

**HEIDEGGER AND
THE PROBLEM OF STYLE IN INTERPRETATION**

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That, like the history of art, literary history cannot afford to neglect the phenomenon of style, ill understood though it remains, is generally taken for granted. How else could we discover meaningful historical patterns? More problematic is the relevance of style to artistic perfection. To say of a poem, or indeed of any work of art, that it has style, usually is to praise it. But why? What contribution does style make to artistic success? The following remarks take a few steps towards an answer to this question.

I

In 'Language in the Poem' Heidegger claims that every great poet writes his poetry out of a single unspoken poem. This unspoken poem is said to be both the origin of the poet's poetry and at the same time what each one of his poems says, if in its own way. Just as, according to Kierkegaard, purity of heart is to will one thing, so, according to Heidegger, there is a sense in which all the different poems of a great poet say the same.

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Formal as it is, this statement does not tell us how this saying of the same is to be understood. Are we to think of different expressions of the same thought? Or is what Heidegger has in mind the unity provided by a personal style? This much at any rate seems clear: if we are to accept the claim that the different poems of every great poet are gathered together by his unspoken poem, a poem that no particular poem ever completely captures, we also have to insist that an interpretation of a particular poem may not consider it only as a self-sufficient whole. The interpreter must be attentive to the unspoken meaning that gathers a poet's different poems into a whole. Using a romantic metaphor, Heidegger speaks of the single source of the poet's speaking. To point towards the site of this source, to determine the place (*Ort*) of the poet's one poem, is the task of what Heidegger calls an *Erörterung*. *Erläuterung* and *Erörterung*, the interpretation of particular poems and the discussion of the place of the poet's one poem, are said to belong together.

One readily sees that a proper interpretation already presupposes a determination of the place of the poet's one poem. Only this place lends light and sound to particular poems. Conversely, a determination of this place requires a preliminary attempt at a first interpretation of particular poems.

Every thinking dialogue with a poet's poem remains within the reciprocity between interpretation and consideration of the place of the poet's one poem.¹

II

In spite of Heidegger's assertion that 'one readily sees that a proper interpretation already presupposes a determination of the place of the poet's one poem', as so often when an author tells us that something is obvious or readily seen, we are not quite sure. There is indeed a related claim that

seems quite unexceptionable: to interpret a poem we have to have some understanding of the poet's language and culture. In this sense we can admit that interpretation presupposes some grasp of the place of the poet's work. Who could disagree with René Wellek when he suggests that to understand even the first lines of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*

Of *Loves* and *Ladies*, *Knights* and *Arms*, I sing,
Of *Courtesies*, and many a *Daring Feat*;

we must already have some understanding of what is meant by 'lady' and 'knight'.² We have to enter into the spirit of a particular language game. The requirement is easily extended to include, for example, the demand that the interpreter have some familiarity with the tradition of the epic. There are countless cases where interpretation must draw on historical scholarship. This leaves open the question: how far should we go in this pursuit? How esoteric should we allow our scholarship to become? Certain words may have had a special aura for a poet, reflecting his own very personal experiences. Should we turn to his biography to recover that aura? Even Beardsley and Wimsatt, determined in their opposition to the 'intentional fallacy' and tireless in their efforts to free interpretation from the burden of delving into what is merely private and idiosyncratic, grant that biographical evidence may lead us to a better understanding of the poet's language.³

Often it is the particular style of a poem that gives us our first idea of where to place it and thus of how to read it and what to expect from it. Such placement will influence interpretation and evaluation. The same poem may seem successful when read as an old folk song, weak and sentimental when discovered to be only an early nineteenth-century imitation.⁴ Even when the historical place of a work of art has been secured, reinterpretation of its stylistic affiliation tends to let us see the work differently and invites re-evaluation. Consider the way the establishment of baroque and mannerism as independent styles led art historians to discover strength where an earlier generation

looking at the same works of art, but measuring them by standards provided by the Florentine Renaissance, found disintegration and decadence.

The claim that we must possess some knowledge of the artist's situation if we are to understand and evaluate his art can scarcely be challenged. Nor can we deny that style plays an important part in giving us access to that situation. If this is how we are to understand Heidegger's claim that interpretation presupposes a determination of the place of the poet's one poem, it seems quite unproblematic.

Unfortunately, this is not at all what Heidegger appears to have in mind. While the determination of the situation of an artist may serve interpretation in that it makes available the 'language' of a particular work of art, what Heidegger terms an *Erörterung* would seem to be more intimately tied to what lets us judge one poem or one poet better than another. Its goal is to exhibit the source of the unity that Heidegger would have us discover in the different works of every great poet.

III

Heidegger's emphasis on the reciprocity of interpretation and the determination of the poem invites us to understand it as one more statement of what has come to be called the hermeneutic circle. By now it has become a commonplace to insist that every complex whole demands to be understood in terms of its constituent parts, while to understand the meaning of these parts we must already have some understanding of the whole to which they belong. Understanding is tossed back and forth between the two, modifying its grasp of one as its grasp of the other develops.

But this commonplace remains unproblematic only as long as we talk abstractly about part and whole. What renders Heidegger's use of the hermeneutic circle in this particular case questionable is the suggestion that when considering poetry the relevant whole is not a particular poem, but the poet's one unspoken poem. Is this to say that we should

understand the different poems of a great poet as fragments of a larger whole? That cannot be right. A poet's poems do not belong together in the sense in which the lines of a poem make up an aesthetic whole.

In emphasizing the poet's one unspoken poem Heidegger is indeed not simply insisting on a more comprehensive unity than we are offered by the individual work of art, but on a unity of a different kind. Neither a mechanical nor an organic metaphor does justice to what is better described as a unity of expression. The particular poems of a poet belong together, not because they are parts that together form a larger whole, but because, like variations on an unknown theme, they have their origin in and are animated by the same force or feeling.⁵ Heidegger does not speak of a theme, but of a *Grundton*, a single key note furnished by the poet's unspoken poem, which reverberates in all his work. 'As the source of the wave that moves the speaking of the poet, the place of the poem holds the concealed essence of what may appear to a metaphysical-aesthetic representing first of all as rhythm'.⁶

Let us consider the claim more carefully: according to Heidegger, the place of the poet's one poem reveals itself first of all not so much in what a particular poem says as in its rhythm. What is meant here by 'rhythm'?

Three years before the publication of 'Language in the Poem' (1953), Heidegger had heard Emil Staiger lecture on 'The Art of Interpretation'. Staiger had raised the question: what form does the hermeneutic circle take when we interpret a work of literature? If interpretation presupposes an anticipation of the whole, how does such a work first disclose itself to us as a whole? In answer, Staiger offered an interpretation of Mörike's '*Auf eine Lampe*'. Important in this context is Staiger's point that when we first hear or read a poem we are unlikely to come away with an adequate grasp of its structure or meaning. Otherwise there would be no need for interpretation. Instead we seize on details and, more importantly, on the poem's particular rhythm. Even before we have adequately understood the poem, its rhythm communicates the mood that animates the whole. It is this

mood that guides and checks subsequent interpretation.

Disagreement with one part of Staiger's analysis of the Mörike poem led Heidegger to advance his own. But both agreed on the nature of interpretation: even on a first reading a poem communicates a basic mood (*Grundstimmung*).⁷ In this mood the poem first discloses itself to us as a whole. What communicates this mood is the poem's particular rhythm or tone or, as Staiger also says, its style. Let me illustrate this with two examples.

Consider this stanza (I, 102), chosen at random from the almost two thousand that make up Byron's *Don Juan*.

It was upon a day, a summer's day —
Summer's indeed a very dangerous season,
And so is spring about the end of May.
The sun no doubt is the prevailing reason,
But whatsoe'er the cause is, one may say
And stand convicted of more truth than treason
That there are months which Nature grows more
merry in.
March has its hares; and May must have its heroine.

Don Juan invites the interpreter to take just one of its many stanzas, to examine its form, the opposition between the first six lines, which 'stagger forward, like the life they contain', and the concluding couplet, which promises resolution and rest — although 'a very shaky resting place it most often is'.⁸ Analysis of this often repeated pattern leads more directly to the centre of the poem than any attempt to show the necessity that governs the unfolding of *Don Juan*'s story. For there is no such necessity. We are offered endless details, bound together by a mood that is communicated first of all by the poet's style. Byron's stanza, with its six lines staggering towards the uncertain conclusion provided by the last two, a conclusion too weak to stand in the way of a new beginning, corresponds to the way one episode after another meanders to an uncertain ending only to be followed by yet another. In his review of *Don Juan*, Goethe already remarked on the extravagant

rhymes that spare language as little as the poem spares humanity.⁹ Calling attention to itself and thus to the distance separating the poet's forced metre and rhyme from what is said in the poem, Byron's use of *ottava rima* expresses a sovereign freedom that refuses full incarnation. Style appears as the vehicle of an existential stance, of a particular way of seeing and valuing. It is in this sense that style lets us enter the world of the poem.

A very different mood is communicated by the style of this brief fairy tale:

Kommt, ihr kleinen Krabben! - Es war einmal ein arm Kind und hatt kein Vater und keine Mutter, war alles tot, und war niemand mehr auf der Welt. Alles tot, und es is hingangen und hat gesucht Tag und Nacht. Und weil auf der Erde niemand mehr war, wollts in Himmel gehn, und der Mond guckt es so freundlich an; und wie es endlich zum Mond kam, wars ein Stück faul Holz. Und da is es zur Sonn gangen, und wie es zur Sonn kam, wars ein verwelkt Sonneblum. Und wies zu den Sternen kam, warens kleine goldne Mücken, die waren angesteckt, wie der Neuntöter sie auf die Schlehen steckt. Und wies wieder auf die Erde wollt, war die Erde ein umgestürzter Hafen. Und es war ganz allein. Und da hat sichs hingesetzt und geweint, und da sitzt es noch und is ganz allein.

Come, you little shrimp! — Once upon a time there was a poor child and had no father and no mother, all was dead, and no one was left on the world. All dead, and it went forth and looked day and night. And since no one was left on earth, it wanted to go to heaven, and the moon gave it such a friendly look; and when it finally came to the moon, it was a piece of rotten wood. And then it went to the sun, and when it came to the sun, it was a withered sunflower. And when it came to the stars, they were little golden mosquitoes, stuck on pins, as the

shrike pins them on the thorns of the sloe-bush. And when it wanted to go back to earth, the earth was an overturned pot. And it was all alone. And then it sat down and cried, and there it is still sitting and is all alone.¹⁰

The style, only inadequately captured by the translation, at first appears to be that of Grimm's fairy tales. Thus the first sentence recalls the beginning of 'The Star Money', which tells of a little girl who had lost father and mother, gave away the few possessions that she still had, and finally was rewarded with money falling from heaven. The paratactic structure of Grimm's fairy tale has, however, become much more insistent and as a result oppressive. The relentlessly repeated 'and' allows no sentence to complete itself until the final 'alone'. The ending recalls 'The Fisherman and His Wife', where the wife pushes the poor fisherman to make ever greater demands on the miraculous fish he has caught until her boundless ambition is punished and they end up as they began, living in that overturned chamber-pot in which they still live.

Just as *Don Juan* mocks the epic and its celebration of superhuman heroes, so this fairy tale — which I have also taken out of its context, Büchner's *Woyzeck* — mocks the vision of a world in which the good live happily ever after and the wicked end up in an overturned chamber-pot or worse. In both Byron's epic and Büchner's fairy tale, parataxis, an emphasis on co-ordination rather than subordination, expresses the absence of a higher power that gathers life into a meaningful whole, although Byron's stanzas still delight in freedom and life, while there is nothing in Büchner's fairy tale that relieves the mood of despair, except perhaps the introductory 'Kommt, ihr kleinen Krabben', with which the grandmother, whom the children had pestered until she agreed to tell them a story, gathers them around her.

I would like to suggest that it is especially by its style that the literary work of art communicates a mood that lets us adopt a definite stance towards what is said. In this sense

we can say that style helps to establish the world of a poem, provided we understand by 'world' not a whole made up of parts, but, following Heidegger and Ricoeur, a space of intelligibility implying a definite stance towards persons and things. A unified style thus contributes to our experience of the work as a whole.

Staiger, however, makes a stronger claim. Style is understood by him as that intangible something that lets 'a perfect work of art — or the entire work of an artist or also of a time — agree in all aspects'.

We recognize baroque style in an altar and in a palace. Schiller's personal style is as distinct in *Tell* as in *Das Lied von der Glocke*. The style of *Hermann und Dorothea* expresses itself in the structure of the verses as well as in the choice of motives and in the sequence of particular images. In the style the manifold is one. It is the permanent in the changing. It is because of this that everything transitory gains an imperishable meaning through style. Works of art are perfect when they are stylistically of a piece.¹¹

The passage raises a number of questions. Does stylistic integrity assure artistic perfection? Is it not possible to admit that what one reads is stylistically of a piece and yet does not possess the kind of unity that we demand of a successful work of art? A great deal of inferior poetry comes to mind. Or think of fragments torn out of context, e.g. the stanza from Byron's *Don Juan*: it certainly is stylistically of a piece. Is it therefore a perfect work of art? Does it not present itself to us as a part that demands to be placed in a larger context? This suggests that it is not style that holds the secret of artistic perfection.

A difficulty of a different sort is posed by the way Staiger blurs the differences between the style of a period, of an artist, or of a particular work of art. Are they all equally relevant to artistic success? Must our emphasis not fall on the particular work of art and on what contributes to its

unity? These questions return us to what is most questionable about Heidegger's claim that the different poems of every great poet speak out of and say this poet's one unspoken poem. This suggests that the relevant unity that interpretation should both pursue and be guided by must be located beyond the particular work of art, that it is the personal style of a poet rather than the style of a particular poem that should guide interpretation. These difficulties invite more careful consideration.

IV

If style grants unity, as Staiger suggests, such unity does not imply that the work of art is a complete whole in the sense that nothing is missing or could be added without serious loss. *Don Juan* certainly possesses a high degree of stylistic unity. Yet it mocks the kind of unity demanded by what I want to call the aesthetic approach, which, in Byron's words, insists that the poet 'begin in the beginning' and demands a 'regularity of design' that 'Forbids all wandering as the worst of sinning'.¹²

We owe the term 'aesthetics' to Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Reflections on Poetry*. It should not be used simply as a synonym for the philosophy of art. The philosophy of art becomes aesthetics only when it adopts a particular approach to art. I would like to characterize this approach with a simile that Baumgarten uses. Following tradition, Baumgarten understands the poet as a second God. And just as the poet is like God, so his work ought to be like God's creation. 'Hence', Baumgarten concludes, 'by analogy whatever is evident to the philosophers concerning the real world, the same ought to be thought of a poem' — an analogy that allowed the newly born science of aesthetics to appropriate the insights of the metaphysicians.¹³ Baumgarten was a follower of Wolff and Leibniz. When he suggests that the poem ought to be like a world, he is thinking of a world that is, as Leibniz describes it, a perfect whole. Everything in this best of all possible worlds has its

sufficient reason in God. In it nothing is superfluous, nothing is missing. The same, Baumgarten insists, ought to be true of a successful poem. In it, too, nothing should be superfluous and nothing should be missing. The ground of this necessity Baumgarten locates in the poem's theme. Just as God unfolds himself in the world, so the theme should unfold itself in the poem. The theme is both the generative centre of the poem and its meaning.

It is not necessary to understand the unity of the aesthetic whole in terms of a theme that assigns to the different parts of the work of art their proper places. We may understand it instead as a harmony of parts that does not permit us to point to a dominant theme. What matters here is not this difference.¹⁴ Decisive is rather the way the aesthetic approach locates unity within the work of art, not without it. It understands the work of art as a whole that absorbs our interest because of its self-sufficient presence.¹⁵

Such presence precludes awareness of style as something separable from the work of art. Not that a first reading may not leave us with little more than a mood communicated by what we can call the poem's style. But here we are aware of style precisely because at this point the poem still has to become fully present. The intimation of the whole that is granted by our sense of the poem's style is thus somewhat like a promise that is fulfilled only by more careful reading and interpretation. Where style calls attention to itself as something separable from the work of art, suggesting the possibility of repetition, it is an obstacle to aesthetic presence.

This is not to deny that all the different works of a poet may possess a certain style that lets us recognize them as belonging together. Just as there is something characteristic about the music of a Haydn or a Mozart that often lets us identify their work after hearing only a few measures, so a definite rhythm or tone, established perhaps by a poet's preference for a certain vocabulary, or for a particular type of metaphor, or for a distinctive metrical or rhyme scheme, lets us speak of the style of a poet. I have no doubt that careful analysis can go a long way towards determining the

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essence of such a style. What is not at all clear, however, is why a work that exhibits style in this sense should therefore be judged better than another that does not. Given the aesthetic approach, the fact that one work exhibits the personal style of an artist more fully than another should not affect our judgement of its aesthetic merit any more than, let us say, the information that a particular painting represents the artist's home town. This is not to deny the phenomenon of personal style; nor is it to challenge those who want to examine an artist's style to gain better access to his world or to gain insight into his character. But it is to demand that we distinguish between aesthetic and stylistic unity. And it is to claim that emphasis on style, either by the poet or by the interpreter, by calling attention away from the work of art in its particularity to repeatable significant traits, denies aesthetic presence.

V

Does such a denial violate the essence of art? 'A poem should not mean but be' — according to Wimsatt, this epigram is worth quoting in every essay on poetry.¹⁶ And perhaps it should. It certainly helps to remind us of the imperative governing the aesthetic approach. But it is not difficult to imagine a poet or a critic countering: 'A poem should not be, but mean'. Thus anyone who would have art serve religion would have to insist on such a recasting of MacLeish's epigram. He would have to demand devices that deny the work of art full presence and precisely because of this permit it to gesture towards God, who alone can give genuine light to the things of the world. Think of the gold background of medieval painting or of what Auerbach calls the figural realism of the Middle Ages. Here, too, style serves to establish a way of seeing things, more precisely a way of seeing through things to their divine origin. To the religious person this divine perspective has to matter more than the details of a particular work of art. Style is more important here than what belongs just to this

work of art. This must be so because what the artist establishes may not be a self-sufficient aesthetic whole. If the work of art can be said to establish a world, in the case of religious art this cannot be just the world of the work of art and thus an aesthetic world, but must be the world that assigns us our place.

Heidegger's understanding of authenticity similarly forces us to question that self-sufficiency of the work of art on which the aesthetic approach insists. It has been a commonplace to suggest that in the aesthetic experience the observer forgets himself as this individual, burdened by particular cares and concerns. Schopenhauer, for example, ties the peculiar pleasure that we are granted when we become absorbed in the contemplation of a work of art to the way such absorption lifts the burden of individual existence. Kant's analysis of the disinterested character of aesthetic experience points in the same direction, as does Bullough's discussion of psychical distance and more recently Michael Fried's emphasis on presentness and absorption. On the aesthetic approach the work of art should deliver us from the burden of our own self. Such deliverance is the secularized aesthetic counterpart to divine grace.¹⁷

But it is possible to assign to art not an aesthetic, but an ethical function, to demand of art that instead of allowing the observer to forget himself, it call him back to himself and to his proper place, to his ethos.¹⁸ Heidegger's remarks on art and poetry presuppose such an 'ethical' approach. Authenticity is made the measure of poetic greatness, and authenticity, as Heidegger understands it, is incompatible with self-forgetting. It demands that we seize ourselves in our entirety. To demand authenticity is to demand self-integration and, if Heidegger is right, self-integration is possible only in the resolute anticipation of one's own death.

Heidegger's claim that the different poems of a great poet all say the same, his unspoken poem, and the implicit shift in emphasis from the particular poem and its style to the style of the poet, depends on the more fundamental thesis that there is a sense in which everything that an authentic

person says and does means the same: it has its origin in and points to the same place, to his own death-shadowed ethos, which determines the way he relates to persons and things. The poet's ethos finds expression in a style that presents itself to us as more significant and of greater extent than the poem that embodies it. Similarly, if a poem is to preserve our authenticity, it must not so fascinate us that we lose ourselves to it. It must gesture beyond itself to a place that, while the poet's own, yet allows us to recognize in it our own proper place. Like Hölderlin, Heidegger ties poetry to homecoming. Not that the poet has the power to lead us home. He can offer us no more than echoes of an unsung song.

That emphasis on style can function as a weapon against the aesthetic approach is shown by Heidegger's essay, 'Language in the Poem'. In keeping with its character as an *Erörterung*, the essay makes no attempt to interpret particular poems in their entirety. Lines are torn out of their original context. This displacement prevents the reader from becoming fascinated by the poems in which these lines have their place. But precisely because now displaced, they call our attention to the strangely moving music of Trakl's style:

O, die Seele, die leise das Lied des
vergilbten Rohrs sang; feurige Frömmigkeit.

O, the soul, that softly sang the song of the
yellowed reeds; fiery piety.

Über knöchernen Steg, die hyazinthene Stimme des
Knaben, Leise sagend die vergessene Legende des
Walds, ...

Over the footbridge of bone, the hyacinth voice
of the boy, Softly saying the forest's
forgotten legend, ...

In seinem Grab spielt der weisse Magier mit seinen
Schlangen.

In his grave the white magician plays with
his snakes.

Taken out of context, lines, even single words, become hieroglyphic signs, gathered together by the poet's style. Heidegger's discussion of the place towards which these signs gesture seems to me to do violence to their tensions, to the interplay of a theme of redemption and another that hints at an irremediable guilt. But this is not the place to discuss and criticize the determination of Trakl's place that Heidegger offers us.¹⁹ What I would like to suggest, however, is that the method employed in Heidegger's essay, his disregard of poems in their entirety, the decision to focus instead on fragments, is justified, given Heidegger's intention to let us listen beyond the poet's particular poems to his one unspoken poem, his conviction that what constitutes greatness in a work of art is not its power to let us become absorbed in it, but its ability to illuminate our situation. Great art, as Heidegger understands it, grants a way of seeing, and this means also a way of valuing. Style communicates such a way.

I would like to add that Heidegger's method is not so very distant from the method Erich Auerbach uses in *Mimesis*. Auerbach himself interprets this method for us by placing it in the context of his discussion of that 'shift in emphasis' that he takes to be characteristic of the modern novel:

... now many writers present minor happenings, which are insignificant as exterior factors in a person's destiny, for their own sake or rather as points of departure for the development of motifs, for a penetration which opens up new perspectives into a milieu of consciousness or the given historical setting.... This shift of emphasis expresses something that we might call a transfer of confidence:

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the great exterior turning points and blows of fate are granted less importance; they are credited with less power of yielding decisive information concerning the subject; on the other hand there is confidence that in any random fragment plucked from the course of a life at any time the totality of its fate is contained and can be portrayed.²⁰

The transfer of confidence of which Auerbach is speaking implies a lack of interest in the aesthetic function of art as I have analysed it. What Auerbach finds in novels like Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is something quite different: 'nothing less than the wealth of reality and depth of life in every moment to which we surrender ourselves without prejudice'.²¹ What matters is the establishment of a particular way of seeing. The novel is assigned an ontological function.

Along with what Auerbach calls a crisis of confidence goes a lack of interest in telling stories from beginning to end, a sense that this kind of unity gives us only something superficial and artificial. What counts must be located elsewhere and requires a different mode of representation. It manifests itself in a seemingly trivial everyday happening as much as in some heroic deed, indeed more so, for where the events absorb our interest in their own right they let us be content with the surface.

Auerbach compares the method of such novelists to 'that of certain modern philologists who hold that the interpretation of a few passages from *Hamlet*, *Phèdre*, or *Faust* can be made to yield more, and more decisive, information about Shakespeare, Racine, or Goethe and their times than would a systematic and chronological treatment of their lives and works';²² and to his own method, a method not so very different from the way that Heidegger proceeds in his discussion of the place of Trakl's poem. What matters to Heidegger, too, is not the work of art in its particular presence, but the ethos governing it, the artist's way of standing in the world. Both Heidegger and Auerbach are not interested in the work of art as a whole that lets us

withdraw from the world into an aesthetic realm, but focus on its style, where style should be understood, as Flaubert describes it, as 'an absolute manner of seeing things'.²³ So understood, style communicates a particular world orientation.

VI

Just as Heidegger would have to admit that a more or less random selection of texts by a great poet allows us to exhibit the place of this poet's one poem, so Auerbach grants that his particular selection of texts is, given the point of the book, quite accidental. Other texts could be used to establish the same pattern. There is, to be sure, what would seem to be a decisive difference between what Heidegger terms an *Erörterung* and the method employed by Auerbach. While the former focuses on the work of just one poet, Auerbach's monumental study ranges over the history of western literature. What interests him is not so much the phenomenon of personal style as the style of a period and, even more, the way in which the succession of period styles manifests the historical movement that assigns us our place. The difference is, however, not as great as may at first appear. Personal and period styles are difficult to disentangle, and our interest in both is inseparable from our concern for our own place.

Heidegger locates the place of Trakl's poetry between the ruins left by the disintegration of the Platonic Christian world and a new world that still awaits its poets and prophets. Trakl's poetry prepares for this hoped-for, but uncertain advent by calling us out of our decayed world, back to ourselves and back to the silent voices of the earth. This determination fails to do justice to that special tone which belongs only to this poet. It is indeed not so much the poet's personal style that seems to interest Heidegger as the style of a particular period. Not surprisingly, the place that Heidegger assigns to Trakl turns out to be very much like the place that determines his own thinking.

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I do not mean to suggest that Heidegger is simply imposing his philosophical thought on Trakl's poetry. Even if he fails to do justice to Trakl's very personal voice, darkened by a quite specific transgression, yet soothed by memories of a gentler utopian existence, there is an affinity between this style and Heidegger's own. Heidegger, too, likes to mingle the dark language of dread, guilt, and death with gentle echoes of a more genuine existing that is denied to modern man. It is no accident that the reader of 'Language in the Poem' has some difficulty separating Heidegger's voice from that of the just slightly older Austrian poet. What Heidegger calls the place of Trakl's poetry is inseparable from the mood of Heidegger's generation and, more generally, from the spiritual situation of modern man, who, alienated from the world he himself has shaped, dreams of a more genuine dwelling. An attempt can be made to discuss this spiritual situation as the place that manifests itself in the style of our period.

More than the conception of the style of a work of art or of a person, the concept of period style has generated heated debate. It becomes particularly problematic when applied to the modern period, which, due to its emphasis on the individual, makes it especially difficult to speak of a single pervasive style. To be sure, the usefulness of stylistic classifications can scarcely be questioned. But how do we establish the unity of a particular period style? We might begin by pointing to a particular group of works of art that show a certain family resemblance. Guided by a vague sense of what they share, we might then single out specific works of art that strike us as paradigms of, let us say, baroque art and try to analyse features that help to establish their paradigmatic status. Other works of art would then be considered baroque to the extent that they resembled these paradigms. Depending on what features we think particularly important, these extensions will proceed in different directions.

But how are we to understand the unity that has thus been established? The unifying power of a style can be likened, as Arnold Hauser does, to a musical theme of which only

variations are known. The attempt to provide what Heidegger calls an *Erörterung* would then be like an attempt to reconstruct this unknown theme. But what is the ontological status of this theme? In the case of a personal style, one can tie this unity to what I have called an existential stance and point to the individual as the bearer of the style. Should we then say that the existence of period styles presupposes some supra-individual reality that we can point to and identify as the bearer of this style? This is suggested by Alois Riegl's conception of a supra-individual *Kunstwollen*, an artistic intention manifesting itself in a common formal language. But what sense can we make of such a *Kunstwollen*? The conception suggests the idea of an ideal type by which we measure and understand the works of particular artists. But are such ideal types not fictions created, to be sure, in response to the phenomena that are to be understood, but reflecting also the prejudices and interests of the particular historian and our incurable tendency to look for meaningful wholes in what confronts us? Ernst Gombrich warns against those who insist with Hans Sedlmayr that the phenomenon of style teaches us to recognize that groups and spiritual collectives are not mere names, but independent realities that manifest themselves in individuals. 'By inculcating the habit of talking in terms of collectives, of "mankind", "race", or "ages"', such 'mythological explanations' are said by Gombrich to 'weaken resistance to totalitarian habits of mind'.²⁴

The warning is not easily dismissed. And yet, to what extent are we still convinced by the individualism that is here being presupposed? The emphasis on period styles has indeed often carried with it the suggestion that what really matters about art is not what is the contribution of the particular artist, but something that transcends him, a supra-personal force or constellation of forces. To express this in the language that I have been using: what communicates itself in a period style is a world that belongs not just to a particular work of art, nor to a particular person, but to a historical community. If an uneasiness with aestheticism has been one motive behind the emphasis on style, an

uneasiness with individualism has been a motive behind the emphasis on period style, a longing for a not merely personal, but a communal ethos. Having lost faith in God, no longer able to discover our place in that order which, with the death of God, has lost both founder and foundation, we turn to recover here that whole which will teach us to understand ourselves as a part and thus assign us our place.

There is more than a suggestion of this in Auerbach's *Mimesis*. Similarly, Ernst Robert Curtius wrote his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* to exhibit and recall us to our historical place. Curtius was convinced that there were 'ultimate units of the course of history, upon which the historian must train his vision in order to obtain intelligible fields of study'.²⁵ To be intelligible in Curtius's sense, a field of study must form a meaningful whole. Indebted to Toynbee, Curtius finds such a whole in a historical concept of Europe. Poetic greatness is defined with respect to this unity: great, for us, is literature that survives precisely because it has helped to establish the furthest horizon, the background of European literature and beyond that of European culture.

Curtius's emphasis on history is directed against the intellectual chaos that results when all emphasis is placed on the individual. Heidegger's concern with history is similarly motivated. Already in *Being and Time* Heidegger insists that the individualism implicit in his emphasis on death distorts the meaning of authenticity. Authenticity does indeed require that one be faithful to one's self, but we exist essentially with others, as members of a community, thus as parts of a larger whole. Authenticity requires recognition of our historically shaped ethos. Because of this, the determination of the place of the poet's one poem is never understood adequately as a place that is just the poet's own, for this place is bound to a destiny that the poet shares with others, and in its most profound aspects with all human beings. On Heidegger's interpretation the poet thus establishes or re-establishes the world as a meaningful whole. What communicates such establishment is above all the poet's style.

I began with the question: what is the contribution that style makes to artistic success? By now it should have become clear why there is no simple answer to this question. For what is art? And what constitutes artistic success? Different determinations of the essence of art will lead to different accounts of the importance of style.

Those who accept an aesthetic interpretation are likely to grant that considerations of style help us to gain proper access to the work of art. Style allows us to place a work of art. Such placement generates certain expectations and gives direction to further exploration. On such an interpretation, 'the discernment of style' may be said to be 'an integral aspect of the understanding of works of art',²⁶ but although integral it would be an aspect that becomes progressively less important as we allow ourselves to become absorbed by the self-sufficient presence of a particular work of art.

But the aesthetic approach is subject to challenge. If what is taken to matter in art is not so much the self-sufficient presence of the art-object, but its power to inaugurate a way of seeing, style, which on the aesthetic approach has only an ancillary function, will gain central importance.

Following Heidegger, Ricoeur and others have begun to speak of poetry as establishing a world, where such establishment may be likened to the inauguration of a new language-game, implying a new way of speaking, seeing, and valuing. The world thus established may just be the merely aesthetic world of this poem; it may be the world of the poet; or it may be a world that helps to shape a community. Poetry strong enough to establish a world in this last sense approaches prophecy.

Ricoeur finds in metaphor the key to the world-establishing power of poetry.²⁷ In closing, I would like to suggest that the phenomenon of style is even more important. This should not seem surprising if we keep in mind Heidegger's claim that it is mood that discloses our Being-in-the-world as a whole. Style communicates mood. Only a poetry that possesses a style strong enough to impose itself on others and thus to found a community can establish a

common world. We may wonder whether today there is still room for such poetry. What feeds the hope for a new style to rival the great period styles of the past is a dream, perhaps a dangerous dream, of an art strong enough to fashion isolated individuals once more into a genuine community.

Notes

1. Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache. Gesamtausgabe 12* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1985), n. 34. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from the German are my own.
2. René Wellek, 'Literary History and Literary Criticism', in *History as a Tool in Critical Interpretation*, ed. Thomas F. Rugh and Erin R. Silva (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), p. 43.
3. William K. Wimsatt, 'The Intentional Fallacy', in *The Verbal Icon* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), p. 11.
4. I take the example from Emil Staiger, 'Die Kunst der Interpretation', in *Die Kunst der Interpretation* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1971), p. 13.
5. Drawing on *Gestalt* psychology, Arnold Hauser likens style to 'a musical theme of which only variations are known'. See *The Philosophy of Art History* (Cleveland/New York: Meridian Books, 1963), p. 210.
6. *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 34.

7. Emil Staiger, 'Ein Briefwechsel mit Martin Heidegger', in *Die Kunst der Interpretation*, p. 37. Also Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe 13* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983), p. 103.
8. Alvin B. Kernan, 'The Perspective of Satire', in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 348.
9. 'Byron's *Don Juan*' (1821), in *Jubiläums-Ausgabe* (Stuttgart/Berlin: Cotta, 1902), vol. 37, pp. 188-191.
10. Georg Büchner, *Woyzeck*, in *Sämtliche Werke* (Berlin/Darmstadt: Tempel, 1959), p. 172.
11. 'Die Kunst der Interpretation', pp. 11-12.
12. *Don Juan*, canto I, 7.
13. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry*, tr. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954), par. 68.
14. Criticizing Baumgarten, Kant thus emphasizes coordination rather than subordination in his discussion of free beauty. Yet that discussion remains very much within the orbit of the aesthetic approach. There are, however, tensions between that approach and the shift towards patterns of coordination, which is often linked with a tendency to replace formal unity with a unity based on character or expression. This shift in sensibility can be traced both in late eighteenth-century discussions of art — Goethe's essay on Straßburg Cathedral is perhaps the best known example — and in the development of the different arts. For a brilliant discussion of this shift in architecture, see Emil Kaufmann, *Architecture in the Age of Reason* (New York: Dover, 1968),

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pp. 141-180. Parallel developments can be traced in the other arts. As Byron's *Don Juan* shows, this shift threatens to put the aesthetic approach in its entirety into question.

15. For a discussion of 'presence', or rather 'presentness', and 'absorption', see Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 116-147; and Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980).
16. 'The Concrete Universal', in *The Verbal Icon*, p. 81.
17. Revealingly, Michael Fried thus concludes his essay 'Art and Objecthood' with the sentence: 'Presentness is grace'.
18. See Heidegger's discussion of *ethos* in 'Brief über den Humanismus', in *Wegmarken. Gesamtausgabe 9* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1976), pp. 353-357.
19. For a fuller discussion, see my 'Language and Silence: Heidegger's Dialogue with Georg Trakl', in *Boundary 2* (Winter 1976), pp. 495-509.
20. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, tr. Willard Trask (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1953), p. 483.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 488.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 484.
23. Letter of 16 June 1852, reprinted in *Madame Bovary*, ed. and tr. Paul de Man (New York: Norton, 1965), p. 310.

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24. E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, Bollingen paperback edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 20.
25. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, tr. Willard Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 4 -5.
26. Nelson Goodman, 'The Status of Style', in *Critical Inquiry* 1 (June 1975), p. 811.
27. Paul Ricoeur, 'Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics', in *New Literary History* (Autumn 1974), p. 107.

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