From the Editor's Desk

Dear Reader,

Because I am graduating in a few short weeks, I have been thinking about the education I will carry with me after leaving UD. My memory is not particularly reliable, but certain phrases and moments have struck me so forcefully that they have echoed through my mind ever since.

In Lit Trad I, Dr. Crider described Homer as magnanimous, as a great-souled man. His soul was large enough to hold the sins, sorrows, and virtues of two cities and all the inhabitants of each. I remember wondering, or perhaps Dr. Crider asked us, “Is your soul large enough to hold even one other person?”

Sophomore year, Dr. Roper asked at the beginning of every class, “How shall we do good today?” One year ago, Dr. Gregory wrote that those leaving UD should be seized with anticipation, not fear. At a time when the thought of leaving UD seemed like disaster, her words were, in equal parts, comforting and inspiring.

This year, the faculty advisor of this very publication returned often to the idea of a text’s ability to make readers “empathically imaginative,” able to enter into the most intimate loves and sufferings of a character and consequently expand their moral vision. The heroine of my senior novel says to her spouse, “You were always on the outside of our love,” while my poet says to his, “that long love . . . [i]s a wild sostenuto of the heart.”

The Western Canon that we study has become precious to me through these and other resonant phrases which enshrine great works in my personal canon. In my mind, these expressions all come to have the character of a challenge to stretch my understanding and sympathy. So I invite you, dear reader, to enjoy this publication and to examine the challenges that your time at the University of Dallas has inspired.

Thank you,

Theresa Guin
Editor-in-Chief
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One of the greatest paradoxes that man faces in his struggle to communicate is that language, the very tool he employs to convey his thoughts and experiences, often functions as a barrier to his audience’s understanding. While language is a sign of the intellect and is useful in the transmission of ideas between persons, it fulfills its role only imperfectly. Dante struggles with this fundamental difficulty of inexpressibility from the opening verses of his Divine Comedy to the last lines, as he invites his audience to perceive the truth beyond the “veil of verses.”

Although he uses silence to signify a departure from human nature in the Inferno, he changes his tune in the Purgatorio, and again uses silence, though in an entirely different capacity, in the spheres of Paradiso. Interestingly, the theme of inexpressibility appears at both the commencement and the end of his journey, and through Dante encounters silence more vividly as a sign of distorted intellect in Hell, he finds that silence in Heaven signifies an admission of the universally human inability to express that which transcends the boundaries of man’s materiality.

From the commencement of his magnum opus, Dante reflects upon the difficulties of communication, especially under the influence of sin: “Ah, it is hard to speak of what it was, / that savage forest, dense and difficult, / which even man inability to express that which transcends the boundaries of man’s materiality.

Dante expresses the boundaries to his human abilities, especially when under spiritual attack. The “savages forest” signifies the brambles of temptation in which man often finds himself entangled. Dante recognizes that he has “lost the path that does not stray,” and that while trapped in this benighted wood, a dimly lit and limited range of understanding and communication confines his intellect and consequently his faculty of language. However, this does not prevent him from trying to transcend those boundaries. In many instances, Dante relies upon his own reason, or upon the reason of Virgil as his guide, to explain and explore the implications of the phenomena he encounters. He exhorts his audience to do likewise, “O you possessed of sturdy intellects, / observe the teaching that is hidden here / beneath the veil of verses so obscure.” While Dante acknowledges the possibility that readers may misinterpret what he intends to communicate, he still invokes human “intellects” and reason as the fundamental powers by which man can attain the fullness of the hidden truths to which he alludes.

The Poet accentuates this call to a reasoned pursuit of the truth, which verbal signs may obscure, in his encounter with Francesca and Paolo, for it is not only what Francesca says that convinces Dante, but also what she leaves unsaid. Francesca remains conspicuously silent regarding her own agency in her adultery with her brother-in-law, but instead blames Love, the story of Lancelot, and even the story’s author, while omitting herself as the actual aggressor. Her three-fold accusation against Love as the power that “quickly seizes the gentle heart, / [. . .] releases no beloved from loving, / [. . . and] led the two of us unto one death!” implies that she wants Dante to impute hers and Paolo’s faults not to themselves but to that which transcended them in the moment of their downfall.

The Pilgrim echoes her sentiments of blame when he asks, “[W]ith what and in what way did Love allow you / to recognize your still uncertain longings?” The ruse works to convince Dante that Love alone is responsible, but because Francesca’s words cloud his reason and ability to judge whether those words are actually true or only a veil of pretty verses behind which she conceals her guilt.

A further investigation of Francesca’s tale of woe highlights the role of sin in silence and how it impairs right reason. She speaks of how she and Paolo were reading “[of] Lancelot—how love had overcome him. / We were alone, and we suspected nothing.” She remains ambiguously silent regarding what it was they might have suspected. Whether they were unsuspecting of the power of their “aggressor” Love, the possibility of her husband discovering them, or the occasion of sin into which they had directly placed themselves, she does not say. Here it seems that she is silent either because sin impairs her ability to reasonably consider her situation or because she intentionally omits certain details to garner pity from the Pilgrim. The sin of lust impairs both hers and Lancelot’s ability to resist that which they know to be immoral or to foresee the consequences of permitting temptation, which they both do by spending time alone with the person for whom they have a forbidden attraction. Both she and Lancelot also give into the temptation and engage in illicit activities, thereby impairing their ability to use the full capacity of their intellects. Francesca narrates how Paolo, “while all his body trembled, kissed my mouth. / A Gallehault indeed, that book and he / who wrote it, too; that day we read no more.” However, Francesca blames Paolo as the one to make the first move, though interestingly it is Guinevere, not Lancelot, who kisses her lover first, implying that perhaps Francesca is withholding a key part of the story.

She also draws attention to the fact that the kiss silences them, for they “read no more,” presumably because their mouths were otherwise occupied. In Francesca’s case, therefore, sin impairs language not only because it disposes the sinner to dishonesty, but also because it weakens the sinner’s ability to perceive and then communicate the reality of the circumstances and potential consequences of the sin.

Paolo himself exemplifies the extreme to which evil can degrade intellect, for he remains weeping by the side of Francesca, silent throughout her entire discourse with Dante. However, his silence differs significantly from his counterpart’s: Francesca’s silence appears to be an abuse of language, whereas Paolo’s is a disuse. He cannot speak, either because Francesca leaves him no opportunity to

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2 Ibid., 1.4-6.
3 Ibid., 1.3.
4 Ibid., 9. 61-63.
5 Inf. 5.100, 103, 106.
6 Ibid., 5.119-120.
7 Ibid., 5.128-129.
8 Ibid., 5.136-138.
9 Notes 558.
do so, or because his sorrow incapacitates him. Whichever the case, silence here becomes a sign of inferiority and weakness of intellect and will, for he can neither form the words to communicate nor assert himself over Francesca, who at least retains the power of language despite her part in their sin. Interestingly, Francesca also never mentions a moment when Paolo exercised the power of language to dissuade her from adultery, but rather indicates that he chose to yield to the voice of “[their] Gallehault.” Thus, while in life he allowed himself to be defeated by the suggestions of passionate words, he remains forever enslaved to silence and to the winds of passion, which negate his ability to express intellect or any movement of the will against sin. Literary critic Renato Poggioli indicates the shame of Paolo’s impotence when he suggests that Dante scorns men like Paolo who are “the slaves, rather than the masters of love.” By yielding himself to the false promises of love, Paolo also subjects all of his intellectual faculties, including that of language, to the slavery of sin.

Francesca also points to a lesson regarding the moral responsibility of the writer to discern when best to speak and when best to remain silent. Francesca blames “that book and he / who wrote it” for leading hers and Paolo’s imaginations from innocence into sin. Although the lovers are fully culpable for their sin, the questions with which the Poet struggles throughout the entire Divine Comedy comes to the fore, namely what the responsibility of the writer is to the reader and what the responsibility of the reader is to the text. He suggests that even though an author may not write a book with the intent to lead persons astray, there is still potential for abuse by the reader. To avoid this abuse altogether, then, ought a writer to remain silent in such cases and omit tales of what is sinful or horrific? The Poet does not receive a definitive answer until he meets Cacciaguida, who encourages Dante to write down everything he sees as a witness to the truth, “For if, at the first taste, your words molest, / they will, when they have been digested, / as living nourishment.” Even though his words may potentially lead readers astray, the fault lies with them if they do not analyze his work for the profound moral lessons behind “the veil of verses.” The Poet seems to suggest, “Immoral literature may influence life, but not in such a way as to pattern life after itself.” The choice to imitate immoral characters is the choice of the reader, not the fault of the writer. In defense of literature, and probably with his own work in mind, Dante mentions neither the book nor the Arthurian poet among the damned in the Circle of the Lustful. Rather, Francesca and Paolo suffer the pains of their torment there together. The Poet admonishes those who use the written words of men as an excuse for personal failings by placing Francesca and Paolo in the Inferno as a cautionary example against those who use books or poetry to justify their sins when they ought to have sought for the moral lessons that lie at those texts’ conclusions.

Despite his hope that his readers will pursue a more profound understanding of his words, Dante does acknowledge the shortcomings of the human tongue. He uses loss of language as a sign of the degradation of human intellect and as a symbol of bestiality. The inexpressibility of some of the damned in Hell particularly perfects the contrapasso of punishments assigned to souls, because such lack of communication expresses the limitations of humanity. As one example among many, Nimrod, “through whose wicked thought / one single language cannot serve the world,” can no longer rationally communicate and must babble in a tongue that no one understands for the rest of eternity. Because of his sin, which is itself an abuse of freedom and rational will, inexpressibility enslaves his distorted intellect in the same way that he “enslaved” truth to his falsehood, thereby corrupting it to serve his own ends. To anyone besides Nimrod, his reason appears to have been silenced, for he can no longer express his thoughts through any mode that holds significance for those with whom he might speak. Humans need language to communicate. The words or signs of that language must be of a form that signifies the same or a sufficiently similar definition to a person’s interlocutors as it does to the speaker. Thus, Nimrod is deprived of the means of language by which he sinned, a fitting punishment for his offense and a sign of his descent into bestiality that results from loss of intellect. In Hell, therefore, Dante at least recognizes that sin, which garbles human intellect, contributes to difficulties in communication, though he does not yet fully acknowledge that his very mortality, not just his concupiscence, affects his own linguistic abilities as well as the language of all mankind.

Stanley Benfell notes, “Nimrod’s sin led to man’s linguistic fall, reminiscent of Adam’s fall in Eden and the fall of Noah’s society, and was significant because it led to the corruption of language that had been divinely created with Adam and Eve and which was, like all things divinely created, incorruptible.” He likens the magnitude of the sin to that of original sin and the cumulative sin of man that prompted God to reconstruct humanity from Noah’s lineage, which indicates the gravity of evils that directly corrupt language. Benfell also suggests, as does the Poet through the words of Adam in the Sphere of the Fixed Stars, that language is godlike and transcends what is strictly human: “That man should speak at all is nature’s act, / but how you speak—in this tongue or in that— / she leaves to you and your preference.” Nature, the instrument of the Creator that extends beyond man’s finite being, is the source of the power of language. Nimrod corrupts the power of language, and as punishment God leaves the choice of the particular language to the individual, thus propagating division among different tongues. These particular languages participate in the divine intellect from which they stem, yet they remain corruptions of the language that God gave to man and thus lead to an inexpressibility and silence resulting from barriers in communication even between speakers of the same tongue.

An apparent paradox arises as Dante enters the heavenly spheres: that not only Hell but also Heaven itself is governed by a principle of inexpressibility. However, in contrast to the silence of the damned, which results from the sins of

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11 *Par*. 17.130-132.

12 Benfell, V. Stanley. “Nimrod, the Ascent to Heaven and Dante’s ‘ovra inconsummabile.’” Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society vol. 110, 1992, pp. 77

13 *Ifig*. 31.67-81.

14 Benfell, V. Stanley. “Nimrod, the Ascent to Heaven and Dante’s ‘ovra inconsummabile.’” Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society vol. 110, 1992, pp. 77

the souls there, the silence that pervades Heaven signifies that man is no longer bound by the need for words. All souls comprehend each other perfectly because those souls exist in such close proximity to perfect Truth that there is no barrier between their understanding and another’s thoughts. In contrast, Dante suffers from inexpressibility as a result of his mortality, for his finitude can neither comprehend nor communicate the infinite without considerable confusion. Beatrice comments while they are within the sphere of Mercury, still far from the center of Heaven: “But I now see your understanding tangled / by thought on thought into a knot, from which, / with much desire, your mind awaits release.” As Dante the Pilgrim, still bound by his mortality, travels toward his ultimate destination, the limitations of his temporal understanding become more obvious. Beatrice understands this and caters to his limitations by gradually rendering his verbal communication unnecessary through her answers to the thoughts she sees in his heart, especially as he approaches the throne of God.

The Pilgrim’s encounter with Cacciaguida also illustrates the inexpressibility from which Dante suffers within the heights of Heaven. Here, the pure soul is not actually silent, but his words so surpass Dante’s understanding that he himself cannot formulate the words with which he might express Cacciaguida’s high language. As Dante stands between Cacciaguida and Beatrice, he recalls that he, “On this side and on that, was stupefied.” Among the souls that constantly share in before the Fall, he wishes to signify, he cannot even attempt to find signs that might capture the infinite, for of what theme other than that of the Eternal could Cacciaguida have been speaking? Dante confirms this assumption when he writes, “These were the first words where I caught the sense: / ‘Blessed be you, both Three and One.’”

Through Dante’s recollections, the readers catch the end of what seems to be a litany of praise and thanksgiving to the Trinity, a litany that surpasses mortal imagination and tongue.

Indeed, the nearer he draws to God the Father and Spirit in union with the Eternal Word incarnate in God the Son, the more human language becomes obsolete, even among the souls. Dante interrogates one of them regarding this very matter while in the sphere of Saturn, asking “why the sweet symphony of Paradise / is silent in this heaven, while, below, / it sounds devoutly through the other spheres.” The blessed soul implies that because Dante is still mortal, any singing would so overwhelm his senses and intellect that he might never awake to return to his temporal life, again gesturing to Dante’s limitations as a material human being. Dante also recognizes that his speech would signify the boundaries of his understanding, for his temporal experiences and materiality confine his ability to convey through language what he wishes to say. Thus, he asks his questions vocally beyond this sphere less frequently, nor need he do so since the heavenly souls perfectly comprehend his thoughts. At last the Pilgrim comes to the final conclusion that language signifies a barrier that he, as a material being bound by his limited experience, cannot cross regardless of his human mastery, and that he must humbly submit to inexpressibility which veils the throne of Truth.

Dante the Poet also realizes the limits of his humanity, and though he continues to detail the Pilgrim’s journey towards Primal Love, he allows himself to be bound by inexpressibility as well. Speaking of Beatrice in the sphere of the Fixed Stars, the Poet contents himself with a brief explanation: “It seemed to me her face was all aflame, / and there was so much gladness in her eyes— / I am compelled to leave it undescribed.” Her face not only reflects a perfect love for God, but also a perfected form of the divine image within her human soul. Thus, Dante’s intellect and language begin to fail in the face of God’s image even before he beholds the consummation of that image at the height of Heaven. Within the same canto, the Poet excuses himself once more: “And this, in representing Paradise, / the sacred poem has to leap across, / as does a man who finds his path cut off.” Both the Poet and the Pilgrim reach the same conclusion, that the material and imperfect part of their human nature inevitably prevents their effective communication. In both instances, the action is passive, implying that Dante would describe the glories of Heaven if such a task were within his power. Here a barrier arises that is not of Dante’s creation, but one that proceeds from the limits of his mortality. He is the man “who finds his path cut off,” and thus he must permit his “sacred poem,” the collection of his words and language, to omit some transcendent details of Paradise. Silence here does not signify the vanity of the Poet, which might deter him from sharing the beauty of his art, but rather intimates a humble admission, a complete prostration before the Creator as the only source of profound understanding of what grace and joy man was meant to share in before the Fall.

In the presence of the Trinity, the climax of his journey, and the perfection of his “wonder and joy,” Dante admits, “From that point on, what I could

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16 Par. 7.52-54.
17 Ibid., 15.33.
18 Ibid., 15.40-42.
19 Ibid., 15.39.
20 Ibid., 15.46-47.
21 Par. 21.58-60.
22 Ibid., 22.31-36.
23 Ibid., 23.22-24.
24 Ibid., 23.61-63.
see was greater / than speech can show: at such a sight, it fails.”

As he perceives for himself the secrets of that heavenly sanctuary, Dante once more draws the veil before the entrance of the tabernacle of Truth, begging for the reverence of his readers as they approach and enter as individuals into a full understanding of what he wishes to reveal. As he contemplates the vision of the Trinity, the Poet laments, “How incomplete is speech, how weak, when set / against my thought! And this to what I saw / is such—to call it little is too much.”

Neither the Poet nor the Pilgrim can begin to speak the glories of one of the greatest mysteries to man’s mind, for even to say that language can communicate the smallest portion of this vision would be an impious and prideful exaggeration of the human word in the face of the Divine Word. Here silence is best, and though he sees for a brief moment the fullness of the mystery, he resigns himself to inexpressibility as an admission of the limitations of human language to signify the sign he receives.

Perhaps the greatest paradox, and arguably the greatest tragedy, of language is that it inexorably fails to convey exactly what one understands. Dante, although he first points to inexpressibility as a result of sin which denies truth and consequently corrupts man’s intellect, ultimately reaches the understanding that language is a sign of man’s very impotence, the limitations of his mortality. The Poet, as a mortal, cannot speak of that which the “veil of verses” must hide, a metaphorical and, at least for the Pilgrim, a literal Holy of Holies. The Platonic idea of epistemology, that man can only be led so far towards understanding and must come to the final stage on his own, applies perfectly to the spiritual journey on which the Poet and Pilgrim lead the reader. Thus, Dante challenges each member of his audience to see beyond the language that obscures his true meaning and to pursue understanding for themselves of that which transcends human boundaries.

Walk the Plank
By Mary-Catherine Scarlett

Builders with their wooden planks attempt
To make a comfortable dwelling.
Using a compass
To construct with sines
And tangents; only produce splintered crossbeams.
Structure they those into a skeleton
Advertising the greatness lying within.
Gloating on a sinking boat
With the flag
Half
Mast.
Hypocrites are swift to forget that none
Are as bad or good as they seem to be.
Our brains drained through cheesecloth
Run thin.
Real villains outviture false heroes.

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20 Par. 33.55-56.
21 Ibid., 33.121-123.
The World As Meditation
By Genevieve Frank

Wallace Stevens is often described as a meditative poet. What does this description mean? His poetry is not meditative in the sense of clearing away all thoughts and desires. Rather, his poetry often reflects upon how one’s perception of the world is actively shaped by one’s desires. As Stevens progressed in his life, he began to explore more and more the relationship between the world that one perceives and the actual outside world, and how this relationship changes in response to desire. Meditation, for Stevens, is a reflective and receptive process by which one reconciles oneself with the world around one. A poem that demonstrates this particularly well is “The World As Meditation,” which comes from Stevens’s last volume of poetry published during his lifetime, entitled The Rock.

“The World As Meditation” exemplifies the meditative cycle of desire, creation, and decreation that Stevens saw as central to poetry and to life.

On a literal level, the poem, which is written in tercets, describes Penelope as she waits for the return of her husband Ulysses, “the interminable adventurer.” As the sun rises, she imagines herself and Ulysses together. This imagining ends as she combs her hair and repeats his name to herself, “never forgetting him that kept coming constantly so near.” Although this literal meaning seems at first rather simple, there are several ambiguities in the text that lead the reader to understand the poem on a deeper level. First, Stevens writes, “a form of fire approaches the cretonnes of Penelope, whose mere savage presence awakens the world in which she dwells.” It is not clear whether the pronoun “whose” is referring to Penelope or to the “form of fire,” which the reader assumes is the sun, although even this is unclear. The first line of the poem asks, “Is it Ulysses that approaches from the east?” The poem later says, “someone is moving on the horizon and lifting himself up above it.” It is unclear whether Stevens is referring to the sun or to Ulysses, since he speaks of both as moving along the horizon and approaching from the east.

This textual ambiguity, a characteristic feature of Stevens’ poetry, draws the reader into the deeper meaning of the poem. Andrew Osborn writes about Stevens’s “sense of unclarity or complication as crucial to the experience of reading poetry.” He quotes Stevens himself who states that “one cannot always say a thing clearly and retain the poetry of what one is saying.” For Stevens, “uncertainty and interpretive impedence . . . are crucial to the desired relationship a reader has with the poem” and are, therefore, “not an important stage on the way toward understanding but the end itself.” The ambiguity, for example, of the pronoun “whose” in the 6th line of the poem, is intentionally unresolved. Since the reader does not know if it is the sun or Penelope that “awakens the world in which she dwells,” he is led to consider carefully what each option means. If it is the sun that awakens her world, it would seem that Stevens is talking about dawn and the natural world. However, if it is Penelope who awakens her world, then one becomes aware of a sense in which Penelope dwells in a world of her own imagination.

This idea of Penelope as the creator of her world is continued in Stevens’ description of her imagining. He writes, “she has composed, so long, a self with which to welcome him [Ulysses], companion to his self for her, which she imagined.” Her imagined self and his meet in a “deep founded sheltering;” his arms are “the final fortune of her desire.” This is more than a daydream; for Penelope, the imagination she composes of her reunion with Ulysses is in itself an experience of him. Her composition is so strong that it leads the poem to ask, “But was it Ulysses? Or was it only the warmth of the sun on her pillow?” Somehow, the sun and Ulysses have become one and the same for Penelope. Just as the sun moves along the horizon and approaches from the east, Ulysses keeps “coming constantly so near.” Thus, the poem answers the question ambiguously; “It was Ulysses and it was not. Yet they had met.” Although Ulysses is not physically present, Penelope’s composed imaginings of herself and him truly have met in a way that brings Ulysses to her world just as the sun rises.

At this point in the interpretive process, the epigraph from George Enesco, a French violinist, becomes especially relevant. The translation reads, “I have spent too much time practicing my violin, and traveling. But the essential exercise of the composer—meditation—has never stopped in me. . . . I live in a permanent dream, which ceases neither night nor day.” As Enesco goes about his daily actions of practicing and traveling, he composes a “permanent dream” through meditation, in which he lives. Likewise, Penelope composes her experience of the world around her. In her article “Penelope’s Creative Desiring,” Loren Rusk writes, “Penelope composes in the sense of selecting and putting together impressions of external reality to constitute her world.” In order to do this, Rusk writes, “the poet must ‘compose herself’ in the sense of achieving a meditative, receptive state.” Through meditation, the rising sun becomes an experience of Ulysses.

The poem builds a full description of Penelope’s imagined composition, then asks a question that begins to deconstruct this creation. The ambiguous text at the beginning equates Ulysses and the sun, leading to a description of “the final fortune of their desire,” which ends with a turn in the argument when the speaker

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2 Ibid., 24.
3 Ibid., 5-6.
4 Ibid., 1.
5 Ibid., 3-4.
6 Ibid., 7.
of the poem asks if it is Ulysses or the sun that Penelope imagines. In his book Late Stevens: The Final Fiction, B. J. Leggett writes of Steven’s artistic cycle of desire. Out of poverty, such as Ulysses’ absence, comes desire. This desire demands to be satisfied by a “final fortune,” but this aim is impossible since “our desires can never be permanently satisfied.”

Penelope’s imagination of Ulysses is her attempt to satisfy this desire. However, as with any temporary satisfaction, it soon grows stale and must be thrown aside to make way for a new creation that can satisfy the same desire. This process of composing and decreation is what Penelope does quite literally with her loom. Stevens uses language having to do with fabric, such as “mended” and “cretonnes” to strengthen this association. Just as Penelope weaves fabric then unravels it, the poem weaves together Ulysses and the sun into an imagined experience of his presence, then unravels it. It ends with the very material actions of speaking and combing hair, demonstrating Penelope’s return to an awareness of the material world around her.

This meditative process is what Stevens understands not only as the central work of a poet, but also as the central act of life. Penelope, through her “barbarous strength,” reconciles herself to the absence of Ulysses by composing a world in which she can dwell, sustained by her own imaginings. Her work is to create, then decrreate, always in search of the final fortune of her desire, yet constantly being brought back to the repetitive rising of the sun and the mundane tasks of the material world. By paralleling Enesco and Penelope, Stevens leads the reader to ponder “the ways in which the human being composes his or her world” in a sort of “mental creation.” The artist, and especially the poet, are focused on this process itself, which Penelope exemplifies in the poem. Therefore, as Rusk writes, “the artist we find in Penelope becomes another figural analogue- for a general human ideal, the well-developed, ever-inventing imagination.” Penelope represents not only the poet but humanity itself. Joseph Riddel reaffirms this idea when he writes that, for Stevens, “life and poetry are one.” That is, the central task of living is the act of meditation by which one composes and recomposes the world in which one lives.

“The World As Meditation” provides a key to understanding Wallace Stevens as a meditative poet. Through textual ambiguity, precise argumentative structure, and specific vocabulary, Stevens creates poems that draw the reader into a receptive and meditative state. In this state, the readers may experience different perceptions of the world, such as Penelope’s perception of the sun as Ulysses, and reflect upon their own perception of the world as it is shaped by desire. What makes Stevens’s poetry so powerful is that it undergoes this process with the poet’s full knowledge that all meditative imaginings or compositions must be destroyed then rebuilt. Stevens possesses a remarkable knowledge of human desire and is able to communicate the way that this desire shapes one’s perception with great subtlety. His poetry, like Penelope’s love for Ulysses, points toward a “final fortune” of desire that keeps “coming constantly so near” yet is never fully realized. Through his “barbarous strength” as a poet, this cycle of unsatisfied desire is transformed into poems of great beauty that reconcile the readers to the world around them.
Goatliness
By Gabrielle Drong

There was once a goat named Gerald
Who wished to know the truth
So he chose to study metaphysics
And became a Plato sleuth.

But caves and shadows are confusing
And Gerald was no fool;
He went in one but soon declared
The Republic would be his tool.

After endless nights of reading
And fashioning a crown
He tried to form his city-state
But his family turned it down

The Symposium was his next choice
(it should have been the first)
But after drinking endlessly
He thought love was the worst.

Maybe Aristotle would be better,
He followed Plato, after all
But mixing form and matter
Only lead to his downfall.

Gerald looked to Kant and Nietzsche
And puzzled with Sartre’s flair;
Augustine he discredited
Because he loved his pears.

Perhaps he wasn’t quite prepared
To see how philosophers vary
But his search ended on the day
He found truth in the dictionary.
“Helen asked me how we’ve been married for so long.”

Her husband didn’t glance her way, didn’t turn his fading gaze away from the tow-headed child playing in the leaves, his tiny suit jacket discarded somewhere in the house, folded over with gentle hands just trying to be helpful.

“And what did you say?” Her husband asked, his tone as acerbic as the nicotine tainted rasp to his throat. The woman sat down on the refurbished wooden rocking chair, across from him, heavily, as if bringing the weight of the world down with her.

What did she say? What could she say? In that moment, in her carefully decorated kitchen, with its smattering of blue paisley crockery and dishware spread about, standing in front of a kindly curious neighbor, she had been more terrified of the enormity of the life behind and before her, more afraid than she had been hours ago, whilst staring at the split ground now bearing a coffin. It seemed impossible to fit two whole lifetimes into a blythe tidbit of advice for an enviously eager woman, who wore her longing like a scarf twisted around her neck.

The old woman had no idea how to begin to unravel the tangled, messy fragments that twisted and melted together. Should she start at the ostensible beginning? Maybe it began with gilded gold cursive impressed upon heavy cream parchment declaring Fred Swifte’s intention to marry Myrtle James before God and all their peers. Each curl and loop of the fancy letters imitating the way Myrtle’s stomach dipped and twirled when she held Fred’s gaze as she walked down the aisle.

Should she speak about the middle, the moments of chaos and carnage in the form of screaming children, one with a sagging diaper and another with pigtails askew and a ruddy freckled face, screaming in time to the steady pounding of her mother’s head? The frustration and steady unsnarling of her husband — his eyes and his frayed threadbare suit, as his shaking hand reached for another glass?

The end then, perhaps, the embittered fights, the silences that extended throughout the too-big house, the stretches of gazes and longing for each other from the other side of the room. The moments of swelling tension as they edged nearer and nearer the precipice of the uncertainty they had always feared and flirted with, right up to the moment when life seemed to pause, so the world could fall apart.
Instead, she had thought of the stacks of paper, the research and articles, tucked away in the long-forgotten attic, underneath the dusty degrees that no longer bore the right name. A regret she had always held like a badge of bitterness, until she had stood in the overly bright sunroom, days before standing there with Helen, her hands firm and unyielding, holding her daughter together as the pieces cracked and shattered underneath the great and horrible burden of the worst sort of homecoming no one ever could have expected - dust to dust, ashes to ashes.

“I told her that we learned to forgive each other for all that we never achieved.”

Her husband hummed softly, a low vibration in the back of his throat that reverberated through the universe, and her heart beat to the rhythm, steady inside the cage of her ribs. Their joint gazes traveled over to their grandson, giggling at the leaves he threw in the air, their hands twining together on the table, of their own accord.

**Execution**

*By Maura Derr*

It was cruel because it was nearly sunrise and
The colors were beginning to spread and would
Soon become their eyes.

Four shoes were shined by a man in blue and it was morning,
but before it was dawn, and while it was still dark.
His reflection was already that of a phantom, so he combed his hair in slow movements. Today it was especially grey.
The other man, in the orange shirt and the orange pants and rough hands,
Crossed himself and apologized, “Lord, I’m sorry I’ve been away.”
The birds answered with sad melodies and
There was a quick, sharp whistle from the man in blue.
Good Morning, Sir. (The most beautiful morning).
They walked and four feet felt especially heavy and today,
They were particularly aware of pumping blood and thinning flesh and life
(The most beautiful morning I can remember, Sir).
They walked in the vast and empty silence with a click clack of polished shoes.
They walked towards a hill decorated with two chairs and four men,
Four rifles and the rising sun.

They crossed themselves, “Lord, remember me- I’m sorry I’ve been away.”
The sun rose upon the setting of two souls.
Origen: The Nuptial Relationship Between Man and the Triune God
By Jean-Paul Juge

Often tragically misunderstood, the brilliant Origen of Alexandria revolutionized theology with his speculative propensities and his passion for finding Christ in the Sacred Scriptures. Though the unofficial Church politics of centuries past have marred his reputation with accusations of heresy, Origen wished above all to be a “man of the Church . . . not . . . the founder of a heresy.” 1 Origen’s true legacy can be found in the multitude of orthodox saints (Saints Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Bernard of Clairvaux to name just a few) who built off of the foundations that he laid. 2 At the center of Origen’s theology one encounters the eternal Word (logos) of God who manifests himself to each depending on his capacity. These manifestations of the Word include its image, the human soul, as well as the Incarnation of the Word in the man Jesus Christ and the Incarnation of the Word in the scriptures. 3 The purpose of the Word’s self-revelation is to unite mankind with himself and then hand over all creation to the Father so that history will be consummated and God will be “all in all.” 4 For Origen, God becomes “all in all” through the Word’s Incarnation and nuptial relation to his Church, which thereby involves the Church in the drama of the immanent Trinity, especially with respect to the Word’s eternal generation.

A topic that merits a brief examination before the foregoing analysis is Origen’s understanding of the human soul as made in the image of the Word, who is himself the Image of God the Father. Crouzel writes that, for Origen, man is the “image of the image” because “[i]nly the Christ is in the strict sense the image of God” and this is “by his divinity alone.” 5 For Origen, being made in the image of God means having the capacity to participate in the divine life and become like God. 6 It is the telos of all creatures to “become like God as much as possible” if the soul is perfected in this way it regains the likeness to God that was lost in the fall. 7 The participation of the human soul in the true source of life, the Word, makes it “spirit” and it thus that the soul shares in the “eternity of the divine goodness.” 8 It must be remembered amid all talk of spiritual progress, perfection, and participation that these originate and depend entirely on God’s grace. 9

Origen says that all creatures with a rational nature have some share in the one Word who is reason itself. However, this share can increase or decrease in individuals. 9 The Word is intimately near to the human soul and is the same reason that is sinned against by those who refuse to follow God’s law. 10 Importantly, the Word is most “living and active” (Heb 4:12) in those who “carry in their body the death of Jesus” (2 Cor 4:10). 11 The influence of the Word on man is not indifferent to the Word’s Incarnation in Christ. Rather, “[h]ad he not become man, no benefit would have come to us from the Word.” 12 By his Incarnation, Christ the Word paves the way for mankind to share in his crucifixion and thus enjoy the life of his resurrection: “the human nature, by communion with the divine, would itself become divine.” 13 The Incarnation of the Word in the man Jesus is not for its own sake but so that the Word may ultimately be incarnated in his mystical body, the Church. 14

The Old Testament, particularly Hosea, portrays Israel as YHWH’s spouse and the New Testament adopts and develops this imagery with Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church. For Origen, the central text from Scripture regarding this theme is the Song of Songs, attributed to Solomon, which narrates the marriage between King Solomon and his bride. Though Tertullian and Hippolytus had both interpreted the Song of Songs as a love poem between God and the soul, Origen was the first to systematically analyze that particular book and explain how both the soul and the Church are the spouse of Christ the Bridegroom. 15

Origen writes, “it is the church which has sprung from Christ’s side [recall the lance that pierced him on the cross] and turns out to be his bride.” 16 Here the Church as a whole is presented as the one spouse of Christ. The Church is the community of all those who will be saved, but on earth the Church is a “mixture of just and unjust.” 17 The analogy of marriage extends to sinners within the Church who are guilty of infidelity to God, their souls’ spouse. Origen goes even further and considers Christians who sin to commit adultery with demons. 18 Crouzel writes, “[i]f union with Christ is a marriage, every sin is an infidelity to the lawful Husband, and an adultery with Satan.” 19 The earthly Church will ultimately be purified, and those who are saved by being “one spirit” with the Lord (1 Cor 6:17) will unite with the saints in Heaven who have awaited the arrival of these souls. Origen not only makes this distinction between the Church on earth and the heavenly Church, which he identifies with the Heavenly Jerusalem, but also refers to the latter as the “perfect bride” from the Song of Songs. 20

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3 Origen, Spirit & Fire, 88.
5 Origen, Spirit & Fire, 56.
6 Ibid. An explanation of Origen’s theory of pre-existence, fall, and universal recapitulation would be a digression as such are not entirely pertinent to the purposes of this paper.
7 Ibid., 52.
8 Ibid., 53.
Church is not perfect because its members never sinned, but because they have been purged and sin no more.21

The understanding of the bride as the true, heavenly church does not exclude or contradict identification of the bride with the individual soul; rather, the latter implies and depends on the former. All Christians are individually members of Christ's body (cf. 1 Cor 12:27) and "the body is the church, the bride of Christ."22 Insofar as the soul is conformed to the heavenly Church-bride, the individual Christian is a spouse of the Bridegroom.23 Origen explicitly expresses the real union between the soul and Christ by comparing the soul's knowledge of God with Adam's sexually "knowing" Eve in Genesis.24 The love with which the soul desires God is the spiritual equivalent of eros.25 Furthermore, just as there is a spiritual love and a physical love, Origen (drawing from the Psalms) describes the spiritual senses of man, which analogously corresponds to the five physical senses. The soul, aroused by the "fragrance of the Word's perfumes," yearns with these spiritual senses to "taste, touch, and contemplate the things of God."26

The soul's unity with Christ means that the Christian must have solidarity in Christ's suffering. In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Origen refers to "the wound of love" that God gives his beloved souls: "It is fitting for God to inflict the souls with such a wound, to pierce them with such darts and projectiles . . . so that they too might say: 'I am wounded with love (Cant 2:5).’"27 Moreover, he elsewhere writes, "How beautiful it is . . . to be wounded by love!"28 The value given to suffering is not derived from masochism; rather, Origen writes that people are "punished in the present life so as not to be punished in the same way in the future."29 God punishes as a "devoted Father" and not as a tyrant.30 Origen believes that the Christian can use suffering as an opportunity to pay the penalties for personal sin as well as grow in love and virtue, which is ultimately Christ's presence in the soul. For Origen, evil provides the Christian with the opportunity to triumph: "For the saints, the things that oppose them are good, because they can overcome them and in overcoming them gain more glory before God."31

While Origen speaks about suffering and punishment as a blessing for the Christian's improvement, the progress referred to here is not merely moral, but essentially concerns the dwelling of Christ in the soul. "The just person who is attacked," writes Origen, "has a share in the work of Christ."32 He goes on to expresses the Christian hope that "we may be found worthy of being conformed to the image of the sacrifice of Christ (cf. Rom 12:1-2)."33 The solidarity with Christ the Word that is achieved in this suffering is not noetic but ontological; for "the suffering of love" experienced by the soul is the same suffering Christ underwent in his life on earth.34 The projectile that pierces the soul of the Christian is none other than the javelin that pierced Jesus Christ's side. Christ and the Church are united in such a way that Christ himself suffers through the continued sufferings of his mystical body: the Church.35 As Christ's love for his ecclesial body is greater than that of his own incarnated body, one could conclude that Christ's suffering in the Church is greater than the afflictions he underwent in the flesh.36

As was said above, it was out of Christ's tormented body and pierced side that the Church was born. The Church reciprocates by birthing Christ in the individual souls of believers; this is why Origen cites St. Paul's words that the Heavenly Jerusalem is "the mother of us all" (Gal 4:26).37 Continuing the nuptial imagery, Christ is the principle of actuality and the Church that of potency and receptivity as a husband is to his wife in the conjugal act. As a man delivers a seed to his wife, who conceives a life that she then nurtures even after birth, so too analogously, Christ sends the Holy Spirit to his spouse the Church, and the Church then goes on to generate Christ in believers via the sacraments.

The individual members of the Church are not entirely removed from this process of generation but share in it by virtue of being part of the mystical body. Recall that the Word is the bridegroom of the individual soul as well as the whole Church; the union between the Word and the soul is a fertile one. Origen remarks that the soul is always giving birth to offspring.38 As was said above, when a Christian engages in lascivious, faithless unions with demons, the offspring of this adultery are vices, disharmony, and corruption. On the other hand, when a Christian "has received the grace of baptism," he conceives within his soul the Word who is the soul's righteousness; good works follow from this birth.39 Origen points out that "[r]ational substance, of which the human soul is also a part, cannot of itself bring forth any good, although it is capable of receiving good."40 The soul must, "like a woman, generate from another" and in the case of Christ's generation in the Christian, the soul conceives by the initiation of the Holy Spirit.41 However, given his Trinitarian theology, it is the Father who is the originator of Christ's generation in the soul.42 Origen writes, "Not just in Mary did his [Christ's] birth begin with an "overshadowing" (Lk 1:35); but in you too, if you are worthy, is the word of God born."43

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22 Ibid., 278.
24 Origen, Spirit & Fire, 247.
25 Danielou, Origen, 306.
26 Ibid., 307.
27 Crouzel, Origen, 123. Origen, Spirit & Fire, 277.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 333.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 336.
32 Ibid., 299.
33 Origen, Spirit & Fire, 299.
34 Ibid., 122.
35 Ibid., 308-309.
36 Roeh Kereszty, Ecclesiology Class Notes.
37 Origen, Spirit & Fire, 173.
38 Ibid., 273.
39 Ibid., 260-271.
40 Ibid., 270.
41 Ibid., 270, 271.
42 Crouzel, Origen, 125.
43 Origen, Spirit & Fire, 270.
There seem to be two levels to Origen's treatment of the Christian's spiritual offspring; the first offspring are the good deeds that come from Christ and his Church, while the second offspring is Christ himself who is born in the Christian's soul. These two seem to be harmonized by Origen when he equates them as follows: “[t]hose who do righteousness do Christ who is justice. Their souls become, in bringing him forth, the mother of Christ. For Christ—righteousness—is formed in them.” Crouzel writes, “Christ is all virtue and every virtue, the virtues are identified with Him as it were in an existentional way.” Thus, the two types of spiritual offspring, good deeds and Christ himself, turn out to really be identical. Each individual Christian mothers Christ in his own soul, while the Church as a whole mothers its members, constantly bringing about spiritual life within them. Both the individual souls and the entire Church have the Blessed Virgin Mary as their model, who is not only the exemplar mother of God, but also the exemplar of the Church.

Explanations of the generation of Christ in the believer are not limited to comparison with human generation but go much further. The generation of Christ in the believer analogously imitates the generation of the Son in the immanent Trinitarian relations. Origen, who understood that God exists in eternity, also knew that the Father's begetting of the Son has no beginning in time, “thus no beginning or day for his birth can be found... he is always with the Father.” The Son is “generated continually” from all eternity. Insofar as the Christian is one with the Son, the Father will continually generate him, “according to each good deed... a son of God in Christ Jesus.” Origen makes it clear that just as the Father did not generate the Son at some particular time and then cease to do so, but continually (i.e. eternally) generates his Son, so too is the just man “continually renewed” and generated as God's sons “day by day.” Thus, insofar as Christ lives in him, the Christian participates in the eternal generation of the Son and thereby becomes involved in the immanent life of the Trinity.

Christ's incorporation of mankind into the Godhead via his incarnated Self is not yet something that is completed, but is in the process of arrival. Origen writes, “[t]he praise of God... is at first sung by a multitude, but in the end just by one. Be aware that the church is now a multitude, ...but that the one is the Lord who gives thanks for the Church.” By becoming one with the souls he dwells in, Christ constitutes the unity of his mystical body and the mutual unity of that body's constituents. However, as was said above, the Church on earth still has sinners amongst it and has not yet been purified. Origen acknowledges that at the present time, Christians see God only “through a mirror, dimly” (1 Cor 13:10); this refers to a faith that has yet to be completed with understanding. Origen writes that, “the perfection of faith will be given us at the great resurrection from the dead of the whole body of Jesus, his holy church.” For “knowing by faith and by faith alone” are very different; the former refers to a faith that is perfected with knowledge. This knowledge is the kind had by those who, being “merged with something [ ,] know what they are merged and united with.” It is this sort of knowledge that constitutes the union between Christ and the soul, as was alluded to above regarding Adam's “knowing” his wife Eve.

The consummation of the union between Christ and his Church has yet to occur and so faith remains partial and imperfect. Origen explains that, just as the knowledge and faith Christians have in this life is only partial, so too has “the resurrection of the dead...already begun in each” Christian, though only in part. When the resurrection of the dead does occur, then “the Son of God shall sit on his glorious throne” (Mt 19:28) and all those who were baptized and purified “in a mirror” and “darkly” will receive a new and complete rebirth, a baptism of fire where graces shall be conferred to the Heavenly Jerusalem who, now perfect and full in number, will consummate its marriage with the Bridegroom who is “clothed in a robe sprinkled with blood.” Finally, “encompassing in himself at the end of the world all those whom he subjects to the Father and who come to salvation through him,” Christ subjects himself to the Father in loving obedience, making God all in all.

The theological genius of Origen makes itself manifest in his ability to explain the harmony between both the diversity and unity of creation in Jesus Christ. Origen's biblical use of nuptial imagery in illustrating Christ's relationship with the Church (and soul) makes explicit the radical love God has demonstrated by welcoming mankind into the Trinity's inner-life. It should be remembered that, ultimately, human marital-love provides only a shadow of the infinitely greater love the Divine has for creation. Nonetheless, Origen's perceptive exegesis successfully systematized a major theme of both the Old and New Testament, which provided ample material for classic commentaries on the Song of Songs like that of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. The philosophical curiosity and theological acumen of Origen make him a model theologian, but it is his fervent love for God and his inexhaustible desire to find Christ in Scripture that make him a model Christian.

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45 Crouzel, *Origen*, 125.
46 Ibid., 124; the understanding of Mary as model of the Church comes from a personal correspondence with Fr. Roch Kereszty.
48 Ibid., 279.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 314.

52 Ibid., 247.
53 Ibid., 352.
54 Ibid., 353-355.
55 Ibid., 314.
Below Dawn
By Joseph Vondrachek

The fallen abide in the measure of sleep,
On sheets of austere ashen slate.
Where always and ever they lie in the deep,
Where tolls of their sorrow hold weight.
If opened their eyes were to rays of the Dawn,
Within could the past find its rest.
The future could offer to live ever on,
As only tomorrow does best.
But never again will the fallen souls see
The light of the day resurrect.
For dead of the night saw their ships out to sea,
And mountainous swells saw them wrecked.
Misplaced and forgotten were men of that day,
But surely those cold souls recall
The wrongs that were done them which need be repaid,
And failures to merit their fall.
At hand - ever far- from the hearts of the youth
Lest one find a strait from his strife,
Great Dawn in her glory: I indicate Truth!
The emblem of beauty in life.
May all of us find her and not find ourselves
Found lost with the shipwrecked below,
Who grasp neither respite nor gain of themselves,
But only whose failure they know.
May light crest the peaks of the mountains we see
Preventing our effort anon,
And thus be the cause that the fallen snow flee,
To save us from sleep below Dawn.

Self-Conscious Narrative, Labyrinthine and Fatal
By Rose Safranek

Often in short-story writing the narrator as adult reflects on his childhood or a past experience and retells it, mingling the remembered emotions of that experience with his present, matured considerations. The narrative unifies, in a Wordsworthian sense, the storyteller's "two consciousnesses": himself as he is now and himself as he once was.”1 However, John Barth's unconventional short story “Lost in the Funhouse” jumbles and fuses these “consciousnesses” so as to render indistinguishable narrator from narrated and even from the literary narrative itself. Barth lends his authorial voice to his narrator, who struggles to control his story about a boy struggling to control his life, a boy who in the end struggles as author to control the story of his life. As the character, Ambrose, reflects ceaselessly back on himself, so does the narrative withdraw from the character to consider itself, a constant intrusion that finally traps it inside itself. Barth creates an overly-self-conscious protagonist and then intentionally distorts point-of-view, rendering his narrator and his protagonist indistinguishable in order to manifest the danger of such self-reflexive writing as its own prison, devoid of meaning and cut off from reality.

A traditional story with an abnormal protagonist might initially sketch out the quirks and inconsistencies of that character. But Barth immediately introduces his work as untraditional, for the reader notices the abnormality of the narrative even before he notices the abnormality of the protagonist of the narrative. The story begins with a query on the nature of a funhouse, and then with some irregular and excessive italicization it introduces Ambrose, the protagonist; but it subsequently digresses into a discussion of the significance of italicization in writing. In the next paragraph, the narrative takes up Ambrose again.2 Throughout, incorrect punctuation, run-ons and fragments, and flat-out unfinished sentences puncture the narrative. The narrative attempts to continue with Ambrose, but at almost every paragraph it stops itself to reflect on “customary” literary devices, on “standard methods of characterization” in fiction writing.3 Furthermore, when the narrative actually succeeds in returning to Ambrose, it does not progress seriatim but hops forward and backward in time, displaying climax and closure alongside the long, drawn-out preliminary exposition. For instance, the fourth page continues the description begun on page one of the family's car ride to Ocean City, where lay the seashore and the carnival and the funhouses. But the narrator, speaking in first person as he intrudes on Ambrose's thoughts, indicates that the ride itself is the funhouse: “We haven't even reached Ocean City yet: we will never get out of the funhouse.” Then, six pages later, the narrator despair: “There's no point in going farther; this isn't getting anybody anywhere; they haven't even come to the

3 Ibid., 72-73.
4 Ibid., 77.
funhouse yet,” even though already “Ambrose is off the track,” lost in the middle of the funhouse. The reader too begins to feel lost, for even the story fails to distinguish for itself between what is and what is not. The narrative is vertiginously choppy, is conscious of its failure, and laments it, constantly comparing itself to “standard” writing and once even to a specific well-known work, James Joyce’s Ulysses. The narrative describes itself saying “the plot does not rise by meaningful steps but winds upon itself, digresses, retreats, hesitates, sighs, collapses, expires. The climax of the story must be its protagonist’s discovery of a way to get through the funhouse. But he has found none, may have ceased to search.”

The protagonist himself resembles uncannily the self-consciousness of the narrative. Ambrose is not, and knows he is not, a normal child: “There was some simple, radical difference about him; he hoped it was genius, feared it was madness.” He sees himself and the world with heightened sensitivity and through “terrifying transports;” he is “unable to forget the least detail of his life” and recalls himself “standing beside himself with awed impersonality.” This detachment from his own life causes Ambrose to experience frequent flashbacks and fantasies which often involve his love interest, the young girl Magda. Like the narrative that depicts him, Ambrose seems unable to separate past and looming future from the present moment.

But Ambrose’s own detachment from the world does not result simply from a sort of tragic mental disorder for which he is blameless. Although the people that surround Ambrose are “vulgar and insensitive,” the boy maintains a rigid mental vision of how the world ought to be and becomes increasingly alienated from the world when it does not live up to his expectation. He imagines himself wandering through the funhouse, eventually meeting “another lost person in the dark...by the time they found the exit they’d be closest friends...they’d know each other’s inmost souls, be bound together by the cement of shared adventure.” But though he so desperately longs for this human connection, he refuses to entertain for long even the image of this intimacy, because the friend could turn out, to his disappointment, to be a “Negro,” a “blind girl,” or his “former archenemy.” His unhappiness extends as his conceptual illusion about his family and society far outstrips his experience of them: “He despised his father too, for not being what he was supposed to be.” Not only does Ambrose experience time in a jumbled-up chronology, but he also, like the narrative, cannot separate what is from what is not.

Just as the narrative compares itself with traditional writing style, Ambrose compares himself to his brother Peter, a “happy-go-lucky youngster” who “seldom complained of his lot.” Peter may respond to the anxieties of life with his usual, ebullient, dismissive “Phooey.” Ambrose, on the other hand, sees the inconsistency of the world as life out to play tricks on him, and he cannot fight his way through them:

People don’t know what to make of him, he doesn’t know what to make of himself, he’s only thirteen, athletically and socially inept, not astonishingly bright, but there are antennae he has...some sort of receivers in his head; things speak to him, he understands more than he should, the world winks at him through its objects, grabs grinning at his coat. Everybody else is in on some secret he doesn’t know; they’ve forgotten to tell him.

Life’s uncontrollability deeply burdens Ambrose: “nothing was what it looked like...everybody acted as if things were as they should be. Therefore each saw himself as the hero of the story, when the truth might turn out to be that he’s the villain, or the coward. And there wasn’t one thing you could do about it! Hunchbacks, fat ladies, fools—that no one chose what he was was unbearable.” Upon entrance to the funhouse Ambrose immediately loses “his voice thrice as the discs unbalanced him,” as though the discs are in fact the ever-revolving vagaries of life. In parallel motion with its protagonist, the narrative too cannot control its progression: the more it describes how narrative ought to be, the more it loses its own voice in the funhouse. It despair’s of itself: “We should be much farther along than we are; something has gone wrong...Yet everyone begins in the same place; how is it that most go along without difficulty but a few lose their way?”

Near the end of the story, Ambrose has thoroughly lost himself in the funhouse. His brother and Magda have outpaced him through all the twists and turns, yet still he could have called out to them for guidance. But he has refused to call out, perhaps to avoid humiliation, to save face, or in fact because he desperately longs to find his “own way yet, however belatedly.” By his silence he has found that exit “you weren’t supposed to find and strayed off into the works somewhere.” Somehow, he has passed beyond the unbalancing discs, but only to reach “suffering and isolation.” He realizes that he will never find a girl “with such splendid understanding that she’d see him entire, like a poem or story” and see his words and worries as “the very things that made him precious to her.” Ambrose attempts to acquit himself, despairing that there is “no such girl”; but in fact, he acknowledges his responsibility for his isolation. He “understood, as few adults do, that the famous loneliness of the great was no popular myth but a
general truth—furthermore, that it was as much cause as effect.” His alienation is self-imposed; his self-consciousness buries him so far in himself that those around him “can’t locate him because they don’t know where to look.”

Finally, the narrator describes the car trip home from Ocean City, during which Uncle Karl teases Ambrose that “the comrade with whom he’d fought his way shoulder to shoulder through the funhouse had turned out to be a blind Negro girl.” And yet, Ambrose has “died telling stories to himself in the dark” in that lonely passage “wherein he lingers yet.” He has lost himself in the funhouse just as the narrator has lost himself in the narrative, and the gap between Ambrose and the narrator narrows even more radically than the myriad of prior similarities have indicated. For, in that dark and lonely passage, “rehearsing to himself the unadventurous story of his life, narrated from the third-person point of view,” Ambrose has become the narrator of himself, of the third-person account of himself that is Barth’s “Lost in the Funhouse”!

Ambrose, revealed as narrator, constructs—he authors—“funhouses for others” as their “secret operator.” But although he “envisions a truly astonishing funhouse, incredibly complex yet utterly controlled,” he cannot control it, as his wildly unorganized narrative manifests! Ambrose as narrator may have recovered his voice, but in the middle of the narrative he loses control, slips into first person, and declares, “I’ll never be an author.” The narrative quickly returns to Ocean City, glossing over the startling appearance of the first person, yet this emergence stands, epiphanic to its perpetrator. He cannot tell a proper story, because he is living not in reality but in his own head, in his own fiction. As character, and in fact as narrator too, Ambrose gazes into the distorting mirrors of the funhouse and wonders “at the endless replication of his image in the mirrors...as he lost himself in the reflection.”

As a relentlessly self-conscious thinker, Ambrose plays the Narcissus; but he also becomes the relentlessly self-reflexive narrator and so must play the Echo, too, for he is doomed endlessly to repeat. But he is a perverted Echo, rather than repeat others, rather than represent an external and objective reality, he must repeat only himself, lost in the twists of his own mental labyrinth. The self-reflexive narrative by its nature mediates to the reader not reality, but itself. Echo, too, for he is doomed endlessly to repeat. But he is a perverted Echo, for which men tragically “cling to that which [has] robbed” them. He despises his funhouse for not being what it ought to be: he yearns for the “walls of custom, which even.” Again, he cannot finish the sentence, for he, always detached from the world, has never personally experienced the order and the meaning that tradition imparts to life.

Traditional literature does not need to intrude upon or reflect upon itself as artifice; it can maintain the “illusion of reality” because it is grounded in and leads back to reality. In other words, a traditional story creates a fictional world, a funhouse, that is complete in itself without excuse or explanation, because it still manages to reflect the true, objective world outside the story. On the other hand, the narrative of Barth’s Ambrose is not complete in itself; it constantly attempts excuse and explanation for itself, asserting its own fictionality and artifice within all the technical literary problems encountered in the writing process. This endlessly recursive self-reflection causes and perpetuates its entrapment, preventing it from discovering and holding onto reality. It set out to be free from the “illusion of

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30 Barth, 94.
31 Ibid., 83.
32 Ibid., 97.
33 Ibid., 95.
34 Ibid., 96.
35 Ibid., 97.
36 Ibid., 97.
37 Ibid., 97.
38 Ibid., 85.
40 Barth, 97.
41 Ibid., 72.
42 Ibid., 97.
43 Ibid., 73.
reality" and has instead found itself in a reality of illusion, such that Ambrose as narrator denies his own being outside his narration: “Is there really such a person as Ambrose, or is he a figment of the author’s imagination? Are there other errors of fact in this fiction?” In "Lost in the Funhouse," Barth ingeniously employs metafiction in order to thematize the peril it entails. And the tragedy is not that Theseus failed to defeat the Minotaur, but that Theseus himself constructed a faulty labyrinth that never gives him a chance to encounter the monster; and the labyrinth thus becomes the monster. At one extreme, man wholly immersed in life could possibly “gain the whole world, yet suffer the loss of his soul;” but at the other extreme, that of metafiction, man could risk forfeiting both the world and his soul, both the world and his.

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44 Barth, 73, 88.
45 Mark 8:36.