The Rhetoric
of Romanticism

Paul de Man

do is to "shriek" in utter derision. In *The King of the Great Clock
Tower*, after the same story is told, this time by means of the
myth of Salomé and John the Baptist instead of that of Venus
and Adonis, Yeats gives the last word to a sardonic, nihilistic
emblem of nature (the *"wicked, crooked hawthorn tree"*) that re-
bukes and dashes the hopes of a *"travelling-man,"* who con-
tains elements from all Yeats's favorite heroes including his most
triumphant self (*Plays*, pp. 640–41). In *The Herne's Egg*, after
narrating again, by means of another set of emblems, the same
myth of divine possession, Yeats ends his play in utter mock-
ery ("All that trouble and nothing to show for it . . ."—*Plays*,
p. 678).

Nowhere is the derision more apparent than in the last of
the poems directly concerned with the problem of imagery,
"The Circus Animals' Desertion" (*Var.*, pp. 629–30). One has
to remember what hopes Yeats had invested in his emblems
to measure the bitterness with which he refers to them as

> A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
> Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
> Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
> Who keeps the till.

They represent not only the sardonic counterpart of his most
venerated "holy things" but also, quite literally, the utterly
worthless content of reality. The failure of the emblem amounts
to total nihilism. Yeats has burned his bridges, and there is no
return out of his exploded paradise of emblems back to a wasted
earth. Those who look to Yeats for reassurance from the anx-
ieties of our own post-romantic predicament, or for relief from
the paralysis of nihilism, will not find it in his conception of
the emblem. He cautions instead against the danger of un-
warranted hopeful solutions, and thus accomplishes all that the
highest forms of language can for the moment accomplish.

9
Anthropomorphism
and Trope
in the Lyric

THE GESTURE that links epistemol-
ogy with rhetoric in general, and not only with the mimetic
tropes of representation, recurs in many philosophical and po-
etic texts of the nineteenth century, from Keats's "Beauty is
truth, truth beauty" to Nietzsche's perhaps better known than
understood definition of truth as tropological displacement:
"Was ist also Wahrheit? Ein bewegliches Heer von Meta-
phern, Metonymien, Anthropomorphismen . . ."[1] Even when
thus translated before it has been allowed to run one third of
its course, Nietzsche's sentence considerably complicates the
assimilation of truth to trope that it proclaims. Later in the es-
say, the homology between concept and figure as symmetrical
structures and aberrant repressions of differences is drama-
tized in the specular destinies of the artist and the scientist-
philosopher. Like the Third Critique, this late Kantian text
demonstrates, albeit in the mode of parody, the continuity of
aesthetic with rational judgment that is the main tenet and the
major crux of all critical philosophies and "Romantic" litera-
tures. The considerable difference in tone between Nietzsche

and Kant cannot conceal the congruity of the two projects, their common stake in the recovery of controlled discourse on the far side of even the sharpest denials of intuitive sense-certainties. What interests us primarily in the poetic and philosophical versions of this transaction, in this give-and-take between reason and imagination, is not, at this point, the critical schemes that deny certainty considered in themselves, but their disruption by patterns that cannot be reassimilated to these schemes, but that are nevertheless, if not produced, then at least brought into focus by the distortions the disruption inflicts upon them.

Thus, in the Nietzsche sentence, the recovery of knowledge by ways of its devalorization in the deviance of the tropes is challenged, even at this moment of triumph for a critical reason which dares to ask and to reply to the question: what is truth? First of all, the listing of particular tropes is odd, all the more so since it is technically more precise than is often the case in such arguments: only under the pen of a classical philologist such as Nietzsche is one likely to find combined, in 1872, what Gérard Genette has since wittily referred to as the two "chiens de faience" of contemporary rhetoric—metaphor and metonymy. But the third term in the enumeration, anthropomorphism, is no longer a philological and neutral term, neither does it complement the two former ones: anthropomorphisms can contain a metaphorical as well as a metonymic moment—as in an Ovidian metamorphosis in which one can start out from the contiguity of the flower's name to that of the mythological figure in the story, or from the resemblance between a natural scene and a state of soul.

The term "anthropomorphism" therefore adds little to the two previous ones in the enumeration, nor does it constitute a synthesis between them, since neither metaphor nor metonymy have to be necessarily anthropomorphic. Perhaps Nietzsche, in the Voltairean conte philosophique *On Truth and Lie* is just being casual in his terminology—but then, opportunities to encounter technical tropological terms are so sparse in literary and philosophical writings that one can be excused

for making the most of it when they occur. The definition of truth as a collection ("army" being, aside from other connotations, at any rate a collective term) of tropes is a purely structural definition, devoid of any normative emphasis; it implies that truth is relational, that it is an articulation of a subject (for example "truth") and a predicate (for example "an army of tropes") allowing for an answer to a definitional question (such as "what is truth?") that is not purely tautological. At this point, to say that truth is a trope is to say that truth is the possibility of stating a proposition; to say that truth is a collection of varied tropes is to say that it is the possibility of stating several propositions about a single subject, of relating several predicates to a subject according to principles of articulation that are not necessarily identical: truth is the possibility of definition by means of infinitely varied sets of propositions. This assertion is purely descriptive of an unchallenged grammatical possibility and, as such, it has no critical thrust, nor does it claim to have one: there is nothing inherently disruptive in the assertion that truth is a trope.

But "anthropomorphism" is not just a trope but an identification on the level of substance. It takes one entity for another and thus implies the constitution of specific entities prior to their confusion, the *taking* of something for something else that can then be assumed to be *given*. Anthropomorphism freezes the infinite chain of tropological transformations and propositions into one single assertion or essence which, as such, excludes all others. It is no longer a proposition but a proper name, as when the metamorphosis in Ovid's stories culminates and halts in the singleness of a proper name, Narcissus or Daphne or whatever. Far from being the same, tropes such as metaphor (or metonymy) and anthropomorphisms are mutually exclusive. The apparent enumeration is in fact a foreclosure which acquires, by the same token, considerable critical power.

Truth is now defined by two incompatible assertions: either truth is a set of propositions or truth is a proper name. Yet, on the other hand, it is clear that the tendency to move from

tropes to systems of interpretations such as anthropomorphisms is built into the very notion of trope. One reads Nietzsche's sentence without any sense of disruption, for although a trope is in no way the same as an anthropomorphism, it is nevertheless the case that an anthropomorphism is structured like a trope: it is easy enough to cross the barrier that leads from trope to name but impossible, once this barrier has been crossed, to return from it to the starting-point in "truth." Truth is a trope; a trope generates a norm or value; this value (or ideology) is no longer true. It is true that tropes are the producers of ideologies that are no longer true.

Hence the "army" metaphor. Truth, says Nietzsche, is a mobile *army* of tropes. Mobility is coextensive with any trope, but the connotations introduced by "army" are not so obvious, for to say that truth is an army (of tropes) is again to say something odd and possibly misleading. It can certainly not imply, in *On Truth and Lie* that truth is a kind of commander who enlists tropes in the battle against error. No such dichotomy exists in any critical philosophy, let alone Nietzsche's, in which truth is always at the very least dialectical, the negative knowledge of error. Whatever truth may be fighting, it is not error but stupidity, the belief that one is right when one is in fact in the wrong. To assert, as we just did, that the assimilation of truth to tropes is not a disruption of epistemology, is not to assert that tropes are therefore true or on the side, so to speak, of truth. Tropes are neither true nor false and are both at once. To call them an army is however to imply that their effect and their effectiveness is not a matter of judgment but of power. What characterizes a good army, as distinct for instance from a good cause, is that its success has little to do with immanent justice and a great deal with the proper economic use of its power. One willingly admits that truth has power, including the power to occur, but to say that its power is like that of an army and to say this within the definitional context of the question: what is therefore truth? is truly disruptive. It not only asserts that truth (which was already complicated by having to be a proposition as well as a proper

name) is also power, but a power that exists independently of epistemological determinations, although these determinations are far from being nonexistent: calling truth an army *of tropes* reaffirms its epistemological *as well as* its strategic power. How the two modes of power could exist side by side certainly baffles the mind, if not the grammar of Nietzsche's tale. The sentence that asserts the complicity of epistemology and rhetoric, of truth and trope, also turns this alliance into a battle made all the more dubious by the fact that the adversaries may not even have the opportunity ever to encounter each other. Less schematically compressed, more elaborated and dramatized instances of similar disjunctions can be found in the texts of lyrical poets, such as, for example, Baudelaire.

The canonical and programmatic sonnet "Correspondances"[2] contains not a single sentence that is not simply declarative. Not a single negation, interrogation, or exclamation, not a single verb that is not in the present indicative, nothing but straightforward affirmation: "la Nature *est* un temple . . . Il *est* des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants." The least assertive word in the text is the innocuous "parfois" in line 2, hardly a dramatic temporal break. Nor is there (a rare case in *Les Fleurs du mal*) any pronominal agitation: no *je-tu* apostrophes or dialogues, only the most objective descriptions of third persons. The only personal pronoun to appear is the impersonal "il" of "il est (des parfums) . . ."

The choice of "Correspondances" to explicate the quandaries of language as truth, as name, and as power may therefore appear paradoxical and forced. The ironies and the narrative frame of *On Truth and Lie* make it difficult to take the apparent good cheer of its tone at face value, but the serenity of "Correspondances" reaches deep enough to eliminate any disturbance of the syntactical surface. This serenity is prevalent enough to make even the question superfluous. Nietzsche still has to dramatize the summation of his story in an eye-catching paragraph that begins with the question of questions: Was ist also Wahrheit? But Baudelaire's text is all assurance

and all answer. One has to make an effort to perceive the opening line as an answer to an implicit question, "La Nature est un temple . . ." as the answer to "Qu'est-ce que la nature?" The title is not "La Nature," which would signal a need for definition; in "Correspondances," among many other connotations, one hears "response," the dialogical exchange that takes place in mutual proximity to a shared entity called nature. The *response* to the sonnet, among its numerous readers and commentators, has been equally responsive. Like the oracle of Delphi, it has been made to answer a considerable number and variety of questions put to it by various readers. Some of these questions are urgent (such as: how can one be innocent and corrupt at the same time?), some more casually historical (such as: when can modern French lyric poetry, from Baudelaire to surrealism and beyond, be said to begin?). In all cases, the poem has never failed to answer to the satisfaction of its questioner.

The serenity of the diction celebrates the powers of tropes or "symboles" that can reduce any conceivable difference to a set of polarities and combine them in an endless play of substitution and amalgamation, extending from the level of signification to that of the signifier. Here, as in Nietzsche's text, the telos of the substitutions is the unified system "esprit/sens" (l. 14), the seamless articulation, by ways of language, of sensory and aesthetic experience with the intellectual assurance of affirmation. Both echo each other in the controlled compression of a brief and highly formalized sonnet which can combine the enigmatic depth of doctrine—sending commentators astray in search of esoteric authority—with the utmost banality of a phrase such as "verts comme les prairies."

On the thematic level, the success of the project can be measured by the unquestioned acceptance of a paradox such as "Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté," in which a conjunctive *et* can dare to substitute for what should be the *ou* of an either/or structure. For the vastness of the night is one of confusion in which distinctions disappear, Hegel's night in

which *A = A* because no such thing as *A* can be discerned, and in which infinity is homogeneity. Whereas the vastness of light is like the capacity of the mind to make endless analytical distinctions, or the power of calculus to integrate by ways of infinitesimal differentiation. The juxtaposition of these incompatible meanings is condensed in the semantic ambiguity of "se confondent," which can designate the bad infinity of confusion as well as the fusion of opposites into synthetic judgments. That "echoes," which are originally the disjunction of a single sensory unit or word by the alien obstacle of a reflection, themselves re-fuse into a single sound ("Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent") again acts out the dialectic of identity and difference, of sensory diffuseness and intellectual precision.

The process is self-consciously verbal or mediated by language, as is clear from the couple "se confondent / se répondent," which dramatizes events of discourse and in which, as was already pointed out, "se répondent" should be read as "se correspondent" rather than as a pattern of question and answer. As in "confuses paroles" and "symboles" in the opening lines, the stress on language as the stage of disjunction is unmistakable. Language can be the chain of metaphors in a synethesia, as well as the oxymoronic polysemy of a single word, such as "se confondent" (or "transports" in l. 14) or even, on the level of the signifier, the play of the syllable or the letter. For the title, "Correspondances," is like the anagrammatic condensation of the text's entire program: "corps" and "esprit" brought together and harmonized by the *ance* of assonance that pervades the concluding tercets: from *ayant, ambre, chantent* to *expansion, sens, transport,* finally redoubled and re-echoed in *enc-ens/sens*.

The assertion, or representation, of verbality in "se répondent" (or in "Laissent parfois sortir de confuses *paroles*") also coincides, as in Nietzsche's text, with the passage from tropes—here the substitution of one sense experience by another—to anthropomorphisms. Or so, at least, it seems to a perhaps overhasty reading that would at once oppose "na-

ture" to "homme" as in a polarity of art ("temple") and na-
ture, and endow natural forests and trees with eyes ("re-
gards") and voices. The tradition of interpretation for this poem,
which stresses the importance of Chateaubriand and of Gér-
ard de Nerval as sources, almost unanimously moves in that
direction.

The opening lines allow but certainly do not impose such
a reading. "La Nature est un temple" is enigmatic enough to
constitute the burden of any attempt at understanding and
cannot simply be reduced to a pattern of binary substitution,
but what follows is hardly less obscure. "Vivants piliers," as
we first meet it, certainly suggests the erect shape of human
bodies naturally enough endowed with speech, a scene from
the paintings of Paul Delvaux rather than from the poems of
Victor Hugo. "L'homme," in line 3, then becomes a simple
apposition to "vivants piliers." The notion of nature as a wood
and, consequently, of "piliers" as anthropomorphic columns
and trees, is suggested only by "des *forêts* de symboles" in
which, especially in combination with "symboles," a natural
and descriptive reading of "forêt" is by no means compelling.
Nor is nature, in Baudelaire, necessarily a sylvan world. We
cannot be certain whether we have ever left the world of hu-
mans and whether it is therefore relevant or necessary to speak
of anthropomorphism at all in order to account for the figur-
ation of the text. "Des forêts," a plural of what is already, in
the singular, a collective plural (forêt) can be read as equiva-
lent to "une foule de symboles," a figure of amplification that
designates a large number, the crowd of humanity in which it
is well known that Baudelaire took a constant poetic, rather
than humanitarian, interest.

Perhaps we are not in the country at all but have never
left the city, the "rue assourdissante" of the poem entitled "À
une passante," for example. "Symboles" in "des forêts de
symboles" could then designate the verbal, the rhetorical di-
mension within which we constantly dwell and which we
therefore meet as passively as we meet the glance of the other
in the street. That the possibility of this reading seems far-

fetched and, in my experience, never fails to elicit resistance,
or that the forest/temple cliché should have forced itself so
emphatically upon the attention of the commentators is one of
the cruxes of "Correspondances."

It has been enough of a crux for Baudelaire himself to have
generated at least one other text, the poem "Obsession," to
which we will have to turn later. For the possibility of anthro-
pomorphic (mis)reading is part of the text and part of what is
at stake in it. Anthropomorphism seems to be the illusionary
resuscitation of the natural breath of language, frozen into stone
by the semantic power of the trope. It is a figural affirmation
that claims to overcome the deadly negative power invested in
the figure. In Baudelaire's, as in Nietzsche's text, the icon of
this central trope is that of the architectural construct, temple,
beehive, or columbarium.

This verbal building, which has to celebrate at the same
time funeral and rebirth, is built by the infinite multiplication
of numbers raising each other to ever higher arithmetic power.
The property which privileges "parfums" as the sensory an-
alogon for the joint powers of mind and body (ll. 9–14) is its
ability to grow from the infinitely small to endless expansion,
"ce grain d'encens qui remplit une église"—a quotation from
Les Fleurs du mal that made it into Littré. The religious conno-
tation of "temple" and "encens" suggests, as in the immedi-
ately anterior poem in the volume, "Elévation," a transcen-
dental circulation, as ascent or descent, between the spirit and
the senses, a borderline between two distinct realms that can
be crossed.

Yet this movement is not unambiguously sustained by all
the articulations of the text. Thus in the line "L'homme y passe
à travers des forêts de symboles," "passer à travers" can have
two very different spatial meanings. It can be read as "tra-
verser la forêt"; one can *cross* the woods, as Narcissus goes
through the looking-glass, or as the acrobat, in Banville's poem
that echoes in Mallarmé's "Le Pitre châtié," goes through the
roof of the circus tent, or as Vergil, for that matter, takes Dante
beyond the woods in which he lost his way. But "passer à

travers" can also mean to remain enclosed in the wood, to wander and err around in it as the speaker of "A une passante" wanders around in the crowd. The latter reading in fact suits the represented scene better than the former, although it is incompatible with the transcendental claims usually made for the sonnet. The transcendence of substitutive, analogical tropes linked by the recurrent "comme," a transcendence which occurs in the declarative assurance of the first quatrain, states the totalizing power of metaphor as it moves from analogy to identity, from simile to symbol and to a higher order of truth. Ambivalences such as those noted in "passer à travers," as well as the theoretical ambivalence of anthropomorphism in relation to tropes, complicate this expectation perhaps more forcefully than its outright negation. The complication is forceful enough to contaminate the key word that carries out the substitutions which constitute the main structure of the text: the word "comme."

When it is said that "Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent . . . *comme* de longs échos," then the preposition of resemblance, "comme," the most frequently counted word in the canon of Baudelaire's poetry, does its work properly and clearly, without upsetting the balance between difference and identity that it is assigned to maintain. It achieves a figure of speech, for it is not actually the case that an answer is an echo; no echo has ever answered a question except by a "delusion" of the signifier[3]—but it is certainly the case that an echo sounds like an answer, and that this similarity is endlessly suggestive. And the catachresis "se répondent" to designate the association between the various senses duly raises the process to the desired higher power. "Des parfums . . . / Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies" is already somewhat more complex, for although it is possible in referential and semantic terms to think of oboes and of certain scents as primarily "soft," it makes less sense to think of scents as green; "green scents" have less compelling connotations than "green thoughts" or "green shades." The relaying "comme" travels by ways of "hautbois," solidly tied to "parfums" by ways

of "doux" and altogether compatible with "vert," through the pastoral association of the reedy sound still reinforced by the "(haut)*bois,* verts" that would be lost in English or German translation. The greenness of the fields can be guided back from color to scent with any "unsweet" connotation carefully filtered out.

All this is playing at metaphor according to the rules of the game. But the same is not true of the final "comme" in the poem: "Il est des parfums frais comme . . . / Doux comme . . . / —Et d'autres . . . / Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies / *Comme* l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens." Ce comme n'est pas un comme comme les autres. It does not cross from one sense experience to another, as "frais" crosses from scent to touch or "doux" from scent to sound, nor does it cross from the common sensorium back to the single sense of hearing (as in "Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent" "Comme de longs échos . . .") or from the sensory to the intellectual realm, as in the double register of "se confondent." In each of these cases, the "comme" is what avoids tautology by linking the subject to a predicate that is not the same: scents are said to be like oboes, or like fields, or like echoes. But here "comme" relates to the subject "parfums" in two different ways or, rather, it has two distinct subjects. If "comme" is related to "l'expansion des choses infinies," which is grammatically as well as tonally possible, then it still functions, like the other "commes," as a comparative simile: a common property ("l'expansion") links the finite senses to an experience of infinity. But "comme" also relates to "parfums": "Il est des parfums frais . . . /—Et d'autres . . . / Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens"; the somewhat enigmatic hyphen can be said to mark that hesitation (as well as rule it out). "Comme" then means as much as "such as, for example" and enumerates scents which contrast with "chairs d'enfants" as innocence contrasts with experience or nature with artifice. This working out by exemplification is quite different from the analogical function assigned to the other uses of "comme."

Considered from the perspective of the "thesis" or of the

symbolist ideology of the text, such a use of "comme" is aberrant. For although the burden of totalizing expansion seems to be attributed to these particular scents rather than the others, the logic of "comme" restricts the semantic field of "parfums" and confines it to a tautology: "Il est des parfums . . . / Comme (des parfums)." Instead of analogy, we have enumeration, and an enumeration which never moves beyond the confines of a set of particulars: "forêt" synthesizes but does not enumerate a set of trees, but "ambre," "musc," "benjoin," and "encens," whatever differences or gradations one wishes to establish between them, are refrained by "comme" ever to lead beyond themselves; the enumeration could be continued at will without ceasing to be a repetition, without ceasing to be an obsession rather than a metamorphosis, let alone a rebirth. One wonders if the evil connotations of these corrupt scents do not stem from the syntax rather than from the Turkish bath or black mass atmosphere one would otherwise have to conjure up. For what could be more perverse or corruptive for a metaphor aspiring to transcendental totality than remaining stuck in an enumeration that never goes anywhere? If number can only be conquered by another number, if identity becomes enumeration, then there is no conquest at all, since the stated purpose of the passage to infinity was, like in Pascal, to restore the one, to escape the tyranny of number by dint of infinite multiplication. Enumerative repetition disrupts the chain of tropological substitution at the crucial moment when the poem promises, by way of these very substitutions, to reconcile the pleasures of the mind with those of the senses and to unite aesthetics with epistemology. That the very word on which these substitutions depend would just then lose its syntactical and semantic univocity is too striking a coincidence not to be, like pure chance, beyond the control of author and reader.

It allows, at any rate, for a sobering literalization of the word "transport" in the final line "Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens." "Transport" here means, of course, to be carried away beyond thought and sensation in a common

transcendental realm; it evokes loss of control and ecstatic unreason. But all attentive readers of Baudelaire have always felt that this claim at self-loss is not easily compatible with a colder, analytic self-consciousness that moves in a very different direction. In the words of our text, "les transports de l'esprit" and "Les transports des sens" are not at all the same "transports." We have learned to recognize, of late, in "transports" the spatial displacement implied by the verbal ending of *metaphorein*. One is reminded that, in the French-speaking cities of our century, "correspondance" meant, on the trolley-cars, the equivalence of what is called in English a "transfer"—the privilege, automatically granted on the Paris Métro, of connecting from one line to another without having to buy a new ticket.

The prosaic transposition of ecstasy to the economic codes of public transportation is entirely in the spirit of Baudelaire and not by itself disruptive with regard to the claim for transcendental unity. For the transfer indeed merges two different displacements into one single system of motion and circulation, with corresponding economic and metaphysical profits. The problem is not so much centered on *phorein* as on *meta* (trans . . .), for does "beyond" here mean a movement beyond some particular place or does it mean a state that is beyond movement entirely? And how can "beyond," which posits and names movement, ever take us away from what it posits? The question haunts the text in all its ambiguities, be it "passer à travers" or the discrepancy between the "comme" of homogeneity and the "comme" of enumeration. The apparent rest and tranquility of "Correspondances" within the corpus of *Les Fleurs du mal* lies indeed beyond tension and beyond motion. If Nature is truly a temple, it is not a means of transportation or a railroad station, Victorian architects who loved to build railroad stations in the shape of cathedrals notwithstanding. Nature in this poem is not a road toward a temple, a sequence of motions that take us there. Its travels, whatever they are, lie far behind us; there is no striving here, no questing for an absence or a presence. And if man (l'homme) is at home among "regards familiers" within that Nature, then his

language of tropes and analogies is of little use to them. In this realm, transfer tickets are of no avail. Within the confines of a system of transportation—or of language as a system of communication—one can transfer from one vehicle to another, but one cannot transfer from being like a vehicle to being like a temple, or a ground.

The epistemological, aesthetic, and poetic language of transports or of tropes, which is the theme though not singly the rhetoric of this poem, can never say nor, for that matter, sing or understand the opening statement: "la Nature est un temple." But the poem offers no explicit alternative to this language which, like the perfumes enumerated by "comme," remains condemned to the repetition of its superfluity. Few poems in *Les Fleurs du mal* state this in a manner that is both so obvious yet, by necessity, so oblique. The poem most remote from stating it is also the one closest to "Correspondances," its "echo" as it were, with which it is indeed very easy to confuse it. Little clarity can be gained from "Correspondances" except for the knowledge that disavows its deeper affinity with "Obsession."

Written presumably in February 1860, at least five years after "Correspondances" (of which the date is uncertain but anterior to 1855), "Obsession" (*O.C.*, 1:73) alludes to many poems in *Les Fleurs du mal,* such as "l'Homme et la mer" (1852) and "De profundis clamavi" (1851). But it more than alludes to "Correspondances"; it can be called a *reading* of the earlier text, with all the complications that are inherent in this term. The relationship between the two poems can indeed be seen as the construction and the undoing of the mirrorlike, specular structure that is always involved in a reading. On both the thematic and the rhetorical level, the reverted symmetries between the two texts establish their correspondence along a positive / negative axis. Here again, our problem is centered on the possibility of reinscribing into the system elements, in either text, that do not belong to this pattern. The same question can be asked in historical or in generic terms but, in so

doing, the significance of this terminology risks being unsettled.

One can, for instance, state the obvious difference in theme and in diction between the two poems in terms derived from the canonical history of French nineteenth-century lyric poetry. With its portal of Greek columns, its carefully balanced symmetries, and its decorous absence of any displayed emotion, "Correspondances" has all the characteristics of a Parnassian poem, closer to Heredia than to Hugo. The "romantic" exaltation of "Obsession" 's apostrophes and exclamations, on the other hand, is self-evident. If nature is a "transport" in "Obsession," it is a temple in "Correspondances." However, by putting the two texts side by side in this manner, their complementarity is equally manifest. What is lost in personal expressiveness from the first poem is gained in the symbolic "depth" that has prompted comparisons of "Correspondances" with the poetry of that other neo-classicist, Gérard de Nerval, or supported the claim of its being the forerunner of symbolism. Such a historicizing pattern, a commonplace of aesthetic theory, is a function of the aesthetic ideologization of linguistic structures rather than an empirical historical event. The dialectical interaction of "classical" with "romantic" conceptions, as summarized in the contrastive symmetries between these two sonnets, ultimately reveals the symbolic character of poetic language, the linguistic structure in which it is rooted. "Symbolist" art is considered archaic when it is supposed to be spontaneous, modern when it is self-conscious, and this terminology has a certain crude wisdom about it that is anything but historical, however, in its content. Such a combination of linguistic with pseudo-historical terms, of "symbolic" with "classic" (or *parnassien*) or with "romantic" (or *symboliste*), a combination familiar at least since Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics,* is a necessary feature of systems that combine tropes with aesthetic and epistemological norms. In this perspective, the relationship between the neo-classical "Correspondances" and the post-romantic "Obsession" is itself structured like a symbol: the two sonnets complement each

other like the two halves of a *symbolon*. Historicizing them into a diachrony or into a valorized qualitative hierarchy is more convenient than it is legitimate. The terminology of traditional literary history, as a succession of periods or literary movements, remains useful only if the terms are seen for what they are: rather crude metaphors for figural patterns rather than historical events or acts.

Stated in generic rather than historical terms, the relationship between "Correspondances" and "Obsession" touches upon the uncertain status of the lyric as a term for poetic discourse in general. The lyric's claim of being song is made explicitly in "Correspondances" ("qui *chantent* les transports. . ."), whereas "Obsession" howls, laughs, and speaks but does not pretend to sing. Yet the *je-tu* structure of the syntax makes it much closer to the representation of a vocal utterance than the engraved, marmorean gnomic wisdom of "Correspondances." The reading however disclosed a discrepancy that affects the verb "chanter" in the concluding line: the suggestive identification of "parfum" with song, based on common resonance and expansion, is possible only within a system of relays and transfers that, in the syntax if not in the stated meaning of the poem, becomes threatened by the stutter, the *piétinement* of aimless enumeration. This eventuality, inherent in the structure of the tropes on which the claim to lyricism depends, conflicts with the monumental stability of a completed entity that exists independently of its principle of constitution and destruction. Song is not compatible with aphasia and a stuttering Amphion is an absurd figure indeed. No lyric can be read lyrically nor can the object of a lyrical reading be itself a lyric—which implies least of all that it is epical or dramatic. Baudelaire's own lyrical reading of "Correspondances," however, produced at least a text, the sonnet entitled "Obsession."

The opening of "Obsession" reads the first quatrain of "Correspondances" as if it were indeed a sylvan scene. It naturalizes the surreal speech of live columns into the frightening, but natural, roar of the wind among the trees:

> Grands bois, vous m'effrayez comme des cathédrales;
> Vous hurlez comme l'orgue;

The benefits of naturalization—as we can call the reversal of anthropomorphism—are at once apparent. None of the uncertainties that obscure the opening lines of "Correspondances" are maintained. No "comme" could be more orthodox than the two "commes" in these two lines. The analogism is so perfect that the implied anthropomorphism becomes fully motivated.

In this case, the unifying element is the wind as it is heard in whistling keyholes, roaring trees, and wind instruments such as church organs. Neither is there any need to invoke hallucination to account for the fear inspired by stormy forests and huge cathedrals: both are versions of the same dizziness of vast spaces. The adjustment of the elements involved (wood, wind, fear, cathedral, and organ) is perfectly self-enclosed, since all the pieces in the structure fit each other: wood and cathedral share a common shape, but wood also fits organ by way of the noise of the roaring wind; organ and cathedral, moreover, are linked by metonymy, etc. Everything 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.

Yet the power of the analogy, much more immediately compelling than that of synesthesia in "Correspondances," naturalizes even this most conventional trope of lyric address: when it is said, in line 4, that the terror of the wind corresponds to the subjective fear of death

> et dans nos coeurs maudits,
>
>   . . .
>
> Répondent les échos de vos *De profundis*,

then the analogy between outer event and inner feeling is again so close that the figural distance between noise (wind) and speech or even music almost vanishes, all the more so since

wind as well as death are designated by associated sounds: the howling of the wind and the penitential prayer, aural metonymy for death. As a result, the final attribution of speech to the woods (*vos* De profundis) appears so natural that it takes an effort to notice that anthropomorphism is involved. The claim to verbality in the equivalent line from "Correspondances," "Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent" seems fantastic by comparison. The omnipresent metaphor of interiorization, of which this is a striking example, here travels initially by ways of the ear alone.

The gain in pathos is such as to make the depth of *De profundis* the explicit theme of the poem. Instead of being the infinite expanse, the openness of "Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté," depth is now the enclosed space that, like the sound chamber of a violin, produces the inner vibration of emotion. We retrieve what was conspicuously absent from "Correspondances," the recurrent image of the subject's presence to itself as a spatial enclosure, room, tomb, or crypt in which the voice echoes as in a cave. The image draws its verisimilitude from its own "mise en abŷme" in the shape of the body as the *container* of the voice (or soul, heart, breath, consciousness, spirit, etc.) that it exhales. At the cost of much represented agony ("Chambres d'éternel deuil où vibrent de vieux râles), "Obsession" asserts its right to say "I" with full authority. The canon of romantic and post-romantic lyric poetry offers innumerable versions and variations of this inside/outside pattern of exchange that founds the metaphor of the lyrical voice as subject. In a parallel movement, reading interiorizes the meaning of the text by its understanding. The union of aesthetic with epistemological properties is carried out by the mediation of the metaphor of the self as consciousness of itself, which implies its negation.

The specular symmetry of the two texts is such that any instance one wishes to select at once involves the entire system with flawless consistency. The hellenic "temple" of "Correspondances," for example, becomes the Christian "cathédrale" of "Obsession," just as the denominative, impersonal

third person discourse of the earlier poem becomes the first person discourse of the later one. The law of this figural and chiastic transformation is negation. "Obsession" self-consciously denies and rejects the sensory wealth of "Correspondances." The landscape of denial from "De profundis clamavi":

> C'est un pays plus nu que la terre polaire;
> —Ni bêtes, ni ruisseaux, ni verdure, ni bois!

reappears as the desire of "Obsession":

> Car je cherche le vide, et le noir, et le nu!

in sharp denial of

> Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies

from "Correspondances." Similar negations pervade the texts, be it in terms of affects, moods, or grammar.

The negation, however, is indeed a figure of chiasmus, for the positive and negative valorizations can be distributed on both sides. We read "Obsession" thematically as an interiorization of "Correspondances," and as a negation of the positivity of an outside reality. But it is just as plausible to consider "Obsession" as the making manifest, as the exteriorization of the subject that remains hidden in "Correspondances." Naturalization, which appears to be a movement from inside to outside, allows for affective verisimilitude which moves in the opposite direction. In terms of figuration also, it can be said that "Correspondances" is the negation of "Obsession": the figural stability of "Obsession" is denied in "Correspondances." Such patterns constantly recur in nineteenth- and twentieth-century lyric poetry and create a great deal of critical confusion, symptomatic of further-reaching complexities.

The recuperative power of the subject metaphor in "Obsession" becomes particularly evident, in all its implications, in the tercets. As soon as the sounds of words are allowed, as in the opening stanza, to enter into analogical combinations with the sounds of nature, they necessarily turn into the light

imagery of representation and of knowledge. If the sounds of nature are akin to those of speech, then nature also speaks by ways of light, the light of the senses as well as of the mind. The philosophical phantasm that has concerned us throughout this reading, the reconciliation of knowledge with phenomenal, aesthetic experience, is summarized in the figure of speaking light which, as is to be expected in the dialectical mode of negation, is both denied and asserted:

> Comme tu me plairais, ô nuit! sans ces étoiles
> Dont *la lumière parle* un langage connu!

Light implies space which, in turn, implies the possibility of spatial differentiation, the play of distance and proximity that organizes perception as the foreground-background juxtaposition that links it to the aesthetics of painting. Whether the light emanates from outside us before it is interiorized by the eye, as is the case here in the perception of a star, or whether the light emanates from inside and projects the entity, as in hallucination or in certain dreams, makes little difference in this context. The metamorphic crossing between perception and hallucination

> Mais les ténèbres sont elles-mêmes des toiles
> Où vivent, jaillissant de mon oeil par milliers,
> Des êtres disparus aux regards familiers

occurs by means of the paraphernalia of painting, which is also that of recollection and of re-cognition, as the recovery, to the senses, of what seemed to be forever beyond experience. In an earlier outline, Baudelaire had written

> Mais les ténèbres sont elles-mêmes des toiles
> Où [peint] . . . (presumably for "se peignent"; *O.C.*,
>   1:981)

"Peint" confirms the reading of "toiles" as the device by means of which painters or dramatists project the space or the stage of representation, by enframing the interiorized expanse of the skies. The possibility of representation asserts itself at its most efficacious at the moment when the sensory plenitude of

"Correspondances" is most forcefully denied. The lyric depends entirely for its existence on the denial of phenomenality as the surest means to recover what it denies. This motion is not dependent, in its failure or in its illusion of success, on the good or the bad faith of the subject it constitutes.

The same intelligibility enlightens the text when the enigma of consciousness as eternal mourning ("Chambres d'éternel deuil où vibrent de vieux râles") is understood as the hallucinatory obsession of recollection, certainly easier to comprehend by shared experience than by esoteric *correspondances*. "Obsession" translates "Correspondances" into intelligibility, the least one can hope for in a successful reading. The resulting couple or pair of texts indeed becomes a model for the uneasy combination of funereal monumentality with paranoid fear that characterizes the hermeneutics and the pedagogy of lyric poetry.

Yet, this very title, "Obsession," also suggests a movement that may threaten the far-reaching symmetry between the two texts. For the temporal pattern of obsessive thought is directly reminiscent of the tautological, enumerative stutter we encountered in the double semantic function of "comme," which disrupted the totalizing claim of metaphor in "Correspondances." It suggests a psychological and therefore intelligible equivalent of what there appeared as a purely grammatical distinction, for there is no compelling thematic suggestion, in "comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens," that allows one to think of this list as compulsively haunting. The title "Obsession," or the last line of the poem, which names the ghostly memory of mourned absences, does therefore not correspond to the tension, deemed essential, between the expansiveness of "des choses infinies" and the restrictive catalogue of certain kinds of scents introduced by "comme." Yet, if the symmetry between the two texts is to be truly recuperative, it is essential that the disarticulation that threatens the first text should find its counterpart in the second: mere naturalization of a grammatical structure, which is how the relationship between enumeration and obsession can

be understood, will not suffice, since it is precisely the tension between an experienced and a purely linguistic disruption that is at issue. There ought to be a place, in "Obsession," where a similar contrast between infinite totalization and endless repetition of the same could be pointed out. No such place exists. At the precise point where one would expect it, at the moment when obsession is stressed in terms of number, "Obsession" resorts to synthesis by losing itself in the vagueness of the infinite

> Où vivent, jaillissant de mon oeil *par milliers,*
> Des êtres disparus aux regards familiers.

There could be no more decisive contrast, in *Les Fleurs du mal,* than between the reassuring indeterminacy of these infinite thousands—as one had, in "Correspondances," "des forêts"—and the numerical precision with which, in "Les sept vieillards" (*O.C.,* 1:87–88), it is the passage from one altogether finite to another altogether finite number that produces genuine terror:

> Aurais-je, sans mourir, contemplé le huitième,
> Sosie inexorable, ironique et fatal,
> Dégoûtant Phénix, fils et père de lui-même?
> —Mais je tournai le dos au cortège infernal.
>
> Exaspéré comme un ivrogne qui voit double,
> Je rentrai, je fermai ma porte, épouvanté,
> Malade et morfondu, l'esprit fiévreux et trouble,
> Blessé par le mystère et par l'absurdité!

Unlike "Obsession," "Les sept vieillards" can however in no respect be called a reading of "Correspondances," to which it in no way corresponds.

The conclusion is written into the argument which is itself written into the reading, a process of translation or "transport" that incessantly circulates between the two texts. There always are at least two texts, regardless of whether they are actually written out or not; the relationship between the two

sonnets, obligingly provided by Baudelaire for the benefit, no doubt, of future teachers invited to speak on the nature of the lyric, is an inherent characteristic of any text. Any text, as text, compels reading as its understanding. What we call the lyric, the instance of represented voice, conveniently spells out the rhetorical and thematic characteristics that make it the paradigm of a complementary relationship between grammar, trope, and theme. The set of characteristics includes the various structures and moments we encountered along the way: specular symmetry along an axis of assertion and negation (to which correspond the generic mirror-images of the ode, as celebration, and the elegy, as mourning), the grammatical transformation of the declarative into the vocative modes of question, exclamation, address, hypothesis, etc., the tropological transformation of analogy into apostrophe or the equivalent, more general transformation which, with Nietzsche's assistance, we took as our point of departure: the transformation of trope into anthropomorphism. The lyric is not a genre, but one name among several to designate the defensive motion of understanding, the possibility of a future hermeneutics. From this point of view, there is no significant difference between one generic term and another: all have the same apparently intentional and temporal function.

We all perfectly and quickly understand "Obsession," and better still the motion that takes us from the earlier to the later text. But no symmetrical reversal of this lyrical reading-motion is conceivable; if Baudelaire, as is eminently possible, were to have written, in empirical time, "Correspondances" after "Obsession," this would change nothing. "Obsession" derives from "Correspondances" but the reverse is not the case. Neither does it account for it as its origin or cause. "Correspondances" implies and explains "Obsession" but "Obsession" leaves "Correspondances" as thoroughly incomprehensible as it always was. In the paraphernalia of literary terminology, there is no term available to tell us what "Correspondances" might be. All we know is that it is, emphatically, *not* a lyric. Yet it, and it alone, contains, implies, pro-

duces, generates, permits (or whatever aberrant verbal metaphor one wishes to choose) the entire possibility of the lyric. Whenever we encounter a text such as "Obsession"— that is, whenever we read—there always is an infra-text, a hypogram like "Correspondances" underneath. Stating this relationship, as we just did, in phenomenal, spatial terms or in phenomenal, temporal terms—"Obsession," a text of recollection and elegiac mourning, *adds* remembrance to the flat surface of time in "Correspondances"—produces at once a hermeneutic, fallacious lyrical reading of the unintelligible. The power that takes one from one text to the other is not just a power of displacement, be it understood as recollection or interiorization or any other "transport," but the sheer blind violence that Nietzsche, concerned with the same enigma, domesticated by calling it, metaphorically, an *army* of tropes.

Generic terms such as "lyric" (or its various sub-species, "ode," "idyll," or "elegy") as well as pseudo-historical period terms such as "romanticism" or "classicism" are always terms of resistance and nostalgia, at the furthest remove from the materiality of actual history. If mourning is called a "chambre d'éternel deuil où vibrent de vieux râles," then this pathos of terror states in fact the desired consciousness of eternity and of temporal harmony as voice and as song. True "mourning" is less deluded. The most *it* can do is to allow for non-comprehension and enumerate non-anthropomorphic, non-elegiac, non-celebratory, non-lyrical, non-poetic, that is to say, prosaic, or, better, *historical* modes of language power.

10
Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*

IN A letter to Körner dated February 23, 1793, Schiller gave the following description of the perfect aesthetic society:

> I know of no better image for the ideal of a beautiful society than a well executed English dance, composed of many complicated figures and turns. A spectator located on the balcony observes an infinite variety of criss-crossing motions which keep decisively but arbitrarily changing directions without ever colliding with each other. Everything has been arranged in such a manner that each dancer has already vacated his position by the time the other arrives. Everything fits so skilfully, yet so spontaneously, that everyone seems to be following his own lead, without ever getting in anyone's way. Such a dance is the perfect· symbol of one's own individually asserted freedom as well as of one's respect for the freedom of the other.[1]

Schiller's English translators and commentators, Elizabeth Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, cite the passage as a fitting description of Schiller's main theoretical text, the *Letters on the*