addressing God is a diversion of our words *towards* the "Judge," that is, towards our primary interlocutor, and towards the origin of language itself.

All of this is obviously relevant to our general thesis, however, what makes Buber's account of original relation particularly interesting, and why it is of importance to our present discussion, is not only because its subtle assertion of our "orientedness," or of our *intended* predisposition, of God's having already had His hands on us, but also because of the bolder assertion that we have something of or like that towards which we are oriented *within* us, *doing* the orienting. Here is the relevant passage, in full this time, including the final significant assertion:

> In the beginning is relation – as category of being, readiness, grasping form, mould for the soul; it is the *a priori* of relation, *the inborn Thou.*
>
> (1944, 27)

This is a very intriguing thing to say. What can Buber mean by it? He appears to be saying that there is a "Thou" within us (*das eingeborene Du*) that is the ground of all the I-Thou relations into which we enter. Here is how the passage continues:

> The inborn *Thou* is realised in the lived relations with that which meets it. The fact that this *Thou* can be known as what is over against the child, can be taken up in exclusiveness, and finally can be addressed with the primary word, is based upon the *a priori* of relation.
>
> (1944, 27)

Whether or not this is more of a "template" or even a latent disposition or whether it is more agentive, Buber appears to leave deliberately open. Granted, he does not go so far as to say that it is the eternal Thou actively working within us, though clearly it would have been easy to avoid any suggestion of this had he wanted to do so; and to define a "disposition" as a personalised otherness within us surely invites such connotations. They are, in any case, but stronger and weaker versions of the same argument; which is, that there is something within us – which is defined as "other" than us – which, extrinsic not only to our own volition but also to our "soul," orients us towards relation (which is, for Buber, towards God). Is this not strikingly close to Augustine's response to the aporia of learning? Whilst Buber is undoubtedly more tentative, and grants his claim a less central role in his philosophy,

both writers contend that we have within us something that is other than us and that providentially orients us towards that which is *beyond* us.

This argument is not offered by Buber in explicit connection with the question of giving and receiving (though it is clearly an integral part of his argument), however, I think it may help us to resolve the aporia in our earlier discussion. If we return to the problem with which we were faced, it appeared that neither simultaneity nor precedence, as we had thus far conceived of it, could entirely account for the contention that giving and receiving were reciprocally related. We were able to show that our being addressed might both precede and yet only be revealed by our address, though we were unable to explain how our being addressed could *prompt* and yet also be disclosed *in* our address. The foregoing discussion, however, opens another possibility to view.

If we have something within us which is other than us – and what other than God could be permanently within us and "part" of us and yet retain its absolute otherness? – which orients us towards relation (and hence towards the eternal Thou), it could therefore be argued that our address of the eternal Thou is prompted by His always already anterior movement towards us, even though this is only revealed to us in our movement towards Him. This interior anterior movement is perhaps what Buber means by "grace" (*Gnaden*), when he says at the start of the section on giving and receiving that "[t]he Thou [...] is not found by seeking" (1944, 11). In this sense, our giving *is* a receiving, and our receiving *is* a giving, since our movement towards Him *is* a movement of Him towards us – perpetually moving us towards Him, though nevertheless leaving us free to do so or not. It may therefore, finally, be maintained, without contradiction, that our receiving or being addressed prompts, coincides with, and yet is also only subsequently disclosed by, our giving or our address.

The foregoing discussion of the logic of giving and receiving from a theological perspective might appear to be somewhat removed from the concerns of poetry. However, the questions with which have been concerned are manifestly central to the Romantic project, as customarily defined, and have become all the more prominent and problematic as a result of poststructuralism's sceptical critique. We may, as it were, kill two birds with one stone, and introduce the two perspectives simultaneously, with a quotation from Catherine Belsey, who, in the words of Aidan Day, "has summarised a poststructuralist perspective on the self-cancelling logic of Romantic dreams of

reconciling subject and object in a way which gives priority to the subject" (1996, 121). Here is the relevant section from Belsey's well-known essay on "The Romantic Construction of the Unconscious":

> René Wellek has defined European Romanticism as an attempt to reconcile subject and object, to heal the split between them and assert "the one Life within us and abroad" [...]. It is the heroic impossibility of this task which produces Romantic exultation and despair. The obliteration of the object in a subjectivity which expands to incorporate it ("In our life alone does nature live") is the negation of desire, because desire depends on the existence of an object that can be desired precisely in so far as it is outside of the subject, radically other. The negation of desire, imaginary plenitude, presents a world whose existence and meaning depends on the presence of the subject, a world of abundant subjectivity. But the obliteration of the object implies the fading of the subject, because it is also the negation of difference. Subjectivity has meaning only to the extent that it is differentiated from something. But a world of difference is a world of lack, of absence, of desire. The reinstatement of the subject is the reinstatement of a world independent of the subject, a world of loss. [...]
>
> The impossible project of Wordsworth's poetry is to hold desire at bay, simultaneously to preserve and eliminate the distinction between subject and object. "Tintern Abbey," for instance, defines a subject present to itself, differentiated from *and* interfused with the objects which it *both* perceives and half creates (lines 106–7), and guaranteed by a "presence" "far *more* deeply interfused" (lines 94–5, my emphasis), which inhabits both nature and the mind, and which drives both subjects and objects, impels
>
> > All thinking things, all objects of all thought
> > And rolls through all things.
>
> (1986, 68–9)

This is a very impressive application of a certain sort of logic. And, if its presuppositions are true, its conclusions would seem hard to resist. Clearly, if the Romantic reconciliation of subject and object involves an "obliteration of the object," this would amount to a "negation of desire" and would concomitantly imply a "fading of the subject," suggesting that the only choice is in fact a highwayman's offer, between separation and solipsism. All of this depends, however, upon an initial "if," which is unacknowledged by Belsey's argument. It is, instead, assumed that such secular, psychoanalytical logic is the *only* logic, whose premises are self-evidently true. Yet there is an alternative logic, expounded by theology, whose premises differ from Belsey's, which is equally plausible, and which permits alternative conclusions.

As we have seen, from a theological perspective, the contention that the "life" of the other is dependent upon the perceiving subject does *not* entail an "obliteration of the object." On the contrary, it was shown that whilst the "life" of things – that which upholds them, from which they come, and which all things in their own way imitate – is only *realised* or *disclosed* in and as a result of the subject's interaction, this neither involves "absorbing" the object into the subject nor a putting there of

what was not already there. In this sense, it is possible to assert that "we receive but what we give" and that "in our life alone does Nature live," *without* this necessarily involving an annihilation of the object and a concomitant loss of the subject. Similarly, whereas according to Belsey's psychoanalytical logic, there is only a choice between separation which results from recognising the difference and lack of the other or a pseudo "reconciliation" (which is but a different form of separation) in which the other is obliterated in being "incorporated" into the subjectivity of the self, theology, as Buber and Pickstock both argue, sees the act of calling out to the other as a Thou as revealing but also as *repairing* separation. As Pickstock writes: "Every invocation betrays an absence, but it also embodies the reparation [...]" (1993, 115). Relatedly, theology construes the reconciliation of subject and object as a mode of relation which is predicated upon and *preserves* difference. As we saw in contrasting psychoanalytical accounts of infancy with Buber's dialogical construal, it is possible and at least as plausible to see the sense of "continuity" between the self and the other as a mode of relation between an I and a Thou as it is to see it as a solipsistic *displacement* of the other. Intimations of relation or reconciliation, construed in this way, might thus be seen as a momentary and partial revealing of the larger relatedness in which *all* differences participate.

Finally, the "paradoxical" logic (from a secular perspective) of giving and receiving, according to a theological view of the matter, offers us a way of making sense of and taking seriously some of the apparently contradictory claims made by the Romantics about the nature of subject – object relation, which are somewhat condescendingly dismissed by Belsey. Let us look again at her criticism of "the impossible project of Wordsworth's poetry":

> "Tintern Abbey," for instance, defines a subject present to itself, differentiated from *and* interfused with the objects which it *both* perceives and half creates (lines 106–7), and guaranteed by a "presence" "far *more* deeply interfused" (lines 94–5, my emphasis), which inhabits both nature and the mind, and which drives both subjects and objects, impels
>
> > All thinking things, all objects of all thought
> > And rolls through all things.

Belsey's criticism of Wordsworth's metaphysical claims curiously consists in pointing out, with an air of triumph, that they do not conform to the logic of secular reason, as though their failure to do so were a mistake that Wordsworth had failed to notice. It is not a *criticism* of a metaphysical claim to

say that it defies secular reason – it is one of its *characteristics*. This is not at all to say that theology is not logical – it is hardly a breach of logic to say that God has God-like characteristics. On the contrary, as we have seen, such apparently contradictory claims make perfect sense from a theological point of view. It is not, for example, a contradiction, to theology, to assert that something may be present to itself, differentiated from, and yet also in relation with, something else. This does not, of course, prove that the assertion is true; though neither do objections to its "illogicality" prove that it is *not* true. Wordsworth's statements might not be logical but then not everything is. Similarly, we have seen, from a theological point of view, that truthful seeing paradoxically requires precisely the sort of *creative* perception that Wordsworth describes; as Pickstock has it, the imagination "*must* act creatively if it is to be 'true.'" Thus there is nothing illogical or "self-cancelling" from a religious perspective to say that the subject "both perceives and half creates" that with which it stands in relation. Again, this does not prove that such claims are true, though all Belsey's argument has to say against them is that they do not accord with secular thought, and surely we already knew that. Finally, the characteristics of the "presence" described by Wordsworth, which Belsey enumerates like a parent reading back to a child its excessive Christmas list, are obviously perfectly compatible and consistent with an albeit pantheistically conceived deity. Indeed, Belsey's list would serve admirably well as a description in a game of charades for someone who had been given the word "God."

Having said this, for all its dismissiveness towards the claims of religion, Belsey's argument does perhaps uncover something important about Wordsworth. There *is* a sense in which Wordsworth seems to want to hold onto himself whilst letting go, which is suggested by the fact that he does not make his acknowledgement of the other *within* a handing over to a real transcendent. In this sense, I would agree with Empson's well-known criticism of Wordsworth's poem that there is "something rather shuffling about this attempt to be uplifting yet non-denominational, to put across as much pantheism as would not shock his readers" (1961, 154). However, I think Wordsworth's "shuffling" – *pace* Belsey – is, as Empson puts it, of a *denominational* kind, and is not, as Belsey contends, illogical as such. This would presumably not wash with or be of interest to Belsey, since it is only a slight repositioning of Wordsworth with respect to orthodoxy within the religious framework outlined above, though it may be uncovered or even in a way analogous to her critique.

To tie together the main points of our argument in this section, and to illustrate in a more concrete and positive fashion the relevance of our theological construal of giving and receiving to Romantic poetry, let us look briefly at a couple of examples.

The "Blest babe" passage in Book II of *The Prelude*, from which the quotation in the title of this section is taken, offers one of the most extensive accounts in Romantic poetry of the reciprocal process of giving and receiving, and what Richard Onorato refers to as the poet's "first relatedness with the world" (1971, 61).

Wordsworth's account of the relationship between the self and the other, and of the reciprocal process of giving and receiving concurs on a number of important points with the theological accounts we have looked at so far. Wordsworth's narration is framed by two parallel descriptions of the infant and its mother bound up in I-Thou relation, which correspond remarkably to Buber's conception of the "original relational event" (1944, 22). Here, to add to the accounts quoted earlier from *I and Thou*, is how Buber distinguishes between I-It and I-Thou modes of interaction in *Eclipse of God*:

> For man the existent is either face-to-face being or passive object. The essence of man arises from this twofold relation to the existent. These are not two external phenomena but the two basic modes of existing with being. The child that calls to his mother and the child that watches his mother – or to give a more exact example, the child that silently speaks to his mother through nothing other than looking into her eyes and the same child that looks at something on the mother as at any other object – show the twofoldness in which man stands and remains standing.
>
> (1957, 44)

It is worth noting, first of all, that Wordsworth manifestly concurs with Buber in seeing the act of I-Thou utterance as something that can occur without speech (a point made repeatedly by Buber, in *I and Thou*, *Between Man and Man*, and *Eclipse of God*). Wordsworth's second description of the event is especially interesting in this respect, in its categorical assertion of the *occurrence* of dialogue alongside of its representation of it as an "illogical" passage across discontinuous modes (he holds a dialogue with his mother's heart by means of touch). The two writers also manifestly agree that life begins in relation, from which we subsequently fall away, though our ability to re-enter it might either remain "till death" or else "[b]y uniform control of after years / [...] be "abated or suppress'd [...]."

More significantly, Wordsworth, also, represents original relation as a process of complex and

paradoxical reciprocity, in which our receiving appears to precede, to coincide with, and to be dependent upon, our giving. Whilst the infant "gather[s] passion from his mother's eye," which awakens his mind and enables him subsequently to *give*, he is, of course, himself the *cause* of his mother's "passion," which is prompted by the giving of his being. Yet, equally, the mother's passion is both registered and apparently intensified within a reciprocal "speaking" gaze (the child is gathering in gazing at the mother's gazing at his gathering of her gaze). Furthermore, the infant's gathering of passion from his mother's eye is, depending on which version of the poem one takes, either actually *performed* by his soul (the 1805 version runs: "when his soul / Doth gather"), performed by the infant though *with* his soul (the 1850 version has: "who with his soul / Drinks in the feelings of his mother's eye!") or else as a *result* of the soul's union with the other (the 1799 version of the lines is: "who, when his soul / Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul / Doth gather passion from his mother's eye"). In any case, as we noted in our theological accounts of relation, that which enables the child to receive (which in turn enables him to give, and – from the perspective of the other – *is itself* a giving) is in fact a *prior* gift (the infant's life is described as "torpid" prior to being awakened by what its soul both gathers and incites). For Wordsworth, as for Buber (and Augustine), then, all giving and receiving is dependent upon a *Providential* giving, which is other than us and precedes us, and yet is also inseparable from *our* giving and receiving.

Wordsworth also concurs with Buber in seeing this pattern of reciprocity replicated in subsequent moments of relation, outside of the mother – child "relational event" upon which they are based. Once again, as a result of a *prior* gift (an "inborn" relatedness or ecstatic predisposition) –

> Along his infant veins are interfused
> The gravitation and the filial bond
> Of nature that connect him with the world

– he is drawn ecstatically away from himself into further giving and receiving, which, once again, appear to be coextensive:

> From Nature largely he receives, nor so
> Is satisfied, but largely gives again;
> For feeling has to him imparted strength [...].

As Donald Davie once insightfully commented, "the syntax [of *The Prelude*] counts enormously, counts for nearly everything" (1955, 111). Not only is "feeling" – in a brilliant Wordsworthian inversion – seen as *imparting* rather than – or in – *expending* strength, but, more radically, the syntax of the preceding lines effects a convergence of the activities of giving and receiving, which the lines nonetheless distinguish: the use of "again," along with the paralleled repetition of "largely," gives the retrospective impression that the activities are in fact the same (not satisfied with the foregoing thing he does so *again*).

There is one other important way in which Wordsworth's account of giving and receiving appears to concur with our theological construal. Earlier we noted that our ecstatic giving of ourselves in the act of apostrophe might be seen as imitating, in a creaturely way, *God*'s ecstatic movement "outside" of Himself in providential love. We also noted how the true being of the other is only revealed in and paradoxically as a result of our creative giving *to* the other. Wordsworth's account similarly suggests that in entering "creatively" into relation with the other, we are imitating God:

> powerful in all sentiments of grief,
> Of exultation, fear and joy – his mind,
> Even as an agent of the one great mind,
> Creates, creator and receiver both,
> Working but in alliance with the works
> Which it beholds.

Wordsworth's "as" seems, furthermore, in simultaneously permitting the readings of "like" and "in the capacity of," to respect and bespeak the point, emphasised by Aquinas, that our relationship with God is *analogous* and yet real.

Our second example is bound at first to seem somewhat slight by comparison. It is, to be sure, but a passing eruption of one of *Don Juan*'s many voices, a number of which are, furthermore, consciously set against it. Yet it is a voice that recurs, across poems as well as within the poem, and it is unmistakably Byron's. The stanza I wish to examine occurs just before the close of Canto I:

> No more – no more – Oh! never more on me
> The freshness of the heart can fall like dew,

> Which out of all the lovely things we see
> Extracts emotions beautiful and new,
> Hived in our bosoms like the bag o' the bee:
> Think'st thou 'twas not in them, but in thy power
> To double even the sweetness of a flower.

<div align="right">(214)</div>

Byron's brilliant and affecting stanza characteristically involves all sorts of remarkable insights and complexities of thought within its seemingly casual and confessional presentation of the poem's speaker. Two of these insights are of interest to our discussion. The first is the poet's suggestion that there is that within us that not only exceeds us but that also somehow exceeds itself. The second concerns the simultaneous reciprocity of giving and receiving that this twofold exceeding of self involves.

The heart, in Byron's description, seems to exceed in being presented as somehow *outside of* the self: "No more – no more – Oh! never more on me / The freshness of the heart can fall like dew, [...]." The freshness of the heart falls *on* the speaker as it were from the outside – "like dew" – as if the heart, like the air out of which the dew forms, were somehow exterior to and in excess of the self that "contains" it. This self, furthermore, is thereby presented as the "passive" recipient of a natural process, for which it is nonetheless also responsible. *What* it is that falls on the speaker is, however, as interesting as the fact *that* it does so. Remarkably, it is an *attribute* – the "freshness" – rather than an object (or an "accident" as opposed to a "substance") that falls on the speaker. In other words, it is its *self* that is somehow reaching outside of itself – it is the heart in ekstasis – descending on the self. Byron's stanza thus presents us with an extraordinary description of ekstasis in ekstasis – the heart which reaches outside of the self is reaching itself outside of *its* self.

If this should seem so peculiar as to be without general relevance, we should recall the poet's account of creativity in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which similarly attributes the source of life and feeling to that which is within – and yet not enclosed by – that which is within – and yet outside of – the self:

> 'Tis to create, and in creating live
> A being more intense, that we endow
> With form our fancy, gaining as we give

The life we image, even as I do now.
What am I? Nothing; but not so art thou,
Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,
Invisible but gazing, as I glow
Mix'd with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,
And feeling still with thee in my crush'd feeling's dearth.

(III, 6)

As we noticed earlier, it is, according to Byron's stanza, in *bringing something into existence* that we ourselves come more intensely into being – the first line's enjambment emphasising this intensification in rendering the life that is gained momentarily absolute. The narrator goes further, however, and grants ontological primacy to that which is the "product" – and thus in some sense "outside" of the self: "What am I? Nothing: but not so art thou, / Soul of my thought!" In this sense, in a way that compares with the *Don Juan* stanza, the poet describes something that is outside of or over against (the poet addresses it), bestowing life upon and yet nonetheless "contained" *within* the self. This "product," however, itself has a soul (the "self," we might say, of the "product" of self) which, again, in a way that compares to the heart's exceeding itself in ekstasis in the *Don Juan* stanza, is radically without boundaries (whilst remaining itself), in permitting the speaker to be generatively "mix'd" and "blended" with it (or, dare we say, its "spirit").

The peculiar way in which that which is part of the self may also exceed the self lies at the centre of the coincidental reciprocity of giving and receiving that is described in the stanza from *Don Juan*. The extended metaphor that the stanza employs is perhaps more radical than it may at first appear. If the "emotions beautiful and new," which are subsequently referred to as "honey," are "[h]ived in our bosoms like the bag o' the bee," and if the example offered of "the lovely things we see" and whose "sweetness" we may "double" is a flower, the obvious implication is that the heart in its relationship with the beauty we perceive is being compared to a bee. What is so radical about this? What it implies is that the heart "goes out to" things – as, of course, people routinely aver – *ecstatically* extracting "out of all the lovely things we see / [...] emotions beautiful and new [...]." The heart's bee-like activities also explain the reciprocity of giving and receiving. It is in being drawn to and extracting "emotions beautiful and new" that we, like the bee, unwittingly "pollinate" and thereby contribute to – and thus receive back from – the beauty we perceive. Our "satisfaction" therefore also perpetuates our desire, without, however, this perpetuation borrowing from or being funded by its

cause. It is, finally, typical of Byron, in contrast to Wordsworth – though comparable to Coleridge in "Dejection: an Ode" – that this realisation and *affirmation* of our power to contribute to (rather than create) the beauty of the things we contemplate is *elegiac*, occurring as he notices its passing away, though more typical still that he *exhibits* such creative power in mourning its departure.

IV
Another Voice

Having completed the exposition of the central claims made in Buber's *I and Thou*, out of which we have built up our "post-secular" construal of apostrophe, we shall now, as the final stage in our argument, complicate matters and challenge Buber's *I and Thou* paradigm, by setting it against a *contrary* theological model of apostrophic usage.

"Holy Insecurity"

As we noted in our Introduction to Part Two, one of the purposes of theology, according to Aquinas, is to defend acts of faith against the laughter of the non-believer by rendering their presuppositions intelligible and demonstrating that they are at least as reasonable as those upon which *non*-belief is founded. We have, accordingly, invoked Buber's theological paradigm in an attempt to show, against a prominent tendency in recent criticism to reduce the figure to a parody of itself, that the metaphysical implications of the act of apostrophe fit in with a coherent and plausible reading of reality, and may be taken seriously. Buber's philosophy of dialogue is, however, manifestly informed by certain *denominational* tenets, which one might contest – from an alternative denominational perspective – whilst agreeing more generally with its metaphysical point of view. What are these tenets?

In his essay "Buber's Philosophy of Religion," Fritz Kaufmann enlighteningly describes Buber as a "Jewish 'Protestant'" (1967, 210). This description at once alerts us to the reactive (Protest-ant)

character of Buber's philosophy – even if it sees itself as a return to a supposedly anterior position – and directs us towards the views against which it is defined. The two related phenomena to which Buber's philosophy of dialogue is categorically opposed are ritual and mediation; the most obvious proponent of which is, as Kaufmann's remark suggests, Catholic Christianity.[87] It will be instructive briefly to elaborate Buber's objections.

The final section of *I and Thou* is given over to a sustained and vehement critique of ritualised and mediated religious practice, on the grounds that the desire for continuity in relation, and predictable, "engineerable" access to the Divine may over time *come in between* the individual and the eternal Thou, and ultimately threatens to *replace* the relation it strives to secure. Thus the desire to "hold onto" God in Buber's view, leads to the "degeneration of prayer" (1944, 118) and the "[d]isintegration of the Word" (1944, 119). He writes:

> Man desires to possess God; he desires a continuity in space and time of possession of God. He is not content with the inexpressible confirmation of meaning, but wants to see this confirmation stretched out as something that can be continually taken up and handled, a continuum unbroken in space and time that insures his life at every point and every moment.
> Man's thirst for continuity is unsatisfied by the life-rhythm of pure relation, the interchange of actual being and of a potential being in which only our power to enter into relation, and hence the presentness (but not the primal Presence) decreases. He longs for extension in time, for duration. Thus God becomes an object of faith. At first faith, set in time, completes the acts of relation; but gradually it replaces them. Resting in the belief in an *It* takes the place of the continually renewed movement of the being towards concentration and going out to the relation. The "Nevertheless I believe" of the fighter who knows remoteness as well as nearness to God is more and more completely transformed into the certainty of him who enjoys profits, that nothing can happen to him since he believes that there is One who will not let anything happen to him.
> Further, man's thirst for continuity is unsatisfied by the life-structure of pure relation, the "solitude" of the *I* before the *Thou*, the law that man, though binding up the world in relation in the meeting, can nevertheless only as a person approach and meet God. He longs for an extension in space, for the representation in which the community of the faithful is united with its God. Thus God becomes the object of a cult. The cult, too, completes at first the acts of relation, in adjusting in a spatial context of great formative power the living prayer, the immediate saying of the *Thou*, and in linking it with the life of the senses. It, too, gradually replaces the acts of relation, when the personal prayer is no longer supported, but displaced, by the communal prayer, and when the act of being, since it admits no rule, is replaced by ordered devotional exercises.
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> (1944, 113–4)

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[87] Buber's controversial and selective reading of Hasidism upon which his philosophy of dialogue is based also, of course, turns its back on the traditional elements of ritual and cult within synagogal Judaism. For a forceful critique of Buber's appropriation of Hasidism, see Gershom Scholem (1941); or, for a more sympathetic account, Rivkah Schatz-Uffenheimer (1967).

In Buber's view, there is no way of "coaxing" the Divine into relation, no way of holding onto relation when it occurs, and yet there is nothing more needful than relation. For Buber, in opposition to Sartre, *le salut, c'est l'autre*. Faith, to Buber, is a matter of waiting, of covenantal trust, of living in "holy insecurity" (cited in Lash: 1988, 183). God's hiding of Himself is not something that we should try to repair or disguise in ritual practice – it is *part of the relationship*. To seek the abolition of His absence or the security of presence in spite of this absence is, for Buber, a *weakening* of faith, and a *lack* of trust, and idolatrously to prefer a presence of our own fashioning to an absence that has been willed by and is therefore paradoxically closer to Him. To turn away from his absence is thus, for Buber, paradoxically to turn away from Him.

Buber's austere distillation of religious experience down to the moment of I-Thou relation has an unquestionable virility, and bespeaks an extraordinarily fastidious desire to separate authentic from inauthentic modes of being. (Our discussion of Buber's conception of faith once again highlights the peculiar proximity of – in spite of the absolute difference between – the Jewish and Protestant fear of idolatry and Derrida's attack upon onto-theology.) As we have already noted, however, this extreme attitude towards mediation and ritual is denominational and not shared by everyone. Christianity, for example, most obviously, differs from Judaism on the issue of mediation – a tenet elaborated by Catholicism (which sees Christ's redemptive mediation between the postlapsarian finite and the Infinite as a contagious and inexhaustibly proliferating source of grace, temporally continued, though differently, by the Church) and pared down by Protestantism (which sees the Incarnation as more of a *promisory* event, and emphasises the "not yet" as opposed to the "already").[88] Nevertheless, in spite of

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[88] Sallie McFague helpfully distinguishes between the "symbolic sacramentalism" of Catholicism and the "metaphorical theology" of Protestantism in the following way:

> Symbolic sacramentalism received systematic interpretation and ordering in the medieval doctrine of *analogia entis*, the analogy of being. This doctrine says, in essence, that every existing thing participates in Being-Itself, but analogously. That is, being is differentiated absolutely, so that while everything is connected as beings immediately and radically dependent on God, each thing has, is, its own act of being and hence is radically particular. [...] Beneath the distinctions, however, everything is connected and this is the reason why everything in such a universe can be a symbol of everything else and, most especially, of God, who created everything out of the divine plenitude as a mirror and reflection of the divine self. The analogical way, the symbolic way, rests upon a profound *similarity* beneath the surface dissimilarities; what we see and speak of must be the differences, but we rest in the faith that all is empowered by the breath of God, Being-Itself. [...] The vision of God, the goal of all creation, is the belief that one day all of creation shall be one. The many shall return to the One, for the many are in secret one already.
>
> [...] One way to describe what occurred in the Reformation is a profound questioning of the symbolic mentality, a loosening of the connections between symbol and reference. The eucharistic

these – significant – differences in Christian confessions, and in spite of the fact that Judaism is also, of course, born out of God's saving historical intervention in the affairs of man, the central difference between Christianity and Judaism is that, for the former, that which is to come has in a sense already arrived ahead of itself, whereas for the latter, it is yet to come. Nicholas Lash cites and comments upon two remarks made by Buber in this connection:

> In 1921 Buber said that "the fundamental difference between Judaism's conception of history and that of Christianity (or that of another savior religion, for example, Buddhism)" does not lie in the notion of redemption itself, for "this already lived in prophetic Messianism and was developed by post-exilic Judaism to the core of its world-view. But to the savior religions redemption is a fact – one by its nature transcending history, nonetheless localized in it; to Judaism it is a pure prospect." And again, in 1930: "'to the Christian the Jew is the incomprehensibly obdurate man, who declines to see what has happened; and to the Jew the Christain is the incomprehensibly daring man, who affirms in an unredeemed world that its redemption has been accomplished.'"
> This, perhaps, is where the immovable difference between Judaism and Christianity is most deeply to be found. It is true, as the recovery, in recent decades, of the centrality of eschatology to the grammar of Christian speech has shown, that Christianity has its own resources for correcting a one-sided emphasis upon the "already" [...] through an equal insistence upon the "not yet." [...] Nevertheless, even if memory and hope are, or should be, dialectically related in Christian discourse, Buber is surely correct in insisting that redemption, for the Christian, can never be a matter of *pure* prospect? The Easter "Alleluia" is sung, undoubtedly, in expectation, but the song springs from a particularity of memory which the Jew does not share.
>
> (1988, 210–11)

The lines of contrast and continuity are drawn differently when it comes to ritual. If Buber's wholesale setting of ritualised practice over against authenticity has an analogue and ally in the Reformation, it is, from another point of view, a belated and controversial departure from orthodox practice, and is refused *as an opposition* both by synagogal Judaism and – even more obviously – by Catholicism. It may therefore be felt, with respect to poetry as well as religious practice, even if we are prepared to endorse Buber's metaphysical claims, that ritual has received an unfair or insufficient

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debate between Luther and the proponents of transubstantiation on the one hand, and between Luther and Zwingli on the other, reveals as much. [...] To Luther, the bread and wine were still symbols of Christ's body and blood, still participated in that reality, but in a way that I would call "metaphorical," for the assertions "This is my body" and "This is my blood" were not viewed as identity statements, but as including a silent but present negative. One critical difference between symbolic and metaphorical statements is that the latter always contain the whisper, "it is *and it is not.*"

[...] The Protestant sensibility tends to see dissimilarity, distinction, tension and hence to be skeptical and secular, stressing the transcendence of God and the finitude of creation. The Catholic sensibility tends to see similarity, connection, harmony and, hence, to be believing and religious, stressing the continuity between God and creation.

(1983, 12–13)

hearing, and that an alternative account – which refuses the lines along which Buber's distinction is drawn, without however abandoning, after the manner of poststructuralism, the notion of authenticity entirely – may be equally viable and a necessary corrective. The rest of this section represents an attempt, from a particular perspective, to sketch out such an alternative account. If, as Fritz Kaufmann suggests, Buber is a "Jewish 'Protestant,'" an obvious place to look for a corrective counterpose to his philosophy's rejection of mediation and ritual is in Catholic Christianity.[89] Before we do so though, it may be worthwhile intimating what is at stake.

Broadly speaking, if Buber's opposition of I-Thou and I-It modes of engagement according to the criteria of conventionality, choreography and exclusivity of address finds an obvious echo in the "Protestant" Romanticism of Wordsworth and Coleridge, it is apparently of less relevance when it comes to those Romantic writers who are more sympathetic to oratory and ritual, such as – in very different ways, of course – Burns, Byron, Keats and Shelley (though, to be sure, some of these writers are not so easily categorised in this respect – Burns, for example, is equally at home with satirical and sentimental (or "public" and "private") modes of address, and Byron, similarly, is a poet of passionate *as well as* ritualised calling). The oratorical denunciations of Burns; the curses, prayers and ritualised callings that pervade Byron's verse dramas; the stammering invocations and stylised addresses of Keats's *Endymion* and "neo-classical" odes; the sustained prophetic apostrophes of *Adonais* and "Ode to the West Wind" – these variously ritualised acts of apostrophic utterance are, I think, not exhaustively explained *either* by Culler's poststructuralist reading *or* by Buber's *I and Thou* paradigm. It is to this neglected ritual territory of the "neither-nor" that we now turn our attention.

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[89] In the first of his two excellent chapters on Buber in *Easter in Ordinary*, explaining his inclusion of a Jewish writer virulently opposed to "religion" in what is supposed to be "an argument in Christian theology," Nicholas Lash states that "Buber's thought offers a kind of Jewish corrective which much of our Christian theology still requires after (but not *only* on account of) the Holocaust" (1988, 179). The logic of this corrective relationship would seem to work both ways. If, on the one hand, Buber's Jewish insistence upon man's temporal exile, and the need for continually repeated conversion (*Umkehr*), upon the insecurity of the present and the need for a trust which is riskily based upon what is to come rather than what has been, may serve to keep the practice of ritual, central to Catholic Christianity, from deteriorating into an empty formalism, and may serve as a salutary counterpose to Christianity's comparative emphasis upon the "already," Catholic Christianity's conception of communion as enabled by "benign" mediation, and its orthodox faith in the efficacy and affectivity of ritual practice may, on the other hand, offer a way of supplementing Buber's philosophy of dialogue, which has been criticised for its failure to take account of the mediatedness of all meaningful encounter, and challenges the lines along which Buber's distinction between authentic and inauthentic modes of being is drawn.

Saying Someone Else's Prayers

In her article "The Episcopalian Liturgy," Margaret Anne Doody draws attention to the opposition

between Romantic and liturgical modes of utterance, introducing her account with a Romantic

definition of prayer by the Scottish poet and hymnist James Montgomery:

> Prayer is the soul's sincere desire
> Uttered or unexpressed [...].

> Indeed, to many of us prayer could not be otherwise, for we in this late Romantic age still believe that sincere feeling creates speech and motivates action, and that to utter words not caused by the soul's desire at the moment is damaging, a violation of the psyche. In this view prayer must be inward, private and spontaneous.
> But there is a tradition, a view of human nature older than Romanticism and quite alien to modern notions of sincerity, according to which outer actions and words spoken can create the feelings and move the desires.

> (1980, 108)

Liturgical practice – the tradition about which Doody is talking – presents us with an utterance and a

use of apostrophe which is neither "Romantic" nor "rhetorical," according to our earlier definition of

these terms, but which cuts across this distinction (a distinction which is itself to a certain extent

Romantic), and in some ways resembles both types of usage. Liturgical apostrophe, more precisely, is

a public, formulaic and premeditated utterance, yet it is supposed to be uttered as our own, without

remainder, and to establish relation. To use the vexed formulation of Vatican II, what is required is our

"full, conscious and active participation," both "internally and externally" (*DV*: 1966, 144 and 145).[90]

It is this possibility of I-Thou relation in a public, premeditated and formulaic act of address, which

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[90] Great emphasis is placed upon this issue in the Constitution of the Liturgy: "In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered above all else" (*DV*: 1966, 144). Central though it is to the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, few phrases can have been the cause of more controversy in recent church history than "active participation" (*participatio actuosa*). As Dom Bernard McElligott argues:

> By using the word "active" for *actuosa* the Church's intention has been misunderstood, and generally, if perhaps unconsciously, taken to mean bodily activity; whereas what the Church really asks for is full, sincere, mental activity, expressed externally by the body.

> (1994, 19)

the practice of religious ritual models – *against* the Reformers, and *against* the first generation

Romantics – that I wish to argue may help us to understand certain acts of apostrophe in poetry that,

for different reasons, are inadequately accounted for by recent poststructuralist readings of the figure

and by Buber's philosophy of dialogue.[91] This is not to collapse our earlier distinction between

"Romantic" and "rhetorical" utterances, but rather to cross this opposition with a third type of

apostrophic utterance, which we shall refer to as "liturgical" apostrophe. This threefold distinction

allows us to recognise the differences between (artistic representations of) passionate or "Romantic"

apostrophes, such as Byron's address to Ada at the start of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto III or

Wordsworth's address to the river Wye in "Tintern Abbey"; parodic or "rhetorical" apostrophes, such

as Baudelaire's arch address to "Eau" in "Le Cygné" or Culler's own apostrophe to Apostrophe; and,

finally, public and formulaic invocations or "liturgical" apostrophes, such as Shelley's "Ode to the

West Wind" or Milton's invocation at the start of *Paradise Lost*, which in spite of their public and

ritualised character appear to represent serious attempts to establish relation.[92] This final category or

comparison will obviously require some substantiation. How, more precisely, do certain apostrophes

in poetry resemble the act of liturgical calling? The utterances may, I propose, be compared in terms

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For an extended discussion of this issue, see Nichols (1991, 49–86); and Ratzinger (2000, 171–7).

[91] Whereas, for Buber, with Jewish "Protestant" presuppositions, ritual is a deceptive barrier to authenticity, which keeps – by anaesthetising – the individual from realising the radical openness of the present, and hence from the relation it purports to establish, for Culler, with wholly secular assumptions, ritual is not devalued, as it is by Buber, as a second-rate form of religious experience, though neither is it treated with full seriousness or on its own terms as a hopeful and potentially efficacious speech act, since, from a secular point of view, it always remains in some sense "hollow" or deceptive in – allegedly – being unable to do what it purports to be doing.

[92] The distinction between "invocation" and "apostrophe" is difficult to draw, though, thankfully, perhaps not of such critical importance. Most writers who have extensively dealt with one or the other (such as Jonathan Culler and Catherine Pickstock) use the terms interchangeably, without comment, or else acknowledge the difficulty of, but refrain from attempting, such distinctions, since the one apparently shades over into the other (Walter Schindler, for example, in his brilliant study of invocation in Milton's poetry, talks of "the difficult distinction [...] between invocation and apostrophe" (1984, 37); the "eruptions of apostrophic voice that seem to border on invocation" (37); the "tension between apostrophe and invocation" (38); and the "sense that apostrophe and invocation exist along a common continuum" (41), and leaves the matter at that). One useful attempt at such a distinction has been proposed by Michael Spiller, who suggests that an invocation "is an apostrophe which then invites the addressee to act in some manner essential to the subject of the poem: for example 'Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd Saints'" (1991, 479–80). The problem with this, however, is that it might be legitimately argued, on the one hand, that apostrophe *also* invites or petitions the addressee "to act in some manner essential to the subject of the poem" – namely, to hear or to be present and respond as a reciprocating "Thou." On the other hand, it may also be questioned whether all invocations invite the addressee "to act in some manner essential to the subject of the poem"; in what sense is the addressee being invited to act by the (common) invocation "Hail"? In view of this apparent coincidence, we do not propose to distinguish too rigidly between "invocation" and "apostrophe," though, for the sake of clarity, we shall in the main reserve the term "invocation" for what we wish to identify as "liturgical" – that is, ritualised – apostrophe, upon which this section concentrates.

of: (1) their function (or "lack" thereof); (2) their communicative situation; (3) their formulaic

character; and (4) their public or "communal" nature.

In her fascinating account of the apostrophic voice in liturgical practice, in *After Writing*,

Catherine Pickstock puts forward a description of liturgical apostrophe that on certain points

corresponds almost verbatim with Jonathan Culler's comments on the figure in "Apostrophe" and

Literary Theory. Here is what Culler says:

> invocation is a figure of vocation. This is obvious when one thinks how often invocations seek
> pity or assistance for projects and situations specifically related to the poetic vocation, but it
> can also be inferred from the functionally gratuitous invocations which mark so many poems.
> If asking winds to blow or seasons to stay their coming or mountains to hear one's cries is a
> ritualistic, practically gratuitous action, that emphasizes that voice calls in order to be calling,
> to dramatize its calling, to summon images of its power so as to establish its identity as
> poetical and prophetic voice. [...] The poet makes himself a poetic presence through an image
> of voice, and nothing figures voice better than the pure *O* of undifferentiated voicing [...].
> Devoid of semantic reference, the *O* of apostrophe refers to other apostrophes and thus to the
> lineage and conventions of sublime poetry. [...] the pun [in Baudelaire's "Le Cygne"] identifies
> the potential addressee of every apostrophe as the apostrophic "O" itself and makes every
> apostrophe an invocation of invocation.
>
> (1981, 143-4)[93]

And here is how Pickstock describes liturgical apostrophe:

> In the Roman Rite there are two main types of apostrophe. First, there are invocations
> which seek assistance for projects related to the vocation of the liturgical journey. [...]
> Secondly, there are functionally gratuitous apostrophic identifications. [...] The apostrophic
> voice calls in order to be calling, or in the hope of a further calling, and is thus situated within
> an expectant and passionate order of language [...].
> The gift-character of the second type of apostrophic address is very similar to the
> structure of liturgy itself, in its perpetual acts of postponement, and casting as the hope that
> there might be a liturgy. In the same way, apostrophe is an invocation of invocation, a
> sacrifice which hopes for a repetition, as a various, conscious, always-differing animal cry.
> [...] Devoid of mundane reference to an object, the cry of invocation is a physical event, a
> desire for proximity, in the pure "O!" of undifferentiated voicing.
>
> (1998, 193-4)

Clearly, then, Culler recognises – in a way that the "radically orthodox" theologian may

wholeheartedly endorse – the ritual character of poetic apostrophes such as Shelley's "Ode to the West

Wind." Culler's insight is, however, harnessed by certain presuppositions, which lead him towards a

conclusion which does not necessarily follow from the initial insight, and which leaves other possible

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[93] Culler's comments themselves recall Geoffrey Hartman's description of the first four apostrophic poems to the
seasons in Blake's *Poetical Sketches*, cited by the former in his earlier volume *Structuralist Poetics*: "If calling
the seasons is a gratuitous or ritual act, this but helps to move into the foreground the lyric pathos, the *ore*

conclusions unacknowledged. More specifically, as we saw in Part One, Culler, firstly, assumes that such apostrophes are non-representational, arguing that it "is hard to imagine what sort of situation would lead someone to speak in this way or what non-poetic act they would be performing" (1997, 72). Hard, perhaps, if one leaves religious practice entirely out of account. Though, as Pickstock's appropriation of Culler's comments as a description of liturgical practice shows, not if one does not. Secondly, since Culler refuses the possibility that religious ritual may involve – and exist as – a wagering upon its own efficacy (and may be efficacious as a *result* of its wagering that it might be so), he assumes that such invocations must be disingenuous, and serve some ulterior or tangential function. As we have seen, Culler therefore concludes that "these speakers are getting carried away and waxing poetical, extravagantly posturing" and that if "we try to understand these poems as fictional imitations of ordinary speech acts, the act seems to be that of imitating poetry itself" (1997, 72). What other possible conclusions does this leave unacknowledged? To bring these into view, we need first of all to indicate what, more exactly, is contestable about Culler's presuppositions.

Culler's implied view of ritual as some sort of obsolete form of primitive sorcery that everyone will agree is dotty and mendacious obviously ignores the widespread and vital persistence of religious ritual within "sophisticated" societies, and the fact that most of those who participate in such rites – it seems reasonable to aver – do so in the hope that their participation may be efficacious. This is, of course, not to say that there is no difference between Shelley's calling to the West Wind, for example, and the act of calling to the Transcendent in, say, the Christian liturgy. However, I do wish to argue that there *is* an analogy in the way of speaking, which Culler disregards, and which may in a number of respects cast light upon invocations uttered in poetry. Neither is this to deny that there is something self-consciously gratuitous about ritual calling, nor equally, as John Hollander argues, that such invocations speak as it were sideways to their overhearing audience. What Culler and Hollander say of utterances such as Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" is also true of liturgical apostrophe. I wish, instead, to point out that neither such self-conscious gratuitousness nor speaking "sideways" to one's audience (or oneself) means that one may not at the same time be hopefully and efficaciously addressing one's addressee. What, in sum, I wish to argue is that Culler's presentation of ritual

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rotunda, of their style. Here voice calls upon itself, calls up images of its previous power" (Hartman: 1970, 194.

invocation as some sort of metapoetic serpent with its tail in its mouth, talking to itself, imitating itself,

depends upon a *secular reduction* or *colonisation* of ritual practice. If, however, we are to deal justly

with a phenomenon born of faith, it would seem reasonable to consult a believer's understanding of

that phenomenon. What, then, from the point of view of the believing participant is the function of

ritual calling?

As we have seen, according to Pickstock, who takes as her exemplar of ritual practice the

preconciliar Roman Rite, there are two main types of liturgical apostrophe. Let us consider her

comments in full:

> First, there are invocations which seek assistance for projects related to the vocation of the
> liturgical journey. These tend to occur within petitional prayers, requesting purification,
> assistance, or acceptance of an offering: "*Iudica me, Deus, et discerne causam mean ...*";
> "*Emitte lucem tuam ....*" Secondly, there are functionally gratuitous apostrophic identifications.
> Because this latter type is removed from the economy of utility, it is more readily assimilable
> to the character of language as gift, or *sacrificium laudis*, and takes the form not of a petition
> but a calling which, like music, both *invokes* and *attracts*. It instantiates a sensual calling
> which, without instrumental purpose, represents a dislodging of language from diurnal orders
> of reasoning. The apostrophic voice calls in order to be calling, or in the hope of a further
> calling, and is thus situated within an expectant and passionate order of language: "*Confiteor
> tibi in cithara, Deus Deus meus,*" "*Domine Fili unigenite, Iesu Christe. Domine Deus, Agnus
> Dei Filius Patris.*"
>
> (1998, 193)[94]

The act of ritual invocation is thus, as Culler recognises, "functionally gratuitous" and aims to

perpetuate, and even in a sense to postpone, its own calling. Yet this does *not* mean that it is without

meaning or purpose, nor that it is exhausted by its reflexivity. What, then, is the purpose of such

"purposeless" calling?

We may identify four things that the act of ritual invocation is freed to become or achieve as a

result of its functional gratuitousness. First of all, as Pickstock observes, since such utterances are

"removed from the economy of utility," they are "more readily assimilable to the character of language

as gift [...]." Their functional gratuitousness does not therefore preclude but rather enables or "purifies"

their orientation towards the other. Secondly, the act of calling renders its addressee present and

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Cited in Culler: 1975, 166).
[94] The two main types of apostrophe identified by Pickstock (and Culler) correspond to the two basic types of prayer, according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, whose summary definition of prayer is taken from St John of Damascus: "the raising of one's mind and heart to God, or the requesting of good things from God" (cited in: Nichols (1997, 228)).

confrontable, for "apostrophe restores to time and physicality that which cannot be seen, and exteriorizes that which is contained within ideality" (Pickstock: 1998, 195). As Heidegger says of poetic naming: "Calling brings closer what it calls" (1975, 198).[95] Our giving is thus repaid in being allowed to be itself by the appearance over against us in the act of giving of that to which we give. Thirdly, and coextensive with this, the act of invocation, for the believer, establishes I-Thou relation:

> The figure of apostrophe is [...] predicated upon a dialogic dynamic. It is not voiced into the void, but towards the ultimate source of the invoker's desires. The object or absent thing which is addressed by apostrophe and thus becomes a "subject" implies in return that the "I" becomes a "you." In this way, one who calls upon God is one to whom God in turn speaks, thereby situating the unidentified "I" with which the Rite opens, not only within a shifting place, but also within a relational place, in an I-Thou relationship with the ultimate Thou. In the case of apostrophic address to God, the calling "I" does not occupy a prior or more primitive subject-position, because God alone makes the cry both possible and audible, [...] such that to call upon God is always already to have entered into Him.
>
> (Pickstock: 1998, 196–197)

Finally, the liturgical invocation's reflexive postponement of itself, invoking invocation, is neither without purpose nor condemned to an abysmal self-cancelling stasis. On the contrary, its perpetual supplementation of itself paradoxically *contributes* to its purpose, and allows it to exceed the tail-chasing stasis to which it is reduced in Culler's metapoetic reading, in that it bespeaks a sense of our fallenness and the necessarily prefatory character of our calling, which is a calling in the hope that there might be calling (Pickstock: 1998, 214).

Evidently, then, it does not necessarily follow from Culler's recognition of the ritual character of utterances such as "Ode to the West Wind" that they are referentially impotent. Even if, as Pickstock concurs, the apostrophic voice is "an invocation of invocation" and "calls in order to be calling," this does not preclude the possibility of hopeful or corroborated calling, nor the advent of relation. Ritual calling is not the opposite of "real" calling, though it obviously advertises itself as

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[95] Though, as Denys reminds us, this is because our call carries us towards what we call:

> even as, having embarked on a ship and clinging to the cables, the which being stretched out from some rock unto us, presented themselves (as it were) for us to lay hold upon them, we should not be drawing the rock towards ourselves, but should, in very truth, be drawing ourselves and the vessel towards the rock; as also, conversely, if any one standing upon the vessel pushes away the rock that is on the shore, he will not affect the rock (which stands immovable) but will separate himself therefrom [...]. Hence, before every endeavour, more especially if the subject be Divinity, must we begin with prayer: not as though we would pull down to ourselves that Power which is nigh both everywhere and nowhere, but that, by these remembrances and invocations of God, we may commend and unite ourselves Thereunto.

different – by means of singing, chanting or "excessive" repetition, for example – from quotidian "horizontal" calling, both to awaken the speaker to the import of what they are doing, and to challenge by revealing itself as an alternative to the latter. To say as Culler does that poetic invocations such as Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" are "ritualistic" is, then, to identify them with a manner of speaking which may be described in its wilfully sustained and perpetually self-supplementing acts of address as a "legitimate stammering," which does not, as Culler contends, necessarily represent a metapoetic suspension of calling but rather bespeaks an awareness of the distance between ourselves and that to which we call, and of the act of calling as a wagering on its own possibility.

Our discussion of the function or functional gratuitousness of ritual invocation and its relation to the issue of referentiality leads us to the second feature of liturgical practice which casts light upon analogous utterances in poetry. In Part One, we considered the contention, put forward by John Hollander and others, that the sort of invocations we find in "Ode to the West Wind" are not "really" addressed to their putative addressee but are rather a thinly disguised way of saying something sideways to a third-party audience. Perhaps the paradigmatic illustration of this is to be found in *Paradise Lost*, where Satan, perchance, decides to tell the Tree of Knowledge how irresistibly sweet its fruit is, and to put forward reasons why it makes perfect sense to eat it, in spite of God's command, just as Eve happens to be within earshot:

> "O Fruit Divine,
> Sweet of thyself, but much more sweet thus cropt,
> Forbidd'n here, it seems, as only fit,
> For Gods, yet able to make Gods of Men, since good, the more
> Communicated, more abundant grows,
> The Author not impair'd, but honour'd more?
> Here, happy Creature, fair Angelic Eve,
> Partake thou also [...]".
>
> (V, 48–75)

The question, then, is not whether such surreptitious sideways speaking occurs or not – manifestly it does, and arguably most, if not all, lyric poetry functions to a certain extent in this way – but rather whether, as critics such as Hollander seem to assume, it necessarily *excludes* a "straightforward" orientation also. In other words, to refer to the example cited by both Hollander and Culler, might not

the speaker in "Ode to the West Wind" be invoking the wind *and* addressing, in consciously speaking in front of, a third-party audience *as well*? This ability to speak in two directions at once, without rendering either one of them "unreal" or inoperative, has been unfortunately popularised by mobile phone users. It is also evinced in the liturgy.

In the act of liturgical invocation, the words of the speaker are in a sense uttered in three directions at once or for the benefit of three distinct auditors. We speak, that is, in the first place, to our addressee, but also in doing so, we speak "to" or in front of our fellow worshippers, and "to" or in front of ourselves – invoking and *showing* ourselves and others that we are invoking. What is the sense of this?

One explanation is to be found in Augustine's *Confessions*, which resemble the liturgy in their apostrophaic orientation, interspersed with explicit apostrophes. Towards the beginning and towards the end of the book, Augustine states that in speaking to God, he is also speaking "to" and for the benefit of himself and others, and offers the following reasons for doing so:

> I need not tell all this to you, my God, but in your presence I tell it to my own kind, to those other men, however few, who may perhaps pick up this book. And I tell it so that I and all who read my words may realize the depths from which we are to cry to you.
>
> (1961, 45)

> O Lord, since you are outside time in eternity, are you unaware of the things that I tell you? Or do you see in time the things that occur in it? If you see them, why do I lay this lengthy record before you? Certainly it is not through me that you first hear of these things. But by setting them down I fire my own heart and the hearts of my readers with love of you [...].
>
> (1961, 253)

Augustine thus realises what he is supposed to do and is inspired to do so by the act of doing it. The same, it seems, is true of liturgical invocation – we show and are shown by ourselves and others what we are supposed to do, and are inspired and inspire others to do what we are doing by the act of doing it.

The connection between invocations such as "Ode to the West Wind" and ritual practice therefore suggests a second conclusion concerning the issue of referentiality. Whilst, to Hollander and others, the act of invocation self-consciously performed in front of others, in the hope of influencing them, by "showing" them our invocation, subverts or short-circuits the utterance's ostensible

orientation, the practice of religious ritual argues that this need not be the case, and that multiple operative orientations are possible. In the liturgy, the celebrant and congregation alike utter – or chant, in a manner as far removed from "everyday" speech as poetical speaking – the same apostrophes each time Mass is said, in front of an audience that is far more palpable than that which attends the act of poetic invocation, and with the express intent of influencing them, without, however, this rendering their acts of address insincere or subverting their overt orientation. To say, then, that Shelley's invocation is a "ritualised" act, which is "functionally gratuitous" (Culler), and which speaks obliquely to its third-party audience (Hollander) does not rule out – but, on the contrary, in fact brings into view – the possibility that, in speaking to itself and in speaking to those who overhear, it may also be doing what it claims to be doing, namely, addressing its addressee.

There are two further ways in which the act of invocation in poetry may be compared to liturgical practice. In both cases, the similarity is more pronounced in "epic" invocations. The first of these pertains to the utterances' formulaic character.

Obviously, in comparing literary and liturgical invocations, we are dealing with different types of formulism and degrees of fixity. Indeed, perhaps what strikes us first in bringing the two together is the difference between the freedom of the former as opposed to the fixity of the latter. Yet it is a freedom that occurs within and preserves – and is in a sense born of the adherence to – certain conventions, even if in modern verse, this is an adherence more honoured by parody than reverent practice. In what ways, then, do these conventions resemble the formulae of liturgical invocation?

Whilst it is possible to educe certain lexical and syntactic continuities within the tradition of epic invocation, the convention of invoking the Muse in poetry is more a matter of adopting a posture and certain procedures than the use of fixed linguistic formulae. Nevertheless, in literary as well as liturgical invocation, the speaker consents to speak from within a relational identity that has been established and inhabited by others. In poetry, the principal feature of this relational identity is the posture of humility or dependency adopted by the poet in the act of invoking the Muse. Whereas the attitude of humility or dependency may be expressed in the liturgy by kneeling or bowing or other paralinguistic gestures in addition to speech, in poetry it tends to be expressed in one or a number of the following ways: acknowledging the source of inspiration – embodied or communicated by the

Muse – to be of divine origin and to lie outside of the consciously speaking poet; honouring the Muse by enumerating her attributes, provenance and former deeds et cetera, which often forms part of an extended naming; according the act of invocation priority of place, at the beginning of the poem or prior to an important section of the poem; and, finally, of course, requesting something of the Muse, which is usually, though need not be, related to the project of the poem. It will be profitable to our discussion to unpack, qualify and illustrate some of these generalisations. The first point, concerning the divinity of that which is invoked, is perhaps least in need of illustration and most in need of qualification.

The Renaissance lexicographer Robert Cawdrey defines invocation as a "calling upon any thing with trust in the same" (cited in: Donker and Muldrow: 1982, 131). Undoubtedly – as Cawdrey's "any thing" makes clear – the greatest variation in the act of invocation, pertains to the nature of the entity invoked, and – *contrary* to Cawdrey's stipulation about "trust" – the potency and ontological status attributed to that entity. Such variations are synchronic as well as diachronic. Thus, if it is possible within Western poetry, leaving overtly parodic invocations aside for the moment, to trace a general movement away from the invocation of classical divinities (the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, *Theogony*), which curiously seems by far to outlive "trust in the same,"[96] in the first place towards a Christianization of the convention (*Paradise Lost*, Tasso's *La Gerusalemme Liberata*), which then gives way to the Romantic invocation of presences in nature or of Nature herself ("Ode to the West Wind," *Alastor*), and is accompanied by an interiorisation and humanisation of the source of

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[96] The remarkable survival of the invocation of classical deities was commonly both attacked and defended in eighteenth-century criticism. Lord Lansdowne, for example (who is himself invoked by Pope at the start of "Windsor-Forest") defends the convention as follows in the "Explanatory Annotations" to his poem "Concerning Unnatural Flights in Poetry":

> The Poetic World is nothing but Fiction; Parnassus, Pegasus, and the Muses, pure imagination and Chimæra: But being however a system universally agreed on, all that shall be contriv'd or invented upon this Foundation according to Nature, shall be reputed, as truth [...].
>
> (1997, 129)

Clearly, not everyone was so forbearing or capable of such a suspension of disbelief. Shaftesbury, for instance, writing only ten years later, comments on the convention in the following way:

> It has become an established custom for poets, at the entrance of their work, to address themselves to some muse: and this practice of the ancients has gained so much repute, that even in our days we find it almost constantly imitated. [...] Now what possibility is there that a modern, who is known never to have worshipped Apollo, or owned any such deity as the muses, should persuade us to enter into his pretended devotion and move us by his feigned zeal in a religion out of date?
>
> (1963, 6)

inspiration (Klopstock's *Messias*, Whitman's "Song of Myself"), and which in turn is superseded in the period of Modernism by the invocation of a dysfunctional or avowedly fictional Muse (Baudelaire's "The Sick Muse," Stevens' "Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction"), it is also possible – to spoil this neat pattern – to find the invocation of pagan divinities within explicitly Christian verse, and the mixed invocation of Christian and pagan divinities (*The Divine Comedy, The Faerie Queene*), as well as the nostalgic attachment to the classical Muse in Romantic poetry (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Endymion*), and the residual persistence within Modernist writing of both invocations to natural phenomena and of more or less orthodox religious invocations (St.-John Perse's *Amers*, Hart Crane's *The Bridge*). Clearly, then, by no means all invocations involve a reverential ascription of inspiration to the divine or even to that which is outside of the self, though it is equally clear that the poet's acknowledgement of dependence and humility is not limited to invocations of the classical Muse. Moreover, the change perceptible over time from attributing the source of inspiration to the Muse or some other numinous surrogate to ascribing it to the realm of the unconscious is arguably in certain respects not really a change at all, since the "unconscious," as much as the "Muse," is a metaphorical and hypothetical attempt to portray that which affects but which is – by definition in the former – beyond the conscious apprehension of the poet. This point has been well made by George Steiner:

> In most cultures, in the witness borne to poetry and art until most recent modernity, the source of "otherness" has been actualized or metaphorized as transcendent. It has been invoked as divine, as magical, as daimonic. It is a presence of radiant opacity. That presence is the source of powers, of significations in the text, in the work, neither consciously willed nor consciously understood. It is, today, conventional to ascribe this vital excess to the unconscious. Such ascription is a secular phrasing of what I have called "alterity." The trope of the unconscious, however we seek to locate its empirical validity, is a translation into a seemingly rational code of that which earlier vocabularies and thought-systems referred to as the *daimon*, as the mantic breath of strangeness which speaks through the rhapsode, which guides the sculptor's hand. In the West, one looked to those sowers of of the powers of significant form, the Muses. It is not the style of designation that matters: it is the affirmation, implicit and explicit, in poetry, in art, since the cave paintings of the pre-historic, of the agonistic-collaborative presence of agencies beyond the governance or conceptual grasp of the craftsman.
>
> (1989, 211)

The second way we identified in which the poet may signal an attitude of humility or dependence is by honouring the Muse by enumerating her virtues and reminding her of her former deeds (or, as Wordsworth does in his apostrophe to the river Wye, by reminding his addressee how

often he has turned to it in devotion before). This sort of polite arm-twisting is a common feature of orthodox prayer,[97] and frequently occurs in the Psalms. The prevalence of such practice, not only in Judeo-Christian prayer,[98] further troubles Hollander's reading of the attributive swelling found in "Ode to the West Wind" as a sign that its speaker is not "really" invoking its addressee. We have already seen that the ritual practice of wilfully and gratuitously spinning out the act of naming need not subvert or reveal a disingenuousness in the utterance's communicative function, but may instead be motivated by a desire to remain in I-Thou relation; and, similarly, that the habit of communicating "sideways" in the act of invoking need not exclude the simultaneous possibility of "straightforward" address. It now, further, emerges to view that the practice of honorifically padding out one's apostrophes in the act of prayer is a traditional, if ingenuous, way of attempting to further one's cause, which bespeaks a *decided* interest in that which is addressed, and bolsters even as it appears to divert attention from the act of invoking.

A third way of signalling humility and dependence is by allowing the act of invocation priority of place. As with all of the other features of the convention, this is, of course, open to variation and parody. Byron, for example, is debonairly late in his invocation in *Don Juan* – though, as we shall see, neither entirely without reverence or reason – which occurs at the start of Canto III.[99] It is nevertheless an important feature of the convention – and, according to Hesiod, the express will of the Muses[100] – to invoke their aid "before" as it were the poem or an important part thereof begins. "As it were," because the act of invocation, in being part of that which it in another way prefaces, represents an area of transition or limbo and a peculiar moment of ambiguous ownership. At what point is the request for

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[97] The Memorare, for example, begins:

> Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
> that never was it known
> that anyone who fled to your protection,
> implored your help, or sought your intercession
> was left unaided.

[98] For a discussion of the "means of persuasion" employed in "primitive prayer" and "prophetic religion," see Helier (1932, 29–35 and 253–8).

[99] Other well-known examples of "delayed" invocations are to be found in Fielding's *Tom Jones* (Book IV, Chapter 8), and in Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*, whose nine cantos are named after the nine Muses, whom the poet, however, only invokes at the start of the final canto.

[100] Relating his encounter with "the eloquent daughters of Zeus," Hesiod states:

> they commanded me to sing of the race of the immortal, blessed Gods, and always to sing of themselves,[9] both first and last.

inspiration answered, if it is answered? Can it be answered *after* the act of invocation, which in forming part of the poem would seem to be itself dependent upon what it requests? Can it, however, be answered *before* the request is made, which defies the normal logic of causality but is implied by the way in which the request is inextricably bound up with the receipt of that which is requested? We seem to find the *Meno* problematic at the doors of the invocation also. How can the poet "give" before he has received? Yet, equally, how can he receive before he has given? The poet must apparently in a sense receive (inspiration) in order to give (that is, create), though in order to receive, the convention demands that the poet has first in a sense to give (that is, invoke), since the request for inspiration forms part of that for which inspiration is requested. This is, however, to look at the matter back to front, and to trace the problem (of how it can occur) from its solution (in its apparent occurrence). As writers as diverse as Augustine, Buber, and the Romantics concur, and as we have traced in the act of apostrophe, there appears to be a paradoxical simultaneity in giving and receiving, which may be observed in the act of invocation also, which suggests that it is in giving that we receive what we require in order to give.

This moment of ambiguous ownership in the act of invocation has an intriguing analogue in the Christian liturgy. As Catherine Pickstock points out, the liturgy, too, needs in a sense to begin before it can begin – since the grace it requests is required to make the request – and has at *its* outset (where it begins "*In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen*") an utterance which is at once or is poised between an invocation and a hopeful assertion of its accomplishment. This initial invocation is, however – like the invocations at the start of *The Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost* – something that needs to be trusted but that also needs to be continually re-attempted during the liturgical journey – as the Muses wish it: first, last and midst.

Our final point respecting the formulaic character of the poetic invocation concerns the request addressed to the Muse. What it is precisely that the poet requests from the Muse or requests her to do, again leaving parodic invocations aside, obviously varies, though typically conforms to certain norms; nevertheless, it is perhaps the definitive feature of the act of invocation that the poet *wants something*

from or is beholden to the Muse, and it is conventional that this desire or deference is expressed in the form of an imperative petition.[101] What typically do invocations request of the Muse?

Summarily speaking, whilst the form it is to take may vary considerably, most poetic invocations tend to request either presence or communication (though one often entails the other, since to be present is in a sense to respond, and to respond concomitantly implies some sort of presence).[102] The first of these is more straightforward.

Direct requests for presence or proximity are to be found, for instance, in Pope's invocation at the start of "Windsor-Forest"; in *Paradise Lost* and Hart Crane's "The Bridge," both of which request their addressee to "descend" (though given that the speaker in Crane's poem is addressing the Brooklyn Bridge, the request in this case is more problematic); in Byron's *Heaven and Earth* (77–8); and in *The Faerie Queene* (I, 3), Milton's "L'Allegro" (11) and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (II, 1), all of which request their addressee to "come."[103] Finally, the request for proximity might, conversely, involve the passage of the speaker into the presence of the addressee, and a plea for the means of doing so, as we find, for example, in Hölderlin's invocation at the start of "Patmos":

> *Drum, da gehäuft sind rings*
> *Die Gipfel der Zeit, und die Liebsten*
> *Nah wohnen, ermattend auf*
> *Getrenntesten Bergen,*
> *So gieb unschuldig Wasser,*
> *O Fittige gieb uns, treusten Sinns*
> *Hinüberzugehen und wiederzukehren.*
>
> (9–15)

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[101] Certain invocations, we have noted, consist more simply of an act of hailing (which as the German "*heil*" reminds us, is etymologically cognate with greeting as "holy"), and lack any overt petition, as found, for example, in Milton's "Il Penseroso" (11–12) and *Comus* (128–9), and in the invocation with which Byron's *Cain* begins (1–21). This is, of course, following Gabriel's greeting, how prayers to Mary conventionally begin (*Ave Maria, Salve Regina*, Newman's "Hail, star of the sea" et cetera).

[102] Sometimes, also, the request is for unspecified help; as, for instance, in *Inferno* (II, 7), Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (8–10), and *The Faerie Queene* (I, 2).

[103] We might note that the New Testament ends with such an imperative petition for presence:

> And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. [...]. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.
>
> (Revelation, 22:17–20)

The request for communication is perhaps more interesting and less straightforward than it may at first appear. To begin with, we find in poetic invocations requests both for communication to be "given" and for communication to be "received" (though, again, the one may in some sense involves the other). Examples of the latter are to be found in "Ode to the West Wind," whose burden is the request "oh, hear!" in the invocation in the first scene of Byron's *Heaven and Hell* ("Yet hear!" (43), "Oh hear!" (61)), in Mark Akenside's invocation at the start of *The Pleasures of Imagination* ("Attend, ye gentle powers"), and in Eliot's invocation at the end of "Ash-Wednesday."

The request for communication to be "given" is, however, far more frequent and involves more interesting similarities and variations. To begin with the variations: the poet may, for example, request direct, *verbal* communication from the Muse, entreating her to "sing," "say" or "tell" and so forth. This is the case in many of the founding classical and Christian invocations.[104] Yet even amongst such requests there are significant variations. First of all, as Volker Klotz points out, sometimes the poet's petition is "accusative" and limited to a request for materials (*Erzählstoff*), as, to use his example, in the *Odyssey*:

> Nicht Eigenschaften sind es, die er, um die Muse zu bewegen, zur näheren Kennzeichnung des Mannes mitteilt, sondern Taten, Handlungen, Begebenheiten, das heißt bewegter Erzählstoff, der dem Anruf nach eigentlich der Muse zustünde.
>
> (1965, 14)

Though, on other occasions, the poet may request communication in a more amplified form, especially where the poem deals with supernatural events about which the poet can only stammer, as in *Paradise Lost*, of which Klotz writes:

> Mit dem Ungehorsam des Menschen und der Frucht vom verbotenen Baum gliedert auch hier nach bewährter Weise der Hendiadyoin den thematischen Sachverhalt auf in Täter und Instrument, doch sie sind nicht nur, sachbedingt, vom Einmaligen (des Heros Aeneas) ins Einfürallemal (Man), vom Faktischen ins Symbolische verlegt, auch grammatisch hat sich etwas geändert: die angerufene Muse soll nicht geradeweg akkusativisch verfügbare

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[104] The Muse is, for instance, requested to "sing" in the *Iliad* (I, 1) and in the opening invocation of *Paradise Lost* (I, 6), as is the poet's "immortal soul" at the start of Klopstock's *Der Messias* (I, 1). Invocations requesting the Muse to "say" or "tell" are to be found in the *Odyssey* (I, 10), in *Paradise Lost* (I, 27), and in Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea* ("Musen [...] saget vor allem" (IX, 6)). Allied, finally, to these requests to "sing" and "tell," we find invocations which call upon the Muse to "remember," as, for example, in the *Aeneid* (I, 1) and *The Faerie Queene* ("Lay forth out of thine everlasting scryne / The antique rolles, which there lye hidden still" (I, 3 - 5)).

Gegenstände singen, sie soll *davon* singen (of). Das heißt, der erzählende Gegenstand ist nicht habhaft als einer, der in Hiesigen zuhaus und überliefert ist, wie die Irrfahrten des Odysseus, die Geschichten von Aeneas oder Roland, er ist vielmehr so beschaffen, jenseitig, gewaltig, daß man ihm nur annähernd beikommen mag.

(1965, 18–19)

Additionally, there would seem to be an interesting difference in the nature and degree of interaction between the *Iliad*'s "Sing, goddess," the *Odyssey*'s "Sing in me, Muse," and Virgil's "Sicilian Muses, let us sing" in "Ecologue" IV.

In other invocations, what is requested is less concrete or non-verbal, and more of a general petition for inspiration. Spenser, for example, having invoked the memory of Calliope, and the presence of Cupid and Mars, concludes his invocation at the start of *The Faerie Queene* with a request for illumination and the ecstatic ingress of the Phoebus-like light of his temporal Muse (Queen Elizabeth):

> O Goddesse heavenly bright!
> Mirrour of grace and Majestie divine,
> Great Ladie of the greatest Isle, whose light
> Like Phœbus lampe throughout the world doth shine,
> Shed thy faire beames into my feeble eyne,
> And raise my thoughtes, too humble and too vile,
> To thinke of that true glorious type of thine,
> The argument of mine afflicted stile [...].

(I, 4)

Milton, in the opening invocation of *Paradise Lost*, similarly bids Celestial light

> Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
> Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight.

(III, 51–5)[105]

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[105] Other more general requests for inspiration are to be found in Tasso's *La Gerusalemme Liberata*, and in *Paradiso* (I, 19–24). The latter's plea for inspiration is the most "ecstatic" of all, requesting not merely the voice or breath of that which is invoked, but requesting rather its bestowal of itself: "Enter my breast" (*Entra nel petto mio*) (I, 19); "O Power Divine, but lend me of yourself" (I, 22). The ingressive ekstasis requested in the invocation, moreover, forms part of the canto's vision of a universe in ecstasy (which characteristically serves as a prologue to the ecstatic realm of Paradise): more precisely, the poet requests the ecstatic ingress of the god Apollo in order that he may be able to describe his earlier ecstatic vision – which is compared to the visionary ekstasis of St Paul (I, 73–5) – of God's ecstatic interpenetration of all things (I, 1–3), and of their ec-centric orientation towards Him (I, 108–26). The canto, furthermore, suggests that the ecstatic ingress of inspiration may precipitate an answering ekstasis in the poet:

In still other invocations, the communication requested is described in more obviously metaphorical terms (though, to be sure, when dealing with the appeal for inspiration from divine and mythical beings, the distinction between "literal" and "metaphorical" makes little sense). Keats, for example, in one of the several stammering invocations in *Endymion*, tentatively asks the Muse to "let a portion of ethereal dew / Fall on my head, and presently unmew / My soul" (I, 131–3). Likewise Pope, at the outset of "Windsor-Forest," having requested the "Sylvan Maids" to "Be present," bids them: "Unlock your Springs, and open all your Shades" (4).

Over time, where she is still invoked, the Muse comes to be relieved of her duties somewhat. As Volker Klotz observes, "Die Muse – oder Gott und Muse – verliert nach und nach an Macht und Gewicht" (1965, 14). Her role in other invocations is thus, finally, more peripheral or ancillary, and what is requested of her is "accompaniment" or favour of some sort (though this accompaniment may, of course, inspire, animate or merely "embellish" the poet's tale). In "Lycidas," for instance, the poet asks the "Sisters of the sacred well" to "somewhat loudly sweep the string" (15; 17). Similarly, though perhaps retaining the Muses more obviously on half pay, in Mark Akenside's *The Pleasures of Imagination*, the poet entreats the "gentle powers / Of musical delight" that he invokes to "dance around [his] strain" while he sings their gifts and honours (I, 6–8). Finally, we can see in Shelley's request at the beginning of *Alastor* to the "Mother of this unfathomable world" to "Favour [his] solemn song" (18–19) a closing of the circle and a shading over into the sort of appeal for audition with which we began our consideration of invocations which request communication.

What, in spite of their variations, do all these invocations have in common? Two points are pertinent to our general argument. First of all, the act of invocation in poetry, like the liturgical invocation, exhibits what Catherine Pickstock refers to as a "double movement of ecstasy and

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Enter my breast, breath into me as high
a strain as that which vanquished Marsyas
the time you drew him from his body's sheath.

(I, 19–21)

As Mark Musa comments, "In mentioning this incident [of Marsyas' punishment – who was tied to a tree and then pulled out of his skin while still alive for his presumption] as part of his invocation to Apollo, Dante prays that he be given the power to perform as wonderfully as Apollo did when he vanquished Marsyas. Dante could also be asking here to be lifted out of himself in the sense of having his mind freed from his body, as well as his poetic abilities from all limitations, to enable him to describe his experiences in Paradise" (1986, 8).

attraction which is a supreme expression of desire" (1998, 194). Though, as we have seen in our

discussion both of apostrophe and invocation, this giving and receiving of reciprocal ekstasis cannot

be disentangled into sequential or uni-directional stages. Rather, giving appears paradoxically both to

be prompted by and to elicit receiving. Here is how Pickstock describes this reciprocity in the act of

liturgical invocation:

> Because that which is invoked is transcendent, the utterance of apostrophe is, by definition,
> contemporaneous with God's entry, not simply as a subsequent response, but as that which
> enables the worshipper to call out in the first place. Thus, it is impossible to desire God
> emptily, without that desire provoking and constituting its own consummation.
>
> (1998, 194)

How can we explain the reciprocal ekstasis that appears to be involved in the poetic act of invocation?

Two well-known classical accounts of the origin and disseminative character of inspiration may help

us here.

According to Hesiod's foundational narrative of the Muses' original bestowal of inspiration in

Theogony, the "goddesses" initially spoke to the shepherd-poet "unbidden" (1972, 3), and "breathed

divine song into [him]" (1972, 3). According to Socrates in the *Ion*, this initial bestowal of inspiration

brought into being a proliferative "divine force," which may be compared in its effect to "the

Heraclean stone" or magnet (1972, 43), since it "not only attracts iron rings, but induces in the rings

the power to do the same themselves in turn – namely to attract other rings, so that sometimes a long

chain of iron rings is formed, suspended from one another, all having the force derived from the stone"

(1972, 43). What we therefore discover in these founding accounts of man's communion with the

Muses is a view of inspiration as contagious ekstasis – the Muses first breathe something of

themselves into man, which produces a creative ekstasis or possession in the poet (1972, 3), which is

itself then capable of inspiring such creative ekstasis in others. As Socrates explains: "Thus the Muse

herself makes people possessed, and from these possessed persons there hangs a chain of others,

possessed with the same enthusiasm" (1972, 3).

There is a striking parallel here, evident in the term "inspiration," between the Muses' bringing

of the poet to creative life, by breathing "divine song" into him, and the Judeo-Christian God's

bringing of man life, according to Genesis, transforming his dust into "a living soul" by breathing His

Spirit into him. In both cases, it is the divine's initial ecstatic bestowal of itself, in breathing something of its divinity into man, which brings him in some sense to life, and is in some sense contagious or transmittable. It is also as a result of this initial ecstatic act of "inspiration" that man becomes himself capable of such ekstasis – on the one hand, the "divine force" bestowed by the Muses carries the poet "outside of himself" in creativity (Plato: 1972, 44), on the other, the "breath of life," which transforms man into "a living soul," permits the soul's ecstatic departure from – even as it is enclosed within – the body.

There is a further "ecstatic" parallel between classical accounts of creativity and Christian accounts of Creation which may help us to answer our earlier question concerning the reciprocity of giving and receiving. The analogy is outlined by Volker Klotz:

> Die Dichter der frühen Epen errichten eine Welt, die der Schöpfung ähnlich ist, sich von dieser jedoch gerade dadurch unterscheidet, daß sie nicht von Göttern geschaffen ist sondern von Menschen. [...]
> Übermenschliches und Außerzeitliches war Bedingung des Weltanfangs: die Götter. Übermenschliches und Außerzeitliches setzt denn auch *Homer* in folgerichtiger Entsprechung als Bedingung an seinen Anfang: die Muse [...].
>
> (1965, 11–12)

Our consideration in section IV of Denys's "ecstatic" account of Creation, and our examination of the Muse's ecstatic communion with the poet permits us to extend Klotz's parallel a little further. If, as Denys argues, and Aquinas affirms, creation is an (on-going) act of Divine ekstasis, there would seem to be an analogy, suggested by Hesiod's and Socrates' accounts of inspiration, and the invocations, among others, of Homer, Dante, Spenser and Milton, not only, as Klotz argues, in the dependency of artistic and material creation upon "that which is beyond man and time," but also in the fact that creation in both cases is born of the divine's ecstatic bestowal of itself.

We are now perhaps in a better position to explain the reciprocal ekstasis that appears to be involved in the poetic act of invocation. As we have seen, according to Hesiod's account of poetic inspiration, which strikingly prefigures the Divine "inspiration" described in Genesis, the original initiatory movement or bestowal of poetic "grace" comes from the divine "unbidden." Furthermore, as Socrates explains in the *Ion*, this original act of inspiration is radically and inexhaustibly disseminative, contagiously drawing the poet outside of himself – in entering into him – and causing

him to give out, in being drawn that which draws him. As Buber says of revelation, it is "summons and sending" (1944, 115). Thus, in each subsequent case of inspiration also, the *mediated incursion of the divine* is prevenient. Yet, at the same time, as we saw in our discussion of the ambiguous ownership of the poet's invocation, the Muse's inspiration is brought into manifest being in – and is therefore in a sense "provoked" by – the poet's calling, since the act of seeking inspiration in invocation forms part of that for which inspiration is sought. The act of calling thus reveals, as a "response" to its calling, that which paradoxically *prompted* its calling. In this, the poetic invocation again resembles the act of invocation in the liturgy. In both instances, the apostrophic calling "exteriorises that which is contained in ideality" (Pickstock: 1998, 195), and in doing so "provokes," in the manner of a response, the revelation of that which provoked the act of calling. In this way, the ecstatic giving of the divine appears both to prompt and be prompted by the act of invocation, which reveals itself, in being itself, as caused by what it in a sense "causes."

What is the second feature of importance to our general argument that all of the invocations requesting communication have in common? In each case, there is some sort of gap or difference implied between what is "given" and the poem as it finally exists. This is obvious enough, of course, though it has an interesting bearing upon what was said in section IV concerning *poesis* and a "making" which is also a revelation. Manifestly, the nature and degree of the Muses' involvement and the poet's communication of their communication varies, though – whether the Muse supplies "materials" or "remembers" for the poet's use, sings "in," sings "with" or sings "for" the poet, whether he requests illumination, accompaniment, favour or the entrance into his being of that which is invoked – in each case, the communication is mediated by the poet, and in each case, it is a mediation that *reveals* rather than impedes that which is "given." Indeed, the Muses' gift would not *exist* without the poet's making; though equally, the poet's making is, at least conventionally, dependent upon the Muses' gift.

In this respect also the act of invocation in poetry resembles the liturgical utterance. We have already seen in our discussion of apostrophe (drawing upon Aquinas' "aesthetic" account of revelation) that "making" is not opposed to, but rather brings to light, in giving substance to, truth. This is supremely the case in liturgical "making," in which, by the work of our hands (and mouths) – in our

gathering together, our reading of His Word, our ritual *anamnesis*, and our repeated acts of invocation, Christ is made present. Though, in the act of liturgical invocation, as in the invocation of the Muse, we make present that which made our "making present" possible. We therefore "make" that which paradoxically precedes and inspires its own making. As Buber writes of creativity: "to invent is to find, to shape is to discover. In bodying forth I disclose" (1944, 10).

One final way in which the poetic invocation resembles the act of invocation in the liturgy remains to be considered: namely, its public or "communal" character. On the face of it, the differences may seem to be more obvious than the similarities. The liturgy, as we know, is "public work,"[106] and its invocations are uttered collectively by a community openly gathering in shared time and space. In what sense is the poetic invocation public or communal? Does it not *precisely* differ from its liturgical equivalent in being uttered by an individual in private? The similarity between the utterances, in spite of certain differences, results, firstly, from the fact that the liturgical community is *not* limited to those who gather together in shared space and time; secondly, from the fact that the poetic invocation is in certain respects *neither* a private *nor* an individual's utterance; and, thirdly, from an institutional performativity common to both. Let us consider each of these points in turn.

In what sense does the communality of the liturgy's utterance exceed those who pray together in shared space and time? As the Christian Church understands its own utterance, the prayer of any particular liturgical gathering, like the prayer of any participating individual, forms part of the prayer of the Church as a whole, which is a *single* prayer, taking place across time and space, offered through, with and in Christ, to God the Father, uniting all of those who take part into a single praying community. This is what is meant by the orthodox formulation that the liturgy is the prayer of "the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, Head and Members" (Pius XII: 1947, para. 20). Sebastian Bullough, drawing on the writing of Odo Casel, sums up the matter as follows:

> The prayer of the Church as a body is the prayer of Christ to the eternal Father: it is the prayer of the whole Christian community, on this earth and in the next life. [...] I believe that the adoration of men on earth is one with the everlasting adoration of the blessed in heaven, of our Lady and all the saints: and I believe it is one, because all alike are sharing in the one prayer that is the prayer of Christ. This is the corporate prayer of the whole Church, which is Christ, and when I take part in it, my own human share becomes something far greater than I could

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[106] Greek: *leitourgia* public service (*leit-* public + *ergon* work).

ever achieve alone: in the strength of Christ's friendship, my prayer becomes his prayer. In this lies the value of common or liturgical worship: it is my worship within the framework of the worship of the whole Church, on earth as in heaven.

(1963, 214)

Turning, then, to our second point: in what respects is the poetic invocation neither a private nor an individual's utterance? In our discussion of the formulaic character of poetic invocation, we cited Socrates' explanation of inspiration as a "divine force," bestowed by the Muses, which "makes people possessed, and from these possessed persons there hangs a chain of others, possessed with the same enthusiasm." It is this "chain of others," which represents a poetic or intertextual "community," which the poet in adopting the conventions of poetic invocation joins. In voluntarily conforming to these communal procedures, the poet takes up a position which, like the act of liturgical utterance, publicly faces a number of different directions at once. Whilst overtly orienting himself in the act of invocation towards the Muse – and, as we have seen, this may be but *need not* be "hollowed out" by the poet's contemporaneous orientation in other directions – the poet is also, on the one hand, self-consciously aligning himself with a group of others who have elected to do the same before him, and, on the other hand, transmitting to those who come after him by *publicly endorsing* certain traditional values and procedures. In this way, the poet, like the liturgical speaker, may be said to be speaking in a public manner both "sideways" and "straightforwardly" in the act of invocation.

We have already in part intimated in what sense the poetic invocation is and is not the poet's own. In the liturgy and in the poetic invocation, the speaker steps as it were outside of himself, and speaks ec-centrically from within an identity that is not of his originating. This identity – which is obviously more precisely and strictly choreographed in the liturgy – is in both cases communally established and formed of a collage of voices.[107] This is the first sense in which the poetic invocation is not the speaker's "own" utterance.

This does not, of course, make such invocations a mere play-acting or "holidaying" in the identity of another. There is, to begin with, nothing inauthentic or necessarily ironic about standing in

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[107] The liturgical and poetic invocational "identities" even appear to merge in certain writers – most obviously in Milton, though also in Eliot's "Ash-Wednesday" and Hart Crane's "The Bridge," for example – whose invocations echo the calling of the Psalms, which, as we know, is the primary source of the liturgy's invocations. This is hardly surprising, of course, since, as Walter Schindler reminds us, "in its deepest historical roots, invocation is a religious, not a literary phenomenon, appearing as the original form of divine worship in all cultures" (1984, 6).

and speaking with the words of another. At the height of His Passion on the cross, Christ called out to His Father in the words of the Psalmist, though no one would doubt that the words were uttered as His "own":

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

(Psalm 22; Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34)

Neither, for all the uniqueness of this example, is there anything unusual about "borrowing" the words of another *in extremis*. As J. Neville Ward observes:

> The idea of words as a form of private property is peculiar. The words "I love you" do not belong to anybody. All over the world hundreds of people are using them at this moment, using a familiar phrase from love's ceremony because it says what they want to say. It is not theirs, or ours when we use it, but all of us use it, just as in another situation we may want to use the words "according to thy loving kindness blot out my transgressions."
>
> Such phrases and sentences become "our own" in the degree to which we put ourselves into the saying. Sincerity has nothing whatever to do with authorship, spontaneity or originality. It has to do with the amount of oneself one is able to put into a word, a look, an action.
>
> (1976, 113)

Moreover, authenticity is not a "one-way street" from disposition to articulation. On the contrary, we may be adventitiously affected by the words we speak. This is, I think, what happens in Shelley's *Adonais* (and what Augustine testifies in his *Confessions*). In Shelley's poem, it appears to be the act of ritual mourning – publicly invoking the Muse to weep, and cursing the reviewer whom Shelley blamed for Keats's death – that precipitates the conventional but nonetheless extraordinary alteration from grief to apocalyptic exultation. The change is not an event, emotion or realisation that first occurs, outside of speaking, and is then articulated by the poet. His speaking is *itself* the event that affects even as it expresses the change. As the speaker says at the end of the poem, "The breath whose might I have invoked in song / Descends on me" (LV). In other words, the direction of causality is not from feeling or prior conviction to speech, but from speaking to feeling or felt belief. The poet thus seems to be convinced, and even in a sense to be converted, by his own public speaking, which does not violently or sophistically change his mind, but disposes him to feel what he already believed. And

if this consolation is good enough for the grieving poet, it should be good enough for us. It is this reversal of the causal relationship, exalted since the Romantic period, between feeling and speaking that is an important feature of and aligns ritualised utterances such as Shelley's *Adonais* to liturgical practice. To recall Margaret Doody's comments about the liturgy quoted earlier: there is "a view of human nature older than Romanticism and quite alien to modern notions of sincerity, according to which outer actions and words spoken can create the feelings and move the desires."

The second sense in which the poetic invocation both is and is not the utterance of an individual returns us to the point made earlier about the ambiguous ownership of the invocation. In his informative article on Karl Barth's "Theology of Invocation," Matthew Boulton draws attention to the "collaborative" and "conspiratorial" character of liturgical invocation, as expounded by Barth. What he means by this is that invocation in the liturgy is an "acting-with," performed "in collaboration with the Holy Spirit" (2001, 71), and a praying "in the name" and "by the mouth of" God the Son, in whose prayer the prayer of the individual participates. Without such "conspiratorial" intercession, creaturely invocation is, in Barth's view, impossible. Yet such "collaborative" calling makes the impossible possible, for if, as Barth argues, the worshipper calls in God's voice, in praying in Christ's prayer, which rescues and incorporates whilst preserving the human call, "how can he fail to recognize his own voice in the cry?" (2001, 74). As a result of this divine "conspiracy," the human being is carried ecstatically beyond himself, and lives, according to Barth, "ec-centrically"; that is, "they [Christians] live centred – i.e., subjectively entrusted, sworn, tethered or rooted – neither in themselves nor in some other creature or finite locus, but "beyond themselves, clinging to God himself ... and this only as they are freed to do so, and continually freed to do so, by the Holy Spirit" (2001, 74).

Without wishing to sweep any of the obvious differences under the carpet, we may discern an intriguing analogy between the dynamics of Trinitarian invocation and Socrates' classical account of the Muse as divine pneuma. There are three aspects to this comparison. In the same way that the liturgical participant, according to Barth, is unable efficaciously to invoke without the intercession of the Holy Spirit, the poet, as Socrates explains in the *Ion*, is unable to compose without "divine dispensation" (1972, 43): "a poet is a light, winged, holy creature, and cannot compose until he is possessed and out of his mind [...]. This is because their [the poets'] utterances are the result not of art

but of divine force" (1972, 43). Secondly, poetic composition, like the act of liturgical invocation, is viewed as a "collaborative" act, in which the poet is "moved" and "inspired" by "a divine force" which speaks through him (1972, 43). Indeed, the poet is apparently accorded an even more passive role by Socrates in such collaborative speaking than the liturgical speaker: "god takes away their senses and uses them as servants, as he does divine prophets and seers, so that we who hear may realize that it is not these persons, whose reason has left them, who are the speakers of such valuable words, but god who speaks and expresses himself to us through them" (1972, 43). This is the second sense in which the poet's utterance is not his "own." Lastly, there is a parallel in the chiastic ekstasis described by Barth and Socrates. Whilst for the latter the poet in ekstasis is more neutrally "displaced" and "beside himself," and for the former "ec-centricity" involves participation in the being of God, in both cases, the divine ekstasis of "inspiration" precipitates an answering or chiastic ekstasis in the speaker. Socrates is, of course, talking about composition in general and not in particular about poetic invocation. Though the parallel we are tracing would appear to be even more symmetrical in the act of calling out to the Muse, since both poetic and liturgical invocations, following the arguments of Socrates and Barth, would involve calling ecstatically to that which ecstatically inspired us to call.

The final feature of our comparison between poetic and liturgical invocations concerns what we referred to as the institutional performativity common to both. The matter may be briefly summed up as follows. We have already shown, on the one hand, how the communality of the liturgy's utterance is not limited to those who gather together in shared space and time, and, on the other hand, how the act of poetic invocation may in certain respects be described as a public and "communal" utterance also. What these poetic and liturgical "communities" have in common is that in both cases the community is established, and the individual incorporated into it, in and by means of *the act of speaking*. As this is perhaps less apparent with respect to liturgical practice, a word of clarification may be useful. Here is how the issue is explained by the French philosopher Jean Ladrière:

> The effect of liturgical language as institution is not only to dispose souls to welcome that which it suggests, but, by the same means, to institute a community. In pronouncing "we," each of the participants to some extent takes upon himself the acts which occur at the same moment, and by virtue of the same words, by all the others. These acts obey very exact rules. They have specific characters and do not depend upon the arbitrary impulse of any one speaker. The participants meet in a kind of objective space determined by their speech acts.

The community is initiated in this meeting. [...] Language is not the expression of a community constituted before it and apart from it and is not the description of what such a community would be, but the location in which and the instrument by means of which the community is constituted. In so far as it gives to all participants – as co-locutors – the chance to take on the same acts, it establishes between them that operative reciprocity which constitutes the reality of a community.

(1973, 58)

Ladrière's comments lessen the apparent distance between liturgical and poetic invocations respecting the issue of "communality" from two directions at once, in arguing that the liturgical community is established linguistically, and in making clear *that* a community may be so established. Obviously, poetic invocations tend not to employ the pronoun "we," and are uttered by individuals separated in time and space. Nevertheless, given that the act of invoking the Muse similarly involves adopting a set of communally established procedures, and self-consciously continuing, by ecstatically inhabiting a palimpsestically "plural" identity, the practice of others, Ladrière's underlying thesis – that language is "the location in which and the instrument by means of which the community is constituted" would seem to be pertinent to the act of poetic invocation also.

Since the argument of the forging section has necessitated a certain amount of detailed and diverse illustration, it may be useful to conclude with a summary of its major points. In view of the failure both of Culler's poststructuralist construal of apostrophe and Buber's "Jewish 'Protestant'" philosophy of dialogue to provide an adequate account of "ritualised" apostrophic usage, we proposed the identification of a third notional type of apostrophe, based upon liturgical practice, which cuts across without collapsing our earlier distinction between "Romantic" and "rhetorical" usage. This liturgical model both complicates and corroborates our foregoing argument. It complicates our thesis since in certain respects it flatly contradicts what Buber claims about the act of I-Thou utterance. Briefly, liturgical practice models a use of apostrophe which is public, premeditated and formulaic. As Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger comments, "unspontaneity" (*Unbeliebigkeit*) is of its essence (2000, 165). Yet it nonetheless purports to establish I-Thou relation with its addressee. Such utterances thus appear to have something in common with "rhetorical" and "Romantic" practice whilst differing from both. This "third voice" of liturgical apostrophe has, we suggested, a number of salient affinities with the act of invocation in poetry – an impression which is underlined by the agreement found in Culler and Pickstock's accounts of the figure. Four points of resemblance were identified. The utterances, we

argued, may be compared in terms of: their function or functional gratuitousness; their "split" communicative situation; their formulaic character; and their public or "communal" nature. It was in elaborating these similarities that certain recurrent themes emerged which corroborate our earlier argument. Firstly, we noticed that Culler's identification of the ritual character of certain apostrophes in poetry does *not* necessarily argue against the utterance's referentiality. On the contrary, it brings into view a model of usage in which the speaker's wilfully sustained stammering and invocatory postponement of invocation paradoxically *contributes* to the utterance's reaching out towards – even as it appears to languish away from – its addressee. Secondly, Culler's pointing up of the analogy between certain poetic invocations and ritual practice calls into question the related contention, put forward by John Hollander, that in speaking "sideways" to their eavesdropping audience or as it were "backwards" to their speaker, apostrophes may *also* be addressing their addressees. The affinity noted by Culler between poetic and ritual use of apostrophe, whilst apparently intended to endorse his metapoetic reading of the figure, therefore turns out to be something of a Trojan Horse, in that it uncovers a model of apostrophic usage in which the utterance's multiple orientation and preparatory deferral or prefacing of itself forms part of a larger referential strategy, and thereby suggests that the "ritualised" act of invocation in poetry may, in spite of its self-referentiality and surreptitiously split addressee, also be a hopeful and efficacious act of address.

Three other general issues emerged which corroborated our earlier account of apostrophe. The act of ritual invocation, we noted, is, like the act of "Romantic" apostrophe, an ecstatic or ec-centric utterance, which carries its speaker outside of themselves, who is as it were beneficently hoist with their own petard. Ritual invocation, we also observed, is in its constructive mediation of divine communion or "inspiration," again like "Romantic" apostrophe, which "creatively" figures forth – through a glass darkly – that which was not apparent before but which enabled the act of figuring forth, a "making" which is also a revelation. Finally, as this last point implies, we discovered in the act of ritualised invocation also, the paradoxical reciprocity of giving and receiving delineated earlier in our account of "Romantic" apostrophe. The invoking poet, as Socrates argues, is ecstatically drawn towards the Muse, whose proliferative ecstatic bestowal of herself is at once the cause of, evinced by and that which is requested in the poet's invocation.

Having established the basic character of our third type of apostrophic usage, and summarily highlighted a number of "classical" instances, we shall in the final section that follows examine a few less "straightforward" examples of invocation in a little more detail, in order to illustrate something of the prevalence and flexibility of what we are describing as "liturgical" apostrophe.

"Hail, Muse! et cetera": Invoking Awry

According to John Hollander, poetic imperatives in modern poetry – conscious of their belatedness and supposed referential emasculation – parodically or metapoetically swerve away from their explicit addressees and what it is they purport to be doing. Thus, if poets "after Milton" invoke, they are, in Hollander's view, parodying invocation or invoking themselves. In making such claims, in spite of a couple of spirited disclaimers quoted earlier, Hollander, as much as Jonathan Culler, attempts to outlaw the referentiality of poetic invocation. The following passage, cited already in part, sums up his argument:

> In either case [speaking of different kinds of directives in poetry], we are to be considering metaphoric commands and urgings, schemes of the imperative that are designed not literally to enact, but poetically to bring a fiction into being. To take a poetic command literally – that is, to treat it like a legal injunction or the binding command on the square of a board game: "GO DIRECTLY TO JAIL" – is trivially to misread the poetry.
>
> (1988, 65)

This may be true; though, as we have argued, to see all poetic invocations as exhausted by their rhetoricity is *sophisticatedly* to misread poetry, and to overlook the possibility that even public and ritualised first person consonant invocations might "covertly" be doing what it is they purport to be doing, whilst simultaneously talking to themselves and their audience.[108] The other related way in

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[108] Hollander has a rather trying habit of attempting to prove his point by ridiculing the artless opinions of an imaginary opponent:

which Hollander attempts to proscribe a referential reading of poetic invocation is by presenting

belated and ironic emulation as an action that is exhausted by its consciousness of imitation, and

which might not similarly involve actually doing what one is simultaneously "doing." He writes: "after

Milton, no major poem could ever again straightforwardly or even deviously command the muse to

sing, save satirically" (1988, 72). In this final section, I wish to examine the possibility that the

movement away from the act of invocation in modern poetry might not be as complete or as

straightforward as Hollander contends.

It is certainly true that "after Milton," there is a dramatic decline in English poetry's use of

invocation – though, as George Steiner has observed, the sense of indebtedness to a collaborative

"otherness" is translated or continues as it were incognito[109] – and it is also true that where the act of

invocation survives, it tends not to be "straightforward" nor done with a straight face. However, as

Paul de Man once memorably wrote in another connection, "the crooked path often travels faster than

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> We cannot, of course, literally become the west wind addressed in Shelley's ode, and thus cannot, as idiotic literalists, attempt to comply with his injunction to "Be thou me, impetuous one!" (how would one do that, anyway?) nor even with the final advice to "Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth/Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!" [...]
>
> There is an easier opportunity to brutalize poetry by wringing its neck into literalness in a beautiful echo of Shelley's lines about scattering his words at the end of Hart Crane's elegy "Praise for an Urn": "Scatter these well-meant idioms / Into the smoky spring that fills / The suburbs, where they will be lost." No reasonable reader would take this as an injunction to him or her to take the page containing "Praise for an Urn" – or, indeed, the rest of Crane's book – tear it up into tiny bits, and fling them, however sacramentally, to the west wind, east wind, or whatever.
>
> (1988, 65)

The problem with such remarks is that Hollander seems to be more interested in exhibiting his sarcasm in destroying straw men than in considering more serious objections to his position – or, one might add, in considering the poems he is discussing more closely: the reader in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" *is not asked* to attempt to comply with his injunction to "Be thou me, impetuous one!" (the reader is no more requested by the poem's speaker to "Be thou me" than the viewer is asked to swear loyalty to the Roman *patria* by David's *Oath of the Horatii*). Similarly, tearing up a page or a volume of Crane's verse would *not* be literally complying with Crane's injunction to "Scatter these well-meant idioms / Into the smoky spring [...]." (It is not even clear that the reader *is* the addressee in Crane's poem – which is "In Memoriam: Ernest Nelson.") These are, to be sure, difficult imperatives, though our understanding of them is not helped by Hollander's setting the matter up as if the only two contenders were his own metapoetic account and an Aunt Sally literalism.
[109] Walter Schindler similarly comments:

> While calling on the "Muse" by name has declined in modern poetic practice, it is difficult to believe that invocation itself can disappear as long as there is poetry, for invocation appears to express an inherent desire of the poet's voice:
>
>> even among these rocks
>> Sister, mother
>> And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
>> Suffer me not to be separated
>>> And let my cry come unto Thee
>
> (1984, 4)

the straight one" (1971, 14). In the remainder of this section, we shall consider three different kinds of "invoking awry," in order to test our hypothesis that non-straightforward invocation need not mean *not* invoking. We shall consider examples of: (1) sceptical or reluctant invocation; (2) parodic invocation; and (3) "impossible" or hyperbolic invocation. In doing so, we hope to show that alongside of the sort of apostrophic usage that we adumbrated earlier and associated with Buber's anti-ritual model of utterance, there exists another perhaps vestigial tradition and type of usage, which we have identified as a transplanted liturgical utterance, which coincides with and yet also differs from this "Buberian" model of apostrophic usage. Before we do so, however, it may be instructive to consider the invocation that is supposed to have put an end to invocation, or in whose shadow subsequent poets are supposed only to be able satirically to invoke. Here is the first extraordinary sentence:

> Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit
> Of that Forbidd'n Tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
> With the loss of Eden, till one greater Man
> Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
> Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
> Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
> That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
> In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
> Rose out of Chaos: Or if Sion Hill
> Delight thee more, and Siloa's Brook that flow'd
> Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
> Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous Song,
> That with no middle flight intends to soar
> Above th'Aonian Mount, while it pursues
> Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme.

One of the most remarkable things about Milton's invocation is its extreme and simultaneous caution and daring.[110] Clearly, his daring is a matter both of who he invokes and what he requests or intends: "Thou O Spirit," who "from the first / Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread / Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss / And mad'st it pregnant [...]." It is no wonder that Milton's invocation was fiercely attacked,[111] for it is a priestly *epiclesis* of the Holy Spirit.[112] What the poet

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[110] This is, according to Schindler, "the characteristic dilemma of his [Milton's] maturity – poetic ambition and Christian humility locked within one consciousness. He must 'soar / Above th' *Aonian* Mount,' yet 'lay it lowly at his blessed feet'" (1984, 17).

[111] Sir William Davenant, for example, described it as a "saucy familiarity with a true God" (cited in: Geisler, 58).

intends and requests the "Heav'nly Muse" to sing is hardly less astounding: "Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit / Of that Forbidd'n Tree, whose mortal taste / Brought Death into the World, and all our woe, / With the loss of Eden, till one greater Man / Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat [...]." This is pretty much everything. The first line's tremendous enjambment, which activates and unites the two ordinarily separate meanings of the word "fruit," and thereby represents in the word a "duplicity" akin to that which it describes, signals the all-inclusive nature of the poem's intended scope. This daring is accompanied and counterbalanced by an equally unprecedented though perhaps less conspicuous caution and humility.[113]

As Matthew Arnold pointed out, a long time ago, we are made to wait until the thirty-ninth word of the opening utterance before we arrive at the verb (1960, 146). Thus, although the genre leads us to expect an invocation, only after we have been carried through the whole of the apparently declarative complementation, do we discover it is an imperative petition. The poet has thus already

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[112] Hollander's comments on Milton's invocation are again somewhat disappointing: "The spirit invoked is hardly the Greek muse of astronomy, nor some tutelary genius of biblical poetry, but the spirit of Originality itself. This is then a muse so far beyond any allegory or any theology, so far beyond ordinary fictive presence that it has been totally internalized. More than any poet before him, Milton is commanding poetry to guide him" (1988, 72). Hollander's description attempts to take charge of Milton's invocation, openly trying to wrest it away from its unequivocally stated orientation and intention, in order to claim it for his own metapoetic reading. Milton is invoking the Holy Spirit. This is a very specific thing. His invocation provides the reader with an unusually detailed and distilled theological history of who he is invoking in the act of invoking. To say that the spirit invoked is "beyond [...] any theology" and that the poet is "commanding poetry to guide him" is surely a distortion of Milton's utterance.

[113] The tensional relationship between humility and daring is obviously something that is played out throughout the poem as a whole. As Steven Blakemore has shown in his brilliant short article "'With no middle flight': Poetic Pride and Satanic Hubris in *Paradise Lost*," Milton self-consciously courts a comparison between the daring evinced in his own invocation and the presumption and pride of Satan's campaign. The poet thus "acknowledges the danger of his poetic attempt, while distinguishing it from pagan and satanic 'overreaching'" (Blakemore: 1985, 27), by highlighting the qualifying and chastening humility with which it is connected:

> Milton's subsequent qualification of the poem's opening lines is a poetic exercise in Christian self-criticism. As we have seen, Milton invites postlapsarian comparisons. From the beginning he intentionally ambushes himself with satanic associations, and he shows that he is aware that his attempt to soar above all previous literature is fraught with satanic dangers. [...] When he announces that he intends to surpass all previous literature, Milton self-consciously suggests similarities between Satan's arrogant pride and his own poetic pride. In effect, Milton self-consciously tempts himself with the ur-temptation of Satan and fallen man. But it is a "test" he passes. Although the poetic boasts initially seem similar to Satan's boasts, they are subsequently chastened, as Milton acknowledges the similarities in order to distinguish the satanic suggestions from the poem's Christian meaning. Milton's strategy is to invite these comparisons and then show that they are ultimately deceiving. [...] Through the imagery of flights and falls, Milton suggests that the Christian poet must "descend" in order to rise, metaphorically clipping his ambitious wings, in order to soar above the Aonian mount. Milton was contemptuous of a "cloistered virtue"; hence he tempts himself with his satanic double and then confronts and exorcises the double with poetry which soars "Inspired, and winged for heav'n with speedier flight / Than loudest oratory" (1985, 29–30).

been speaking for quite a while before he requests the inspiration he desires to do so, and has had at least some minimal opportunity to demonstrate something of the inspiration he is in the process of invoking. We may therefore also observe, perhaps in Milton's invocation more than any other, the ambiguous ownership and the unentangleable reciprocity of giving and receiving we alluded to earlier.

Milton's delayed or drawn out invocation is described by Hollander as "a long running jump over the eternal hurdle of the obvious" (1988, 72). Another way of describing it is to say that the poet is stammering at the prospect of, and in attempting, the task he has set himself.[114] That is to say, his invocation is what Buber describes as a "legitimate" prophetic stammering:

> The biblical story of creation is a legitimate stammering account. Man cannot but stammer when he lines up what he knows of the universe into a chronological series of commands and "works" from the divine workshop. But this stammering of his was the only means of doing justice to the task of stating the mystery of how time springs from eternity, and world comes from that which is not world.
>
> (1982, 11)

Clearly, Milton saw himself in the role of the stammering prophet.[115] In the famous projected account of his epic poem in *Reason of Church Government*, Milton compares his dependency upon Divine inspiration to the stammering of Isaiah, whose "unclean lips" required purification before he could speak of the vision he had been granted (Isaiah, 6: 5–7). His epic, he writes, is to be:

> a work not to be rays'd from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at wast from the pen of some vulgar Amorist, or the trencher fury of a riming parasite, nor to be obtain'd by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternall Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallow'd fire of his Alter to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases [...].
>
> (1953, 820–1)

Without disagreeing with any of this, I wish to suggest that something of the poem's "subsequent" humbling and dialectal chastening of its initial invocation's daring is to be found in the invocation itself.

[114] In his fine discussion of the "enhancing suggestions" of Milton's syntax, Christopher Ricks alerts us to ways in which the poet's verse may be "Doing what he Describes" (the phrase is Richardson's (Ricks: 1967, 249)), and demonstrates that the poet had "a real interest in expressive syntax" (251). Agreeing with this, I wish to suggest that it is in the syntax of Milton's opening invocation, whose radical prepositioning of the verb's complementation defers the request for the space of five lines, that we may perceive the poet's stammering.

[115] The phenomenon of prophetic stammering is described by Herbert Marks as follows: "In the dramatizations of prophetic calling, this central moment of blockage before the reactive identification takes place is represented by the prophetic stammer – the 'slow tongue' of Moses and its variations, the 'unclean lips of Isaiah,' the demur of Jeremiah, the mutism of Ezekiel" (1990, 64).

Additionally, the Muse he invokes in *Paradise Lost* is the "Heav'nly Muse" that "on the secret top / Of

Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire / That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed, / In the beginning

how the Heav'ns and Earth / Rose out of Chaos" – namely, "Moses the stutterer" (Steiner: 1989, 112).

In identifying the poem's source of inspiration as the God of the Old Testament, who "inspired" Moses

on Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai, Milton – we might note in passing – is not only Christianising the

Muse, he is also superimposing the Old Testament account of the "inspiration" of Moses (who, as F. T.

Price notes, was "both literally and figuratively a shepherd" (1962, 104)) upon the classical narrative

of the Muses' inspiration of the shepherd-poet in Hesiod's *Theogony*.

There are two general reasons why the extreme and simultaneous humility and daring of

Milton's invocation is of interest to our general discussion. The first is because this coincidence of

apparently contrary impulses and the stammering to which it gives rise is a central feature of liturgical

speech. The liturgical speaker is similarly burdened and made to stammer by the dual awareness of the

need to call and of their unworthiness to call.[116] This aspect of the liturgy has been admirably

elucidated by Catherine Pickstock, who, citing Herbert Marks also, sums up the "vocal stammer" of

the liturgical task as follows:

> The obscuration of repeated beginnings, shifting personae, oblique calls, cries to be heard,
> recommenced purifications, and apostrophic petitions for assistance reflect the same "slow
> tongue" of Moses, the "unclean lips" of Isaiah, the demur of Jeremiah, and the mutism of
> Ezekiel. Thus, we can situate the liturgical poetics of satire, verbal "blockage," obscuration,
> supplementation, and preface, within an overall response to, and expression of the crisis of
> liturgical expression, the transgression of the mundane order of language and the magnitude of
> its task: to mingle its voice with that of the supernumerary seraphim.
>
> (1998, 215)[117]

The second reason why the humility and daring of Milton's invocation is of interest to our discussion

is because it may help to explain the shadow cast by a single poet's use of an ancient and popular

convention, which meant, according to John Hollander, that thereafter "no major poem could ever

again straightforwardly or even deviously command the muse to sing, save satirically." It seems

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[116] Drawing upon the writing of Freud, Herbert Marks consonantly suggests that the "prophetic stammer might
be thought to mark a [...] conflict between the wish to cry out and the fear of crying" (1990, 70).

[117] It is an intriguing fact, which we obviously cannot explore any further here, but which should not pass
without attention, that perhaps the most "liturgical" of invocations is written by perhaps the most violently anti-
liturgical of poets. (Depending on one's view of the matter, Milton's most eloquent or most tendentious attack
upon the Roman ecclesia is contained in his *Defensio Secunda pro Populo Anglicano*.)

plausible to speculate that the apparent unsurpassability of Milton's invocation has something to do with its sublime reaching towards two opposite extremes at once, so that not only is it hard to imagine reaching "above" or "beneath" it in daring or humility, but to do either would seem to be in some sense defective, and to do both would seem to be inconceivable.

We are now perhaps in a better position to examine certain examples of what we have described as "invoking awry," and to consider in how far it is true, as Hollander claims, that Milton put an end to, in sublimely renewing, the tradition of invocation. We shall first of all look at a few examples of "reluctant" or doubtful invocations, beginning with Keats's series of stammering attempts to invoke the Muse in *Endymion*.

Keats's use of invocation in *Endymion* is, to use his own fine phrase, "a thing of yes and no" (IV, 898). He is for the most part unable straightforwardly to invoke the Muse, yet he is unable to stop *talking about* his inability to invoke her. Like someone continually walking past a shop they do not want to enter, he keeps returning to and dancing around but backing away from the subject. Moreover, it is – poor Muse – the Muse herself that he talks to about his inability to invoke.

The poem is strewn with aborted, stammering and hypothetical invocations. Which would seem to confirm J. R. Watson's observation that the "overcoming of silence is the great problem of *Endymion* (1985, 264)." The poet's wavering is apparent from the outset. At the conventional moment, just before he begins to tell the story of Endymion, we find the poem's first virtual invocation:

> Many and many a verse I hope to write,
> Before the daisies, vermeil-rimmed and white,
> Hide in deep herbage; and ere yet the bees
> Hum about globes of clover and sweet peas,
> I must be near the middle of my story.
> O may no wintry season, bare and hoary,
> See it half finished; but let Autumn bold,
> With universal tinge of sober gold,
> Be all about me when I make an end.
> And now at once, adventuresome, I send
> My herald thought into a wilderness –
> There let its trumpet blow, and quickly dress
> My uncertain path with green, that I may speed
> Easily onward, through flowers and weed.
>
> (I, 49–62)

There is something almost ghostly about these lines. The poet seems to be talking in front of someone he feels he cannot address or, like someone returning to a familiar but altered location, to have a persisting sense of that which is absent. The poet's imperatives – if they are imperatives – imply but curiously lack an addressee: "There let its trumpet blow, and quickly dress / My uncertain path with green [...]." Who or what is supposed to do the "letting" and the "dressing"? Who is the poet talking *to*? Neither the reader nor the speaker himself would seem to fit the bill, yet no one else is explicitly involved. It is as though the poet were attempting to invoke intransitively, or is hoping that *his invocation* will find its addressee: "I send / My herald thought into a wilderness [...]." Though, as we suggested, it is not even clear that these lines *are* imperatives: "I send / My herald thought into a wilderness – / There let its trumpet blow, and quickly dress / My uncertain path with green [...]." The subject-less clauses that follow the dash could conceivably be indicative and elliptically coordinated with the preceding clause, in which case no addressee would be implied. There thus seems to be a further equivocacy or wavering about the poet's first virtual invocation.

Some seventy lines later (a short distance in a poem of over four thousand lines), at the threshold of describing the pagan ritual in the forest of Latmos that culminates in the hymn to Pan, we find the second of the poem's invocations:

> O kindly muse! let not my weak tongue falter
> In telling of this goodly company,
> Of their old piety, and of their glee:
> But let a portion of ethereal dew
> Fall on my head, and presently unmew
> My soul – that I may dare, in wayfaring,
> To stammer where old Chaucer used to sing.

> (I, 128–34)

On this occasion, the poet succeeds in straightforwardly invoking the Muse, though the request is eroded to within an inch of its life by its modesty. Both of the invocation's imperatives employ what Hollander describes as the "slightly less assertive" jussive "let" (1988, 64), the first of which requests only that his "weak tongue" may not falter, the second recalls the purgation required by the Old Testament prophets, though in requesting inspiration that he may "dare [...] / To stammer where old Chaucer used to sing," the poet seems to conceive of and to identify his present speech as a stammering that is as it were beneath or more humble than stammering.

On two other occasions in the poem, we find sundered or vitiated invocations, where the poet addresses the Muse (or her traditional haunt) and takes up an invocatory posture, but feels unable or unworthy to invoke her aid. Here is the first of them, from Book II:

>   – Helicon!
> O fountained hill! Old Homer's Helicon!
> That thou wouldst spout a little streamlet o'er
> These sorry pages! Then the verse would soar
> And sing above this gentle pair, like lark
> Over his nested young: but all is dark
> Around thine agèd top, and thy clear fount
> Exhales in mists to heaven. Ay, the count
> Of mighty Poets is made up; the scroll
> Is folded by the Muses; the bright roll
> Is in Apollo's hand: our dazèd eyes
> Have seen a new tinge in the western skies:
> The world has done its duty. Yet, oh yet,
> Although the sun of poesy is set,
> These lovers did embrace, and we must weep
> That there is no old power left to steep
> A quill immortal in their joyous tears.

<div align="right">(II, 716–32)</div>

Here, Keats's invocation, in the stammering of its conditional casting, is more like an invocation of invocation, whose conditional retreat from outright requesting wistfully requests the ability to request: "Old Homer's Helicon! / That thou wouldst spout a little streamlet o'er / These sorry pages!" The co-occurrence of "yes" and "no" suggested by the conditionality of Keats's utterance is played out in the following lines by the qualification of the conditional invocation and the qualification of this qualification: "but all is dark / Around thine agèd top, and thy clear fount / Exhales in mists to heaven. [...] Yet, oh yet, / Although the sun of poesy is set, / These lovers did embrace [...]." There is something not only in the repeated "yet," which counters without having any arguments at its disposal the preceding "but," and the "Ay" which extends it, but also paradoxically in the insistent reassertion – in five consecutive clauses – that the Muses have terminated their communion with man that suggests, to paraphrase Empson's comment on the repeated negation with which "Ode to Melancholy" begins, that some force in the poet's mind must still have wanted to invoke the Muse very much, if so much vindication was felt to be necessary to dissuade himself from doing so (Empson: 1961, 205).[118]

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[118] Keats's elegiac invocation of the Muse, and his convoluted qualifying of his qualifications may owe something to Byron, whose invocations in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* cantos I and II – which were published

The other remaining sundered or reluctant invocation occurs at the start of Book IV:

> Muse of my native land! loftiest Muse!
> O first born on the mountains! by the hues
> Of heaven on the spiritual air begot!
> [...] Great Muse, thou know'st what prison
> Of flesh and bone, curbs, and confines, and frets
> Our spirit's wings. Despondency besets
> Our pillows; and the fresh tomorrow morn
> Seems to give forth its light in very scorn
> Of our dull, uninspired, snail-pacèd lives.
> To thee! But then I thought on poets gone,
> And could not pray – nor can I now – so on
> I move to the end in lowliness of heart.
>
> (IV, 20–9)

Here, in what John Barnard describes as a "Miltonic invocation" (Keats: 1973, 605), the poet addresses the Muse for the space of twenty-nine lines, only to conclude by telling her of his inability to call on her. Keats's invocation is thus once again divided against itself, since it in a sense does what it disclaims in the act of disclaiming it.

There is one final twist in this already twisted tale, which gives the poem as a whole the sort of "if ... but ... yet" trajectory we observed in the earlier invocation. Having repeatedly told the Muse about his inability to invoke her, the poet suddenly asks her in the middle of the final book:

> Muse of my native land, am I inspired?
> This is the giddy air, and I must spread
> Wide pinions to keep me here; nor do I dread
> Or height, or depth, or width, or any chance
> Precipitous. I have beneath my glance
> Those towering horses and their mournful freight.
> Could I thus sail, and see, and thus await
> Fearless for power of thought, without thine aid?
>
> (IV, 354–61)

This final quasi-invocation continues but also subtly recasts the equivocacy of the preceding invocations. Continues, because the speaker remains unsure about his relationship to the Muse, and whether or not he has been favoured by her, asking "am I inspired?" and – perhaps with a rhetorical tinge – "Could I thus sail, and see, and thus await / Fearless for power of thought, without thine aid?"

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and made the poet famous for becoming famous overnight five years before Keats began writing *Endymion* –

The equivocacy of the preceding invocations is subtly altered since the poet's sense that he might be inspired and favoured by the Muse – and presumably he would not ask without some such feeling – suggests that the foregoing invocations, for all their stammering, reticence and retractions, may have been efficacious after all.

How might we explain this possible efficacy? How can we make sense of the paradoxical suggestion that in failing to invoke the Muse, Keats may have been efficaciously invoking?

In our preceding discussion of the act of invocation, with reference to liturgical practice and Old Testament prophecy, as well as Milton's paradigmatic use of the convention, it emerged that stammering in the act of invoking and attempting to relate the communications of the Divine is not only normal and to be expected, given the distance the speaker is trying to bridge, but is moreover a proper admission of our fallen condition, and may therefore in fact be that which renders our calling efficacious. To be sure, Keats's invocations stammer in the extreme – obliquely requesting the ability to request in their conditional casting, revealing themselves as a stammering prior to and in preparation of stammering, being brought into being by their renunciation – yet, as we have seen, liturgical invocation is *ordinarily* a stammering preparation for itself, which must somehow "precede" or retreat in asymptotic humility from itself, if it is in fact to be possible at all. Additionally, literature, in contrast to liturgical practice, with the exception of Pierre Menard's unrealised work of genius, of which Borges writes,[119] cannot, of course, if it is visibly to exist, simply repeat that which has gone before. There is thus in the act of invoking in poetry, the need to *differ* from even in attempting to *emulate* the practice of others. The poet who attempts to invoke the Divine therefore in a sense has even *more* reason to stammer than the liturgical participant, in being burdened by his belatedness and the need for originality, and thus by a sense of "horizontal" as well as "vertical" inadequacy. It is perhaps therefore hardly surprising that Keats stammers so immoderately in invoking the Muse, since he is stammering in the shadow of another's celebrated stammering. Finally, according to the orthodox definition, formulated by Denys and affirmed by Aquinas, prayer is a consciously standing and unveiling the mind in the presence of God (2a 2æ, 83, 1 (1964a)). If this is the case, Keats's

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are, as we shall see, comparably knotted and elegiac.

"unveiling" to the Muse of his inability to invoke her in his stammering retreats from invocation – which the poet himself describes as prayer (*Endymion*, IV, 28) – might therefore be efficacious paradoxically *in spite of* their "failure" to invoke the Muse.[120] It will be instructive briefly to compare Keats's invocatory stammering with that of another poet.

In his discussion of the act of invocation in his chapter on poetic imperatives, John Hollander talks of "replacements of opening imperative by belated question" (1988, 245), offering as examples of which an early eight line poem by Hölderlin ("*Sonnenuntergang*") and the first of Rilke's *Duineser Elegien*. The occurrence of such utterances is presented by Hollander as part of his more general claim that non-satirical invocation became extinct after Milton. Our consideration of the stammering invocations in Keats's *Endymion* suggested, however, that belated questioning, even where it appears to "replace" invocation, is not *opposed to* but may in fact be a *form of* invocation. Let us take a look at the belated question with which Rilke's *Duineser Elegien* begin, and consider whether things are really as black and white as Hollander contends:

Wer, wenn ich schriee, hörte mich denn aus der Engel
Ordnungen?

Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels'
hierarchies?

<div align="right">(I, 1–2)</div>

Whilst Rilke's question evidently aligns itself with the tradition of epic invocation – in talking about what is traditionally done in the place that it is traditionally done – it appears to do so negatively, by showing us what it is *not* doing, and seems even further away from actually invoking than the stammering quasi-invocations of *Endymion*. This impression is supported by the following

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[119] Menard's unfinished masterpiece, "perhaps the most significant of our time, consists of the ninth and twenty-eighth chapters of the first part of *Don Quixote* and a fragment of chapter twenty-two" ("Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" (Borges: 1964, 65)).

[120] At the end of our discussion of Milton's invocation, we noticed in passing the intriguing, though not perhaps illogical, fact that probably the most anti-liturgical of poets was the author of what is arguably the most "liturgical" of invocations. Again without being able to go into the matter here, we might similarly note with respect to Keats that probably the least religious of the major English Romantics appears (with the possible exception of Byron) to be the most interested in religious ritual, judging by the frequency of its presentation in his poetry. Processions of people attending or involved in ritual sacrifices are repeatedly appearing from out of nowhere in Keats's poetry. The most famous of which occurs, of course, in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (IV), though we find similar descriptions or images of religious ritual in "To J. H. Reynolds, Esq." (20–5); "The Eve of St Mark" (1–22); *Endymion* (I, 134–307); and, finally, in "Ode to Psyche," where the poet describes the rituals that are *not* performed in honour of the goddess, and which he himself proposes to make up for (28–51).

lines, in which the poet describes his "swallowing" (*verschlucken*) of an emergent wordless invocation

(*den Lockruf / dunkelen Schluchzens*):

> and even if one of them pressed me
> suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed
> in that overwhelming existence. For beauty is nothing
> but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure,
> and we are so awed because it serenely disdains
> to annihilate us. Every angel is terrifying.
> And so I hold myself back and swallow the call-note
> of my dark sobbing.
>
> (2–9)

The poet's questioning, conditional distancing and "swallowing" of his invocation would seem to leave very little room for its performance. And yet, is not the opening questioning of the act of invocation itself a form of invocation? Is the poet not crying out in talking hypothetically crying out? Is not Rilke, like Keats, invoking awry? There is reason to think the answer may be affirmative.

The fact that the Elegies' opening question expresses doubts about the act of calling out, and demotes conventional invocation to the status of hypothetical possibility, in precisely the place where one might expect such things to occur, may distract us from the fact that it *is* a question, which *is* asked. And questions, like apostrophes, ordinarily call out. Of course, *un*like most apostrophes, questions may not specify or even *have* a particularised addressee, and, obviously, they may rhetorically turn back upon themselves. Though neither of these facts means that they might not call out. Asking "Who's going to help me do the washing up?" will in most cases make everyone who hears it feel uncomfortably included in its address. And even what is intended as a rhetorical question is unable irreversibly to fix its own destiny, since it may be retrospectively transformed into a *non-rhetorical* question by being answered. The *Oxford Reference English Dictionary*'s everyday example "who cares?" which may be intended by its speaker to mean "nobody cares," may, for instance, be shorn of its rhetorical armour by the unexpected response "Well, *I* do, actually." The difference between rhetorical and non-rhetorical utterances is clearly further complicated by the act of prayer, which neither rules out nor expects an answer in any ordinary sense.

In the case of Rilke's opening question, it might be countered that the utterance *may* be an address or a calling out, though it crucially excludes from the scope of its calling the audience upon

which the poet desires to call – namely, the angels[121] – thus robbing it of its "invocatory" character, and leaving it hopelessly oriented towards its literary audience (or the poet himself), from whom he can expect sympathy but not intervention. Two points may be raised in answer to this objection. First, as the immediately following lines make clear, the reason why, according to Rilke, we cannot turn to angels "in our need" (I, 10) is *not* because they cannot or will not hear, nor because they cannot be invoked – the poet does precisely this at the start of The Second Elegy ("Every angel is terrifying. And yet, alas, / I invoke you, almost deadly birds of the soul, / knowing about you" (1–3))[122] – but because "if one of them pressed me / suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed / in that overwhelming existence" (2–4).[123] Second, the Elegies are in many ways "about" the act of calling. The poet, as no one can fail to notice, is constantly calling out to all manner of unexpected phenomena – mothers, lovers, children, his father, the earth, the stars, trees, a square in Paris and so on – and in turn feels addressed *by* all manner of things:

> everything here
> apparently needs us, this fleeting world, which in some strange way
> keeps calling to us.
>
> (IX, 11–13)

Indeed, it is the avowed and perhaps central concern of the Elegies to explore the question "whom can we turn to in our need?" (I, 9–10). In view, then, of all of the entities, angels included, that the poet freely invokes during the course of the Elegies, it would seem to be a mistake to circumscribe the possible audience of the poet's calling. And who, in any case could do so, if the poet considers himself incapable?

> Look, I was calling for my lover. But not just *she*
> would come ... Out of their fragile graves
> girls would arise and gather ... For how could I limit
> the call, once I called it?
>
> (VII, 30-3)

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[121] Robert Hass, for example, reads Rilke's question in this way: "'Who, if I cried out,' the poems begin, 'would hear me among the angels' hierarchies?' And the implicit answer is 'No one'" (Rilke: 1987, xv).

[122] The poet, of course, *repeatedly* calls out to angels throughout the Elegies (V, 59 and 97; VII, 70–86).

[123] George Steiner, for one, seems to consider the Elegies' opening utterance to be addressed to the angels. Commenting in passing as an illustration of his larger argument, Steiner speaks of "Rilke's cry to the 'Angels,' to those who break him open at the beginning of the *Duino Elegies*" (1989, 211).

Releasing the Elegies' opening question from this rhetorical embargo allows us to recognise the complexity of the utterance.

If, as I am suggesting, the opening question is not a purely rhetorical question, lamely or pathetically aimed at its literary audience or addressed to its speaker, then what is asked is subtly complicated by the act of asking. That is to say, the poet's doubts about who, if anyone, would hear his cry, which seem to keep him from crying out, are accompanied by a perhaps desperate hope or wish, evidenced by the act of asking, that his question will *itself* be heard. The poet would therefore appear to be obliquely or more diffusely doing what he is talking about *not* doing. He would seem, that is, to be crying out in giving voice to that which *keeps him from* crying out. This is not to suggest that his crying out *cancels* his not crying out, but rather, paradoxically, that he is crying out *and* not crying out. Since this is a somewhat unusual thing to do, it may be worth attempting to explain a little further.

The poet's crying out is, as he tells us himself, stifled. Yet, it is *incompletely* stifled (to swallow it, it must first have emerged), and the poet's question – perhaps in a desperately transmuted form – gives voice to even as it stifles his cry. The poem thus in a sense presents itself as beginning before it begins to speak or as being as it were only part of its own story. To be more specific, the opening question appears to be a counter-response to the impulse to cry out, which it both displaces and obliquely transmits. This crying out which in a sense "precedes" the stifling by which it is yet made apparent is described in the lines already quoted:

> And so I hold myself back and swallow the call-note
> of my dark sobbing.

Here, the consciously speaking "I" is presented not only as not comprising the whole of the speaker's self (that one has a self that needs holding back is presumably only felt when it attempts to step forward). Moreover, the consciously speaking self is shown to be not the only part of self that calls, since his "sobbing" is itself described as a calling (*"Lockruf"* – literally, a "luring call"). The poem thus suggests that there is a calling going on beneath or even "before" – in that it precipitates – the speaker's refusal to call out, which I am arguing is residually preserved and communicated, in a concentrically weakened form, in the question that marks that refusal. The opening utterance may thus

have a rhetorical component or tone, in that it seems in one sense to be spoken back to the self that desires to call, as if asking another, "Who would here you?" Though, in another sense, as this "other" is part of the speaking self, the question is also spoken *from* the point of view of the self that desires to call, and directed outwards, carrying the questioning self's sense of its futility but also something of the calling self's impulse to call, in defensively postponing its invocation with a call of its own concerning the efficacy of calling. What general conclusions can we draw from this?

If our reading of Rilke's opening utterance is correct, it would seem possible to argue, against Hollander's allegation that the belated question replaces without remainder and is a sign of the "post-Miltonic" extinction of the act of invocation, that questioning is not opposed to – though it may represent a desperate or sceptical diffusion of – calling; that questioning, like the stammering we observed in Keats's *Endymion*, may be seen as a precursive or "reconnoitring" invocation, which calls "ahead of" calling; that a question, like apostrophe, may call "with outstretched voice," even if it has to find its own addressee; and hence, though it may replace the conventional imperative, that the belated question may be a form of invoking awry.

According to Hollander, the act of invocation in the wake of Milton is condemned to a phantom or pantomime afterlife of satire. Reverently and irreverently invoking are, he implies, exclusive practices. Writing to Samuel Rogers on a slightly different matter, Wordsworth appears to agree: "the apostrophe," he writes, "is not a figure, that like Janus, carries two faces with a good grace" (Wordsworth: *WL*, 597). Indeed, even if the act of invocation is able to survive questioning, stammering and its own postponement, it is hard to imagine how making fun of the convention could coexist with its reverent performance. Yet this is precisely what I wish to suggest is possible and perceptible in certain post-Miltonic invocations. In order to substantiate this, I shall consider two of the most celebrated and openly parodic invocations in English poetry. To begin with, it might be useful to distinguish between irreverence or parody which consists in adopting the proper procedures in an inappropriate context, and parody which consists in improperly adopting the conventional procedures in an appropriate context. Thus, in the invocation which opens *The Rape of the Lock*, the poet, we might say, behaves in the right way towards the wrong object:

What dire offence from am'rous causes springs,

> What mighty contests rise from trivial things,
> I sing – This verse to Caryll, Muse! is due:
> This, ev'n Belinda may vouchsafe to view:
> Slight is the subject, but not so the praise,
> If She inspire, and He approve my lays.
> Say what strange motive, Goddess! could compel
> A well-bred Lord t'assault a gentle Belle?
> Oh say what stranger cause, yet unexplor'd,
> Could make a gentle Belle reject a Lord?
>
> (I, 1–10)

Whereas in the invocation at the start of *Don Juan* Canto III, we might say that the poet, conversely, behaves in the wrong way towards the right object:

> Hail, Muse! et cetera. We left Juan sleeping [...].
>
> (III, 1)

What in each case is being ridiculed or satirised, and what, if anything, is concomitantly elevated or exempted from ridicule? Let us consider the two invocations in more detail.

The events being satirised in Pope's epic "proposition" (lines 1–2) are familiar enough not to need recounting here, as is his method of making them or the fuss they caused seem ridiculous by simultaneously inflating what occurred with over-august declamation, and deflating it by the archly bawdy suggestion that what it all boils down to is the perennial "rising" of trivial "things." What is of concern to us here is the poem's treatment of its Muse or Muses.

Two Muses preside over and are addressed at the beginning of Pope's poem – his long-standing friend John Caryll ("This verse to Caryll, Muse! is due"), and the poem's heroine, Belinda, ("Say what strange motive, Goddess! could compel / A well-bred Lord t'assault a gentle Belle?").[124] The poem is thus lightly but interestingly represented as proceeding from both of them, and as being both given and yet to come. In what sense does the poem "make fun of" its Muses?

Pope's appointment of Caryll as the poem's Muse is obviously but not only a funny thing to do. The joke, of course, being that since it was Caryll who suggested the story of Lord Petre's theft of Arabella Fermor's hair as the subject for a poem, he may, with perfect comic legitimacy, be referred to

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[124] It is, of course, slightly odd that a character in a poem should also be its Muse. It might therefore be argued that Pope's "Goddess!" refers to and whimsically feminises Caryll. However, if, as the opening lines make clear, "Belinda" is outside of (as well as inside) in being able "to view" the poem, it would seem possible for her also to be its co-Muse. The preceding line also suggests such a dual role: "If She inspire [...]."

as the poem's Muse. However, in playfully conflating the two, the poet would seem neither to be denigrating the Muse (he is after all crediting "her" with what was to prove his most popular poem) nor smiling at any shortcoming or overestimation on Caryll's part. The comedy lies, rather, in Pope's spotting of the wonderfully serendipitous elasticity of the designation "Muse," which allows the poet at once to signify the sweet voiced and soft footed daughters of Zeus, and his friend for giving him some advice.[125]

Pope's comical elevation of Caryll to the office of Muse is though, we suggested, not *simply* a joke. The final couplet of the opening sentence evinces a marked change in voice, setting aside the irony and innuendo of the preceding lines, and paying his friend a humble and formally courteous compliment:

> Slight is the subject but not so the praise,
> If She inspire, and He approve my lays.[126]

The significance of this act of courtesy and change in voice is that in publicly esteeming Caryll's approval, Pope narrows the distance, made earlier apparent by their comic conflation, between his friend and the customary conception of the Muse. In other words, the poet appears to be saying something in earnest which is not so far away from what he playfully said earlier. The effect of which is that Caryll is subtly elevated by a comparison that previously, if playfully, upstaged him. What is more, the earlier comedy appears to energise and lay the foundations for the poet's subsequent seriousness: by saying something playfully and then saying something similar in seriousness, which draws upon the resonance of the comic exaggeration, and allows that which is said seriously to dilate

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[125] Robert F. Willson, Jr. has suggested that Pope is punning on Caryll's name: "Obviously the *cause* of the poem is Caryll himself; but if we pronounce Caryll as 'curl,' a likely eighteenth century pronunciation, we have a witty allusion to the *theme* of the work as well, the lock of curl of hair" (1976, 72).

[126] The poet's compliment draws dignity from Virgil's fourth *Georgic*, to which these lines, of course, allude. As J. S. Cunningham points out, Pope "neatly conflates two recent translations of Virgil's lines [...]: Sedley's

> The Subjects humble, but not so the Praise,
> If any Muse assist the Poet's Lays

and Dryden's

> Slight is the Subject, but the Praise not small,
> If Heav'n assist, and *Phoebus* hear my Call.

(1966, 55)

into the space created by that which was said playfully, Pope's invocation involves an intensification and distension of the parodic gesture in the direction of that which it parodies.

Pope's casting of Belinda in the role of the poem's Muse obviously serves a more mischievous parodic purpose, allowing the poet tactfully to censure her with excessive praise. Invoking her as the source of all knowledge – "Say what strange motive, Goddess! could compel / A well-bred Lord t'assault a gentle Belle?" and so on – also helps the poet to negotiate the hazardous claims to authority and omniscience which the writing of the poem implicitly makes. Promoting Belinda to the status of Muse means that he may, in conventionally deferring to her, acknowledge that what he is about to describe is in a sense beyond his knowing. Though, once again, the invocation appears to work on another, less ironic level as well. The fact is that the poet does *not* know or know for certain "what strange motive [...] could compel / A well-bred Lord t'assault a gentle Belle" nor "what stranger cause [...] / Could make a gentle Belle reject a Lord [...]." He is, furthermore, asking Belinda as a Muse things that as a character she does not know (namely, "what strange motive [...] could compel / A well-bred Lord t'assault a gentle Belle"). Thus, even though we may be sure that he is about to answer them himself, are not the questions he asks Belinda real *as well as* ironic questions? And, more strangely, is Belinda not in a way thereby *actually* transformed into the poem's Muse?

What is important to our general discussion is that Pope's parodic invocation in *The Rape of the Lock* suggests that reverent and irreverent invocation are not incompatible or locked in adversarial relation, but may in fact somehow be in collusion and work on one another's behalf. Let us turn now to our second example of parodic usage.

We observed earlier that if Pope's parody of the act of invocation consists in behaving properly towards an improper object, Byron's parody – "Hail, Muse! et cetera" – may be said to be a matter of behaving improperly towards the proper object. This "impropriety" has been summarised by Walter Schindler:

> Part of the hilarity in Byron's parody quoted above is the nonchalant use of "hail," a word that turns us back to the central instance in English poetry of invocation in the sublime style: "Hail, holy Light..." Another aspect of Byron's parody is his exclusion of the lyrical elaboration that makes Milton's invocation what it is, all dismissed with an *etc.* He gives us the two minimal requirements of invocation – the hailing and the Muse – but dismisses what matters most: the *voice* of the poet. Byron's *etc.* is, for Milton, the *sine qua non*.

Byron is, of course, not doing – and is advertising that he is not doing – what Milton does. Yet Milton's way of doing things is obviously not the only way of doing things. Byron is also, clearly, being flippant, and is aware that for some people flippancy and seriousness *both* leave the room when the other one enters.[127] But flippancy, whilst customarily the enemy of devotion, may also turn out to be its friend. This is often the case in Byron's verse. It is also, I think, true of the invocation that opens Canto III. If this is so, Schindler's remarks will need to be qualified in certain respects. The two points I wish to supplement or query are Byron's supposedly "nonchalant" use of "hail," and his "exclusion of [...] lyric elaboration" or "dismissal in the use of et cetera of "the *voice* of the poet."

What grounds do we have for thinking that Byron's use of "hail" is nonchalant? If we consider his hailing of the transcendent elsewhere in the poem or in other poems – and, *pace* Hollander, Byron's poetry is filled with invocations – the evidence is inconclusive. Indeed, the frequency and manner of the poet's hailing suggests, if anything, to the contrary, that Byron was far from indifferent towards the act of invocation. Two examples will have to suffice here.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage begins with the following invocation:

> Oh, thou! in Hellas deem'd of heav'nly birth,
> Muse! form'd or fabled at the minstrel's will!
> Since sham'd full oft by later lyres on earth,
> Mine dares not call thee from thy sacred hill:
> Yet, there I've wander'd by thy vaunted rill;
> Yes! sigh'd o'er Dephi's long-deserted shrine,
> Where, save that feeble fountain, all is still;
> Nor mote my shell awake the weary Nine
> To grace so plain a tale – this lowly lay of mine.

Whilst it is possible to discern, alongside of a foregrounded and reverential humility, an element of irony or even embarrassment, there is little or no nonchalance in evidence here. Indeed, the poet's irony appears to be born of a sense of embarrassment at what others might think – which it signals in attempting to conceal or forestall it – which in turn suggests an albeit troubled *attachment* to the act of

invocation. Pre-emptively smiling at her mythological provenance, allows the poet, it seems, to treat the Muse seriously. Moreover, his irony is apparently directed *away* from the Muse, in being oriented, more specifically, towards the tradition which held that she was "of heavenly birth [...]." In seeming to smile her divinity away from beneath her, this may appear to be much the same thing. Yet Byron is, I think, more sceptical because *more serious* than we might presume, and, like Steiner after him, is aware that the names we use and the stories we tell of the Muse do not as such matter, and are all "made up," without this arguing against a sense of collaborative otherness, to which the work of art is indebted, and which it may behove the poet to invoke.

Significantly, Byron's Muse is a "Thou" before she is the "Muse" – "Oh, thou! in Hellas deem'd of heav'nly birth, / Muse!" The poet invokes a "Thou" then says of this "Thou" that "in Hellas" she was "deemed of heavenly birth [...]." The postmodification "In Hellas deemed of heavenly birth," is, in other words, non-defining, implying that the "Thou" he is addressing will somewhere else be deemed something else. The poet, according to this reading, would therefore be smiling at the stories that have been told about the collaborative otherness conventionally referred to as the Muse, not at this collaborative otherness itself, which exceeds – though may be pointed to or revealed by – our designations, nor at the act of invocation. Indeed, whilst Byron's invocation – like those of Keats's *Endymion*, which it may have influenced – invokes without, paradoxically, wholly turning the corner into being itself, in calling upon the Muse to tell her of his declining to call on her, it is the poet's *reverence*, rather than his irony or anything like nonchalance, that keeps him from invoking – even as he invokes – the Muse: "Since sham'd full oft by later lyres on earth, / Mine dares not call thee from thy sacred hill: / Nor mote my shell awake the weary Nine / To grace so plain a tale – this lowly lay of mine."

If we turn now to Byron's use of "hail" in the extended hymn to Our Lady, which occurs in the same canto as the poet's "Hail, Muse! et cetera," we may observe a similar conjunction of flippancy and reverence:

Ave Maria! 'tis the hour of prayer!

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127 Talking of his "half-serious rhyme," towards the beginning of Canto IV, Byron comments: "To the kind reader of our sober clime / This way of writing will appear exotic" (6).

Ave Maria! 'tis the hour of love!
Ave Maria! may our spirits dare
Look up to thine and to thy Son's above!
Ave Maria! oh that face so fair!
Those downcast eyes beneath the Almighty dove –
What though 'tis but a pictured image strike –
That painting is no idol, 'tis too like.

Some kinder casuists are pleased to say,
In nameless print – that I have no devotion;
But set those persons down with me to pray;
And you shall see who has the properest notion
Of getting into Heaven the shortest way [...].

(III, 103–4)

Whilst Byron's formulaic hailing of the Virgin Mary – which occurs six times in three stanzas – is immediately followed by and appears to give rise to a spontaneous overflow of light-hearted feelings, its reverence is, I think, insulated and evidenced *rather than* undermined by the subsequent flippancy. The poet's challenging of anyone who accuses him of a lack of devotion to a praying contest, suggests in its combination of comedy and combativeness that he feels he has done something unguarded – which he presumably would not feel if he had been "nonchalantly" hailing – and appears to serve a similar purpose to the irony that pre-emptively protects, by expending with his own laughter the potential laughter of others, the reverence we observed in the opening invocation of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

It would therefore seem, judging from these two examples, that it is not the case that Byron has anything a priori against the Muse or the act of hailing as such. If, then, his invocation at the start of *Don Juan* Canto III is deemed to be nonchalant or ironic, it must be on account of what the poet does *not* say to the Muse. In other words, it is his "et cetera" that is the villain of the piece. Which is the second point that I wish to suggest may be contested.

Before saying anything about Byron's use of the phrase "et cetera" in his invocation, it may be useful to clear its name more generally. The *OED* identifies two principal uses of the phrase: either, most commonly, it indicates "that the statement refers not only to the things enumerated, but to others which may be inferred from analogy" or else it may be used as a "substitute for a suppressed substantive, generally a coarse or indelicate one." Thus, whilst the phrase may lend itself to Shandian

bawdy, there is nothing *inherently* ironic or derisory about it. Winifred Nowottny makes the same point in her more general discussion of diction in poetry, taking Byron's usage as one of her examples:

This derisory function [in Byron's invocation] cannot simply be ascribed to any inherent unpoetical quality in the word. As evidence that the word cannot guarantee a belittlement of any poetic context it enters, one might cite Wordsworth's lines in *The Prelude* (185 version, V, iii, 437–43):

> Where the harm,
> If, when the woodman languished with disease
> Induced by sleeping nightly on the ground
> Within his sod-built cabin, Indian-wise,
> I called the pangs of disappointed love,
> And all the sad etcetera of the wrong,
> To help him to his grave.

In Wordsworth's lines, "etcetera" (now doing duty as a noun) is so far from deflating the dignity of the context, which, itself, is a half-rueful account of how the poet's imagination operated to romanticize the lives of those around him, that, on the contrary, it gives the passage more of real human dignity than it has while it speaks of "the pangs of disappointed love" [...].

(1962, 31)

To underline this fact, we may point to the phrase's use in explicitly religious writing. Aquinas, for example, repeatedly etceterises himself and others throughout the *Summa Theologiæ*:

Now eternal life, as we know from *John*, consists in seeing the divine essence; *This is eternal life, their knowing thee, the only true God*, etc.

(1964, 15)

Superfluously, then, the priest prays for its accomplishment, *Which oblation do thou, O God*, etc.

(1975, 155)

Bunyan, also, to cite a literary example, makes frequent use of "et cetera." Here are a few random examples:

Talk. [...] A Man may get knowledge of many things; as of the vanity of earthly things, and the benefit of things above: (thus in general) but more particularly, by this [talk] a man may learn the necessity of the New-birth, the insufficiency of our works, the need of Christ's righteousness, *&c.*

And moreover, my Brother, thou talkest of ease in the Grave; but hast thou forgotten the Hell wither, for certain, the murderers go? for no murderer hath eternal life, &c.

Then I saw in my Dream, that the shining men bid them call at the Gate, the which when they did, some from above looked over the Gate; to wit, *Enoch, Moses*, and *Elijah, &c.*

(The Pilgrim's Progress, 63, 94, 132)

Children, Grace be with you, Amen. *I being taken from you in presence, and so tied up, that I cannot perform that duty that from God doth lie upon me, to you ward, for your further edifying and building up in Faith and Holiness, &c.*

When I have considered also the truth of his resurrection, and have remembered that word, *touch me not Mary*, &c., I have seen, as if he leaped at the Grave's mouth, for joy that he was risen again, and had got the conquest over our dreadful foes, *John* 20. 17.

And as I was thus in a muse, that Scripture also came with great power upon my Spirit, *Not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us*, &c. 2 Tim. 1.9.

(Grace Abounding, 3, 35, 73)

And as to the Lord's Prayer, although it be an easy thing to say; *Our Father, &c.* with the mouth; yet there is very few that can call God their Father, as knowing what it is to be born again, and as having experience, that they are begotten of the spirit of God: which if they do not, all is but babbling, &c.

(A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan, 107)

If, as these randomly selected instances suggest, there is nothing inherently ironic or irreverent about the phrase "et cetera," what is it about Byron's usage that transforms his invocation into what Hollander describes as "gleeful irony" (1988, 77)? According to Schindler, Byron's "et cetera" involves an "exclusion of [...] lyrical elaboration" and "dismisses [...] the *voice* of the poet." How true is this?

Undoubtedly, Byron's invocation is iconoclastically cut off in its prime, and does not involve "the lyrical elaboration that makes Milton's invocation what it is [...]." Nevertheless, I wish to suggest, firstly, that the utterance is not *entirely* exclusive; and, secondly, that the poet's "et cetera" may, oddly, *enable* the poet to invoke the Muse.

To etceterise is to signal an exclusion. This exclusion is not, however, a blank space in which something simply fails to appear. To know of an exclusion, there must paradoxically be some sign or *trace* of that which is excluded. This sign or trace in the case of "et cetera" consists in the activated implication within its space of not saying of certain referents to which the utterance's forgoing trajectory points. Such pointing is, of course, implicit and unpoliced, though its usage conventionally requires that what is intended is sufficiently familiar and will be safely, if approximately, inferred. The exclusion or discontinuation announced by "et cetera" is thus perhaps less brusque and more helpful

than it may at first appear. It is also less complete. Our friends may have gone on ahead without us, but they have left a message saying where they are going. "Et cetera" therefore marks a peculiar space in which that which is not signified is elliptically indicated, and brought tangentially into play, in spite as it were of not being personally invited. "Et cetera," in other words, vestigially includes that which it *ex*cludes.

There is, without question, a flaunted and defiant irony in such etceterised pointing out and pointing to what is not being said in the act of invocation. Yet, might we not see in the invocatory use of "et cetera" a form of stammering that arrives from the direction of flippancy? There would seem to be an analogy between the stammering postponement of invocation which manages to invoke in spite of its postponement, observed in the invocations of Rilke and Keats, and the way in which "et cetera" gestures towards what it does not supply, and signals an exclusion but also an oblique *continuation* of that which is excluded.

We suggested, also, that Byron's etceterisation of his invocation may, oddly, *enable* him to invoke the Muse. What did we mean by this? Byron's invocation, perhaps more than any other, is an invocation of invocation. His "et cetera" signals that he knows that we know that what he is doing has been done any number of times before. Taking advantage of this awareness, the poet, may therefore, with a sort of aristocratic disdain, allow other people's invocations to do his invoking for him. Schindler is thus obviously in one sense correct to identify an element of insouciance in Byron's invocation. However, the poet's "et cetera" also suggests that such consciousness is also a burden, and something that the poet desires to escape.[128] Umberto Eco has an enlightening statement on the problem of such consciousness and its "postmodern" solution, which may help us to draw some conclusions concerning Byron's practice:

> the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently. I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, "I love you madly," because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say, "As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly."

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[128] Byron's use of "et cetera" elsewhere in the poem as a way of doing something without doing it or whilst doing it parodically, and of thereby distancing his "doing" from its having been done before confirms this impression. See, for example, V, 42 and XIII, 36.

Byron appears to be in a similar predicament, and to come up with a similar remedy. Like Eco's postmodern man in love, he has something to say to "a very cultivated woman," yet he knows that she knows, and she knows that he knows that what he has to say has been said innumerable times before. Byron's use of "et cetera" is, to be sure, a more drastic solution to the problem, though he, too, is communicating by means of, whilst signalling his distance from, the words of others. We should also note that although Eco's imaginary inamorato speaks "with irony" and "not innocently," and even though his declaration of love is an avowed pastiche, he is *also actually doing* what it is he is *ironically* doing. Speaking within quotation marks *allows* him to speak. Byron, I suggest, is similarly liberated by the act of parody, which enables him to do what it is he is parodying. In hailing the Muse, and then etceterising his hailing, he is, I think, stammering flippantly and invoking askance.

So far, we have considered examples of sceptical, reluctant, flippant and parodic invocations. To conclude our illustration of what we have been referring to as invoking awry, and with it our final section of the thesis, I wish to look at an example of what Jonathan Culler describes as "hyperbolic" invocation. If the foregoing "post-Miltonic" invocations have been discounted for appearing to fall short of themselves, in asking too little or backing away from their own asking, others, such as Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" (the recurrent example), have been discounted as "serious" invocations or divorced from their professed occupation for appearing to ask *too much*. Theirs is a stammering of excessive asking. The example I wish to consider by way of illustration is Hart Crane's "To Brooklyn Bridge." Here are the final four stanzas:

> O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
> (How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
> Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
> Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry, –
>
> Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
> Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
> Beading thy path – condense eternity:
> And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.
>
> Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;
> Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.
> The City's fiery parcels all undone,

Already snow submerges an iron year . . .

O Sleepless as the river under thee,
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

If a contemporary reviewer of Keats's sonnet "To Ailsa Rock" was amused by the image of "Mister John Keates [*sic*] standing on the seashore at Dunbar ... cross-questioning the Craig of Ailsa" (quoted in Wolfson: 1986, 318), it is not hard to imagine the merriment that Crane's invocation of the Brooklyn Bridge may cause. It would be a mistake, however, if we failed to register the "absurdity" of Crane's invocation, just as it would if we were not to move beyond it.

The embarrassment Crane's invocation causes us is the embarrassment with which we have been concerned throughout the thesis. It is the embarrassment caused by Keats's charioteer in "Sleep and Poetry," whose apostrophic behaviour is cited by Culler as an illustration of the "scandalous" nature of the trope: "The charioteer with wondrous gesture talks / To the trees and mountains; and there soon appear / Shapes of delight, of mystery, and fear [...]" (1981, 136–8). It is the embarrassment caused by Blake when he writes: "'What,' it will be Question'd, 'When the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?' O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.'" ("A Vision of the Last Judgement," (Bloom *et al*: 1973, 121)). The "absurdity" or embarrassment of Crane's invocation is the absurdity or embarrassment of visionary perception. What makes Crane's invocation so peculiarly embarrassing, however – and why it might be described as "hyperbolic" – is the extraordinary distance, registered as likely as not by the reader, and collapsed by the poet, between the object as it is mundanely perceived, and the poet's visionary response to it. We might be perfectly at ease with the psalmist's proclaiming that the "heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (19:1), and may likewise not be unduly disturbed by the Romantic poet's seeing "a World in a Grain of Sand" or "Heaven in a Wild Flower" (Blake, "Auguries of Innocence," 1–2), however, a poet's seeing eternity and the mediation of the Divine in the construction that links Long Island with lower Manhattan is perhaps another matter. Yet this is, of course, the greatness and extraordinary daring of Crane's poem, which seeks to span and reveal the possible traversal of the widest distance between quotidian material

reality – without painting over the horror, the indifference and the materiality of things – and the Divine, which is unimaginably beyond it, but which it may yet bespeak. Crane's poem thus seeks itself to perform what it sees the Brooklyn Bridge as superlatively performing in the act of representing and praising that performance. To be more precise: "To Brooklyn Bridge" is a visionary "making," which represents an ecstatic dilation of quotidian reality in the direction of the Divine, and which has as its Muse the product of a prior visionary "making," which, in "Socratic" fashion, draws others towards itself and hence towards its ulterior source, and contagiously bestows the inspiration of which it arose. From one point of view, such "making" is, of course, hyperbole – the average motorist crossing the Brooklyn Bridge would, I dare say, be somewhat surprised to hear it described as a "harp and altar" and its traffic lights as an "immaculate sigh of stars [...]." Yet, as we have seen, from another point of view, such "making" is also a *revelation*, highlighting the ecstatic teleology of all phenomena. Similarly, if, in one sense, invoking a bridge and requesting it to "descend" is manifestly a hyperbolic, if not dangerous, thing to do, in another sense, according to the religious and literary traditions we have traced, asking something to "descend" and ecstatically give of itself something of that which has been ecstatically bestowed unto it, in order that the receiver may return themselves to the ulterior Giver is a wholly orthodox and perfectly sane thing to do. Crane's invocation may thus in fact turn out to be the most "devious" of utterances – if deviousness is what one expects from post-Miltonic invocation – in that it is perhaps after all doing what it *appears* to be doing.

Having established in the previous section the basic parallel between liturgical apostrophe and "ritualised" invocation in poetry, both of which may be seen as some sort of "third voice," which lies outside of Buber's "Romantic" distinction between I-Thou and I-It utterances, or what we have described as "Romantic" and "rhetorical" usage, we sought in the present section to show that although invoking the Muse "after Milton" is manifestly an endangered practice, it is not something, contrary to Hollander's contention, that was simply discontinued, only to be artificially resuscitated as a joke at its own expense. Rather, we have seen, in a range of examples from Keats, Rilke, Pope, Byron and Crane, that the convention's vestigial, pressurised persistence is more recalcitrant and complex than Hollander makes out. More specifically, we have attempted to show that "serious" invocation is not wholly displaced or consumed by its speaker's reluctance, scepticism, flippancy or hyperbole. In *Endymion*,

for example, we noticed that the act of invocation may survive its own stammering, and may paradoxically be performed in the process of its renunciation. Similarly, *in Rilke's Duineser Elegien*, we saw that faith or "trust," to recall Cawdrey's definition of invocation, is not necessarily devoured by doubt, and that sceptically questioning the act of invocation may *itself* be a form of invocation. Perhaps even more surprisingly, in our discussion of the parodic invocations of Byron and Pope, we suggested that flippancy may as it were lie down with seriousness, and that it may be possible, as Umberto Eco points out, seriously to do what one is doing within quotation marks. Finally, we argued, in our discussion of Crane's "To Brooklyn Bridge," that hyperbole may paradoxically be the form that literal invocation takes. In each case, we suggested, in spite of saying too much or not saying enough, or saying something contrary at the same time, the poet may be "seriously" invoking awry.

If this is the case, the final stage of our argument permits us to draw two general conclusions. First, against the claims made by John Hollander in *Melodious Guile*, it seems that not only do we find non-satirical invocations of the Muse "after Milton," in Romantic as well as in Modernist verse, but also, perhaps more interestingly, that satirical "ritualised" invocation is not opposed to but may even enable or be in collusion with serious invocation. Second, in relation to our larger argument, it seems that, in poetry as well as in religious practice, we find a – perhaps residual and beleaguered – use of apostrophe that argues against whilst in certain ways agreeing with Buber's anti-ritual conception of I-Thou utterance.

Conclusion

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
That is the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

(A Midsummer Night's Dream, 5, 1, 7–17)

"The lunatic, the lover and the poet"

Having spent the final section of the thesis outlining a model of apostrophic usage that complicates even as it coincides with our earlier argument, it may be useful to conclude with a summary statement which cuts across the differences between "ritualised" and "Romantic" practice and which pulls together the major points of our alternative "post-secular" construal of apostrophe. This may be done with the help of Theseus's famous speech about the "lunatic, the lover and the poet."

The Lunatic

I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness,
I never gave you kingdom, called you children.

(King Lear, 3, 2, 16–17)

Not surprisingly, at various points throughout this thesis, we have encountered, and have sought to challenge, the contention, put forward by a variety of people sharing Theseus's devoutly rationalistic view of things, that apostrophes uttered to non-human phenomena, whether "Romantically" or "ritualistically," are mad and/or embarrassing. James Bowyer, it will be recalled, expressly warned

Coleridge against "'Apostrophes' and 'O Thou's,'" which he set over against common-sense, and described as "the grimaces of Lunacy." Taking essentially the same view, though seeing the figure's impotent gesture in the direction of the real as a sign of a more general metaphoricity, Jonathan Culler has delineated the scandalous nature of the ontological claims made by the act of apostrophe. Immanuel Kant, we also noticed, writing more explicitly about prayer (from a rationalistic pietist perspective), similarly described the act of turning one's words towards the Unseen – in whom one may nevertheless still believe – as a "slight fit of madness." For Derrida, as well, we may finally note, in *On the Name*, the act of moving beyond an aporia in apostrophe or prayer involves "passing through madness" (1995, 59). Without, it is hoped, sounding like the person in the joke recounted by Freud, who, on being sued for not returning a damaged kettle, claimed never to have borrowed it, to have returned it undamaged, and that there was a hole in it already, we have called these claims in question in several ways.

First, it has been pointed out that the act of apostrophe – even in everyday contexts – is *normal*, since, as Newman argues, "[t]hat is to be accounted a normal operation of our nature, which men in general do actually instance." Second, it has been argued that what is usually meant by "madness" in making such criticisms is that something does not accord with a certain secular construal of reality; that is to say, a view of reality that is culturally and historically specific, and which may be contested. One may therefore concede that there *is* something "mad" or embarrassing about the act of apostrophe – as Pickstock and Steiner, for example, openly aver[1] – without this meaning that it may not at the same time be perfectly sensible, efficacious or imperative. This is obviously because there are other – equally cogent – views of reality, which are cognisant of, but ultimately bracket or annul, such secular construals of the real. One may similarly concede, as Newman has shown, that an action or belief may not be arrived at or accountable in terms of logic, without this making it abnormal or unfounded. This, again, is obviously because there are *other* equally prevalent and practicable ways of reasoning and knowing. Moreover, the matter may be looked at the other way round. If the act of

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[1] Steiner describes the act of prayer as "the last total embarrassment available to us" (1989, 195). Writing more specifically about liturgical practice, Pickstock observes that the liturgy's "admission of the crisis of articulation" and "its theological struggle to articulate itself" is "embarrassing from an immanentist perspective for which language is fundamentally written and issues from a permanent, enclosed, and powerful stronghold" (1998, 177). Indeed, as Michel de Certeau points out, such embarrassment is perhaps inevitable: "the Feast of Fools is not the

apostrophe is embarrassing and does not "make sense," this is, to be sure, because it radically conflicts with our conception of reality. One natural response to this conflict might be to assume that our conception of reality is correct, and conclude, as Jonathan Culler does, that the act of apostrophe is a curious aberration. It could, however, equally be argued that it is our *conception of reality* that is incorrect, and that the peculiarly pervasive and resilient habit of apostrophe residually gestures towards what we have lost sight of.

Theseus's strictly rationalistic view of events is undercut and troubled in a comparable way by the return of Puck and the fairytale world at the end of the play, to whom the last word is given. The effect is admirably summarised by Chesterton:

> the dream-fumes begin to clear, and characters and spectators begin to awaken together to the noise of horns and dogs and the clean and bracing morning. Theseus, the incarnation of a happy and generous rationalism, expounds in hackneyed and superb lines the sane view of such psychic experiences, pointing out with a reverent and sympathetic scepticism that all those fairies and spells are themselves but the emanations, the unconscious masterpieces, of man himself. The whole company falls back into a splendid human laughter. There is a rush for banqueting and private theatricals, and over all these things ripples one of those frivolous and inspired conversations in which every good saying seems to die in giving birth to another. [...] All the dreams have been forgotten in the human certainty of any other triumphant evening party; and so the play seems naturally ended. It began on the earth and it ends on the earth. Thus to round off the whole midsummer night's dream in an eclipse of daylight is an effect of genius. But of this comedy [...] the mark is that genius goes beyond itself; and one touch is added which makes the play colossal. Theseus and his train retire with a crashing finale, full of honour and wisdom and things set right, and silence falls on the house. The there comes a faint sound of little feet, and for a moment, as it were, the elves look into the house, asking which is the reality. "Suppose we are the reality and they the shadows."
>
> (1983, 44)

Apostrophe makes us similarly "suppose" or is a sign of our "supposing" in spite of ourselves. It is also, to the believer, only sensible that we do so. Addressing ourselves to that which is non-human or unseen is patently embarrassing, scandalous or quixotic. Though, as St Paul reminds us, wholly cognisant of the transgression of reason involved in faith, there is a foolishness that is wiser than the wisdom of the world.

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opposite of the Secular City, [...] but its corollary. When the organization of practices is exclusively 'secular,'

The Lover

> He sigh'd; – the next resource is the full moon,
> Where all sighs are deposited; and now
> It happen'd luckily, the chaste orb shone
> As clear as such a climate will allow;
> And Juan's mind was in the proper tone
> To hail her with the apostrophe – "O thou!"
> Of amatory egoism the *Tuism*,
> Which further to explain would be a truism.

<div align="right">(Don Juan, XVI, 13)</div>

"Love," according to Denys, "carries the lover outside of himself, and transports him into the beloved." Drawing upon the writing of Buber and Barth on the I-Thou utterance and liturgical invocation, as well as the more general accounts of ekstasis by Denys and Aquinas (which are corroborated – even if their positive claims are ultimately negated – by Paul de Man), we have as a way of theoretically elucidating the "counter-rational" claims recurrently made in poetry similarly described the act of apostrophe as an *ecstatic* or *ec-centric* act. According to Buber, I-Thou relation does not take place *within* the "I" (neither does it take place within the Thou nor within *both* the "I" and the Thou) but in the "between," which Buber describes as "the real place and bearer of what happens" (1969, 203). The utterance, which brings the self into being, thus also radically opens the self up towards the other, carrying the speaker "outside of himself," and leaving him reciprocally open to the "mystery of alien ingress" (Steiner: 1979, 440). To Barth, the act of invoking God involves living "ec-centrically" beyond oneself, in the being of God, which he similarly claims "founds and constitutes human being" (Boulton: 2001, 72). Pickstock, also, describes liturgical apostrophe as an ecstatic act, comparing the speaker's reaching outside of himself in the act of calling or what Walter Ong describes as the "invasion of [...] the atmosphere which surrounds a being by that being's interior state" (1972, 500) to the way in which the incense (as both the smoke and that which gives off the smoke) in its self-dissolution "escapes" or transgresses the boundaries of itself (Pickstock: 1998, 195).

The movement out of the self in the ekstasis of love is a movement towards the other. Apostrophe, we have argued, similarly announces a traversal of the separation it bespeaks. Whereas in Catherine Belsey's doleful critique of Romanticism, the only options are a solipsistic cancelling of

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how does one mark out one's difference other than through 'madness'?" (2000, 221).

difference in the ecstatic expansion of the self towards the other, which entails an "obliteration of the object" and a concomitant "fading of the subject" or a realisation of difference, which is "a world of lack, of absence, of desire [...] of loss," a theological reading of apostrophic relation reveals to us another option, which is neither an unrequited reaching towards the other, in all its otherness, which merely bespeaks lack and separation, nor is it an annihilating *assimilation* of the other. Rather, drawing upon the writing of Buber, Marion, Milbank and Pickstock, we have seen that, from a theological perspective, apostrophic *ekstasis* preserves whilst permitting the traversal of the distance between the self and the other, or as Pickstock puts it: "invocation betrays an absence, but it also embodies the reparation" (1993, 115).

In the lover's ekstasis, as Denys writes, it is "love" that "carries the lover." Again, there are a number of parallels with the act of apostrophe. According to Aquinas and Newman, who see knowing as something that involves the whole person, and *not*, as secular modernity would have it, as something that is reserved for a pared down and exalted form of rationalism, which is artificially removed from and autonomously governs the rest of ourselves, as Hardy governs Laurel, love may knowingly carry us beyond the aporias that mesmerise secular reason. In *The Divine Comedy*, the pilgrim is led by his love for Beatrice (who is allegorically at once created wisdom and the beloved of the *Vita Nuova*) towards "the Love that moves the sun and the other stars" (*Paradiso*, XXXIII, 145). It is likewise, according to Augustine, only as a result of our already having – and yet not yet having – within ourselves that which is other than and infinitely exceeds us that we are able to desire and thus "re-turn" to that which is beyond our knowing. As John Milbank writes, "if we are naturally oriented to the supernatural, this can only be because our original and 'most proper' nature is a paradoxically superadded nature [...], giving us more than our due as our due, and pulling us naturally beyond our nature in an *ecstasis* at the outset" (Milbank and Pickstock: 2001, 38). It is likewise, according to Wordsworth, the soul of the "[b]lest [...] infant Babe" or what Buber describes as the "inborn Thou" that initiates (or initiates the individual into) the reciprocal process of giving and receiving that is "the first / Poetic spirit of our human life" (*The Prelude*, II, 276–7). According to the poet, the infant is born with an *ecstatic predisposition*, which draws him beyond himself and into relation:

> Along his infant veins are interfused
> The gravitational and the filial bond
> Of Nature that connect him with the world.

<div align="right">(The Prelude, II, 262–5)</div>

In accordance with these and other claims, we have *argued that the* act of "Romantic" apostrophe and the practice of "ritualised" invocation also, like the act of orthodox prayer, is not entirely our own work. As St Paul famously expresses it: "we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Romans, 8:26). Relatedly, we suggested that the *difference* between apostrophes addressed to natural or inanimate phenomena and orthodox prayer may also be a sign of this "not knowing." Observing the reverentially ordered incorporation of apostrophes to the whole of the created order in the biblical (but prelapsarian) prayer in praise of creation in *Paradise Lost*, we suggested that the *post*lapsarian occurrence of such apostrophes to the created order *outside of* orthodox orientation towards their Creator might be seen as an apophatic and fallen remainder of the communion enjoyed before the Fall, stammering and instinctively groping where Adam and Eve used to sing.

The Poet

"The Harp the Monarch Minstrel Swept"

> It told the triumphs of our King,
> It wafted glory to our God;
> It made our gladden'd valleys ring,
> The cedars bow, the mountains nod;
> Its sound aspired to heaven and there abode!
> Since then, though heard on earth no more,
> Devotion and her daughter Love
> Still bid the bursting spirit soar
> To sounds that seem as from above,
> In dreams that day's broad light can not remove.

<div align="right">(Byron, II)</div>

Theseus's denigratory linking of the poet's imagination with that of the lover and the lunatic, as itself a product of "the poet's pen," notoriously speaks against itself. It is a variation upon or antecedent of the

celebrated Cretan paradox. Here we are being told by a Cretan that Cretans are "more strange than true."[2] If the statement is true, then it is paradoxically *not* true, since it is itself implicated in its own condemnation; though if it is *not* true – and the products of the poet's imagination *may* be believed – then paradoxically it *might* be true. This radical confusion of the customary difference between truth and illusion is, of course, central to the play as a whole. As we have noted, the return of the fairytale world *after* Theseus's repudiation of it makes clear that there are, to borrow from a later character, more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Theseus's philosophy. Furthermore, his "criticism" is in fact the highest praise, attributing to the poet a godlike capacity to create from nothing:

> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.

Harold F. Brooks comments on these lines as follows:

> Before giving his judgement on imagination and drama, Theseus has done the same on imagination and poetry, in his famous lines attacking the irrationality of imagination. T. S Eliot draws attention to the occurrence from time to time in drama of
>
> > the voices of the author and the character in unison, saying something appropriate to the character, but something which the author could say for himself also, though the words may not have quite the same meaning for both. [...]
>
> In the present instance they actually have the opposite meanings. [...] Theseus intends them as censure; but his eloquence, summoned like Balaam to curse, blesses altogether. The clue is given at once: the "fine frenzy" with which he charges the poet, is the "furor poeticus" so much honoured in the Renaissance, following Plato and Aristotle, as the mark of true poetic inspiration. [...] In the line of his argument, his stress is on the "airy nothing" which is all that the poet's fabric is made of: but to make a world out of nothing is a godlike attribute. For the

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2 The lines immediately preceding Theseus's speech are as follows:

Hip. 'Tis strange, my dear Theseus, that these lovers speak of.
The. More strange than true. I never believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.

(5, 1, 1–6)

audience, what Theseus says is a tribute to the power of the poet: the power of which Shelley was to write

> create he can
> Forms more real than living man

<div align="right">(1979, cxl)</div>

Theseus' "created" speech about the act of creation hovers intriguingly – and collapses any identifiable boundary – between "truth" and "illusion" in a way that corresponds to our argument concerning apostrophic "making." Drawing on Romantic theories of "creative" perception and Aquinas' "aesthetic" account of revelation, we suggested that the power of apostrophe or invocation to fashion out of its own hopeful reaching a personified otherness which corroborates and returns its call may be creative *and* truthful. The act of apostrophically personifying may, that is, involve "creating" what is in fact the case, but which is otherwise unavailable to our perception. According to such a reading, the personification involved in apostrophe and invocation is, of course, in one sense an "illusion," since that which it gives "a local habitation and a name" is placelessly present and has a name beyond naming. Though in another sense, to the believer, all things that have a finite name and "habitation" dimly and incompletely yet nonetheless truthfully disclose across the yes and no of analogical relation the reciprocating, prevenient, ecstatic reaching of their nameless, placeless yet communicable Creator.

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