
Intimate Conflict : Contradiction as Origin and Mode of Existence of the Work of Art

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The three of them sat before the window looking at the sea. One talked about the sea. The second listened. The third neither spoke nor listened; he was deep in the sea; he floated.

Yannis Ritsos, from "The Third one,"
Gestures (London, 1971)

In his *Science of Logic* Hegel rejects the law of the excluded middle in favor of a viewpoint which acknowledges the essential nature of contradiction. Opposites which are posited are always posited with a third determination, and "the third when taken more profoundly, is the unity of reflection into which the opposition withdraws as into ground."¹ Yet this ground, this unity of reflection, must always determine itself in identity, difference and opposition; the ground posits its determinations in order to appear, and inversely the determinations demand the ground or the unity in order for them to be posited. Hegel pushes this formulation further. When the determinations of this ground,

namely, identity, difference and opposition, have been put into the form of law, still more should the determination into which they pass as their truth, namely, contradiction, be grasped and enunciated as a law: *everything is inherently contradictory*, and in the sense that this law in contrast to the others expresses rather the truth and the essential nature of things. The contradiction which makes its appearance in opposition, is only the developed nothing that is contained in identity and that appears in the expression that the law of identity says nothing. This negation further determines itself into difference and opposition, which now is the posited contradiction.

Thus contradiction shows itself, for Hegel, as the enunciated and lawful truth of all determinations; it is "the essential nature of things." The nothing that is also the unity determines itself solely, truthfully and essentially in contradiction. Or to put it differently :

Contradiction develops out of Polar Opposition when we reflect on the fact that each opposite must in a sense contain, and also not contain, its opposite: each opposite, says Hegel, is mediated with self through its other, and so contains that latter, but it is also mediated with self

through the *non-being* of its other, and through the exclusion of the latter from itself. Such Contradiction was implicit in mere Difference for there too we had an apparent separateness which was also a form of union. It is (we see) in the attempt to give separateness and independence to opposed determinations that Contradiction arises : Contradiction is therefore the limit towards which all Difference and Opposition necessarily tends.²

Contradiction necessarily arises in any determination and in any action, for as the limit of all oppositions contradiction stands as the essential law of determination. Here, the polar opposites of the contradiction mediate themselves into their appearance through the simultaneous being and non-being of their opposites; and, furthermore, this entire determination still remains grounded in a unity (a "union"). Indeed, Hegel claims forcefully that "contradiction is the root of all movement," for "it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, has an urge and activity.

To shift the field of discussion from logic to aesthetics and apply this Hegelian notion of contradiction to works of art would entail seeing works of art as "inherently contradictory."³ Contradiction would be present *at* or *as* the ground of aesthetic works and would be the mode of appearance and existence of a work of art. In other words, contradiction would be the "limit" towards which all works of art necessarily tend. This thesis, which is here asserted provisionally on the basis of Hegel's formulation, is one I would like to examine and elaborate in the course of this essay.

There could be several kinds of contradiction cited in works of art; so it is possible that most of them might fail to accord with that particular kind of contradiction deployed in Hegel's *Science of Logic*. For instance, if a work were reduced to a series of propositions and a logical contradiction found between two of these propositions- such as, "Q is F" and "Q is M" where it is known that "F is not M" : therefore the first two propositions stand in logical contradiction to one another- This state of philosophical affairs would not be Hegel's notion of contradiction. As a matter of fact, this logical contradiction is the kind of contradiction Hegel argues against in his discussion of the law of the excluded middle.⁴ A second example of this multiplicity of contradiction will be a bit more elaborate: four readings of the play of contradiction in the "Boy of Winander" section of "Book Fifth" of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*.⁵ Two of the readings are based on two fairly recent approaches to contradiction and aesthetic conflict; a third reading is based on a popular critical approach to Wordsworth; and the fourth reading is an attempt to see an Hegelian notion of contradiction at work. The idea motivating these four readings is to test practically the thesis of

contradiction as the mode of existence of a work of art as well as to see different kinds of contradiction, however, is to realize the Hegelian notion of contradiction as applied to aesthetic works as the most cogent and embracing.

To consider the "Boy of Winander" episode in *The Prelude* as a "self-consuming artifact" would leave the reader with an epistemological insight at the conclusion of the passage.⁶ A single sentence composes the passage, and this sentence occurs between the opening phrase "There was a Boy:" and the opening phrase "This Boy was . . ." in the next verse paragraph of the fifth book. The body of this sentence is posited as an abrupt consequence or some type of opening up of the statement "There was a Boy:" and this quick bursting open, as it were, is suggested by the colon in the first line, the dash in the second line ("There was a Boy: ye knew him well, ye cliffs / And islands of Winander: - many a time . . .") as well as the return to the phrase "This Boy was . . ." recalls "There was a Boy:" and suggests that the experience which the reader has just undergone happened in the briefest of moments, as if the narrator had paused to sigh between words and had been caught momentarily in a rush of recollections. The reader feels that he has been swept quickly through these recollections also and that he is left hanging silently over the lake's edge before the narrator resumes his discourse with "This Boy was . . ." In this moment, then, in this single sentence, the reader is carried forward by the dialectical thrust of the narrator's recollections. Transitions are made quickly by the wealth of "and"s, "then"s and "when"s; but the force of these connectors is to pull the reader along behind them as soon as they are pronounced. The one sentence and its relationship (by means of a colon and dash) to the overall narration demand this dialectical forward thrust. There is one "visible scene" (1.384) constant throughout the one sentence, but the dialectic brings a consecutive series of events before the reader as he reads. One event not only replaces the previous event in the foreground of the reader's attention but also seems to leave that prior event behind it as a stepping-stone, as if cast aside or abandoned in passing. The sentence and the reader's experience of its pass through a "jocund din" (1.379) beginning with the Boy's preparations (ll. 368-72), his "mimic hootings" (l. 373), the owls' "responsive" shouts (ll. 374-76), and then the redoubling echoes of the "concourse wild" (l. 378). The movement is forward from the Boy standing alone before the lake to an increasing and redoubling response between the Boy and the owls and their mutual echoes. All becomes wildly lost and blended in the "jocund din"; and then this event, this level of the dialectic, breaks into the next where the Boy hangs "listening" expectantly (1.381). He is drawn towards the other side of the lake, and with "a gentle shock of mild surprise" "the voice / of mountain torrents" is "carried far into

his heart" (11. 382-84). In the silence that occurs after the closeness of the "concourse wild," a deeper and farther "voice" pierces through to the "heart" of the Boy. Yet the dialectic carries the Boy and the reader a further step and allows the whole "visible scene" to "enter unawares" into the Boy's and the reader's minds (11. 384-85). After that far-off voice enters deep, all that was once separate enters without being known into a moment of "hanging" silence both for the Boy and for the reader. Both the Boy and the reader have been carried forward into an epistemological insight by the thrust of their experiences, and the level they reach is an utterly suspended moment. The level of insight consumes the previous levels or events leading up to it; all is now blended unawares into one silent mind. The whole sentence and the whole self-consuming movement towards insight, however, are consumed themselves when the narrator breaks the "hanging" silence with the words "This Boy was . . ." and thereby reminds the reader that what he has experienced is the momentary pause and recollection following a colon.

This "Fishean" reading of the Wordsworth passage thus points to contradiction in the work of art as being a contradiction in the aesthetic experience. The dialectical thrust of a piece of writing, according to Fish, consumes where it has been and where it is now in order to lift the reader to a higher level of insight. Yet this mode of contradiction deals with a particular type of reading experience, though that reading experience depends upon a "burning up" of the text that is supposedly implicit in the work itself. The point is, though, that with the Hegelian notion of contradiction an action comes into appearance in and through contradiction. Contradiction is an activity itself, for it is the "limit" of all differences and oppositions. Thus it would be the opposite of the state of mind that the Boy and perhaps the reader attain at the end of a "Fishean" reading of the "Boy of Winander" passage. What happens in this reading is "the loss of power."⁷ Contradiction is not the source and appearance of activity here; but, instead, it shows itself as the end and self-consumption of activity: it is the loss of power and thereby the loss of contradiction.

A second reading of the Wordsworth passage can be made from the perspective on contradiction developed in Per Aage Brandt's essay "The White-Haired Generator." Brandt says that "contradiction stands out in a text as its short-circuited thought. It is the text's motivating underlying reason (sense) which is noticed as it fails."⁸ A text purportedly doubles back upon itself and presents three levels to the reader; and in contradiction the third, or deep, level of the text fails to complete a full, rational circuit with the first, or aesthetic, level. The contradiction, though, occurs through the medium of the second level of the text. In the "Boy of Winander" passage, the "visible scene," with the Boy standing alone by the

side of the lake, constitutes the medium or the second level of the text. A great deal of activity occurs in the passage, but the actual medium of that activity is the constant and established position of everything in that "visible scene." Yet this medium is reflected in another way. Though the physical location of the passage is graphically determined as one scene, the way in which that passage is spiken to the reader is curiously deceptive. This deception resides in the fact that one sentence contains this plethora of activity, transitions and advancements. It is not at first noticeable that only one constant, physical scene and one sentence could serve together as the medium or, in all senses of the word, the passage for the Boy of Winander.

This medium of visible scene and single sentence brings the other two levels of the text into contact with one another. The first level of the text can be seen as the level of sounds and activity. As with the second level or medium, this first level has two aspects - namely, the sounds of the "concourse wild" and the sounding of the clauses of the sentence one after another. Held by the medium of the "visible scene," the sounds made by the Boy, the owls and the echoes build up to an intensity which then crest over into that hanging silence. Similarly, the sounding of the clauses of the sentence occur in a sequence that yields to the hanging moment at the end of the passage. But this stress on the sounding of the one sentence itself as well as the "concourse wild / Of jocund din" is not meant to be incidental or capricious, for in the third level of the text this dual stress becomes justified. Here the second level, the "visible scene" and the sentence itself, generates that one moment of silence that liberates itself from the sounds of the first level.⁹ This liberation occurs simultaneously in both the Boy and the sentence as they "h(a)ng / Listening" in the silence after the sounds. In that coming to stasis and silence, the second level of the text mediates the transformation from independent movement and sounds to the liberation, the piercing in deep of a far-off voice which completes the merging of Boy and visible scene (Other). Silence and stasis (the hanging over the lake edge, listening) are liberated from sound and activity through the aegis of their generator, the visible scene and the sentence. Yet the generator holds its contraries within it, and the movement toward liberation can be repeated. The visible scene and the sentence are both sound and silence, activity and stasis, at once; but this truth must be experienced temporally again and again in order to see what is possible.¹⁰

This second reading points to another kind of contradiction, but it is not really very different from that first kind of contradiction discovered in the reading according to Stanley Fish's method. A contradiction is generated by the text as the text unfolds itself temporally, but that contradiction emerges as a burning up of the text towards a possibility. The possible conflicts with the actual in the

"mediating machine" of the poem.¹¹ This conflict involves the negation of one type of activity while an assertion of a contradictory (contradictory to the original activity) possibility shows itself in its movement towards silence and death. As with Fish, there is a "loss of power" even though a possibility has been liberated momentarily. The text ends, death comes, and the pause between statements is shattered by the sounding of "This Boy was . . ." Again contradiction is not the source and appearance of activity as in Hegel, but instead it is the slow "death struggle"¹² of activity.

A third reading of the "Boy of Winander" passage can be made employing the method used in David Ferry's *The Limits of Mortality*. Ferry intends to read the major poems of Wordsworth "under the form of eternity." He borrows from Spinoza for both his vocabulary and his interpretive categories; and to conceive of things "under the form of eternity" is to see them "so far as we conceive them to be contained in God, and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature."¹³ To conceive of things in such a way, though, is to view them under the aspect of abstraction, of eternal laws and eternal, non-concertized truth. Again borrowing from Spinoza, Ferry contrasts the level of interpretation "under the form of eternity" with a second level of interpretation, the level at which we conceive of things "in so far as we conceive them to exist with relation to a fixed time and place."¹⁴ We are engaged in the particular itself and thereby miss seeing clearly the particular in its universal and eternal aspect. According to the categories that he has derived from Spinoza, Ferry insists, then, that there are two possible readings of Wordsworth's poems. One reading follows the conception of things with regard to fixed time and place, and the other claims to read the meanings of the poems with regard to their universal, eternal or divine form. The first type of conception Ferry calls the "sacramental imagination." The sacramental imagination is bound to the concrete instance and all its difficulties and inadequacies (inadequate in the sense of not clearly showing forth the eternal aspect). Yet this type of imagination would persevere in its search for the flash of the eternal in the concrete itself. The second type of conception is called the "mystical imagination," for it apprehends the eternal when the concrete is suppressed or obliterated entirely. The concrete merely supplies an occasion for the workings of the mystical imagination which in "introspection" or private manipulation and expressiveness frees the eternal essence or universal meaning from its immersion in external nature. The hypothesis that Ferry wants to put forward and test says that Wordsworth's imagination destroys nature and human relations in order to express the eternal aspect latent in them.

The application of Ferry's two types of reading to the Wordsworth passage result in the generation of a contradiction which is quite similar to the

one in the "Brandtean" reading. A reading "under the form of eternity" would put the eternal aspect sought by the mystical imagination into conflict with the "fixed time and place" in which the sacramental imagination dwells. The eternal aspect would be the possibility which is freed only by contradicting and destroying the given actuality of the concrete instance. The moment when

the visible scene

Would enter unawares into his mind,
With all its solemn imagery, it rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received
Into the bosom of the steady lake, (11. 384-88)

This moment is the mystical imagination apprehending the eternal, the fundamental identity of self and other. But in that apprehension "the visible scene" is transported and incorporated into the mind. A violence has been committed in the sense that the conflict between the mystical and sacramental imaginations has gone in favor of one to the suppression and destruction of the other. All the hooting and echoes and the din created are being drawn towards their obliteration in the silent pause, the hanging posture and mystical union. But this is also what has happened in the second reading of the passage. A possibility shows itself in the contradictory and destroying conflict with the actual, but it shows itself only for that moment before its own death. Similarly, the Boy dies. The "knowledge" gained in his mystic vision was "purchased by the loss of power" (1. 425). For the third time, the citing of contradiction in the passage reveals that particular type of contradiction as a dying, self-consuming struggle between what is actual and what would like to uproot completely and supplant that actuality.

The fourth reading discovers contradiction just as the first three have done, but contradiction here lies not in the conflict of sounding and silent moments along a temporal axis in the text or in a reader's consumption of it. Contradiction under this reading would seem to be the foundation for the other three readings of contradiction, for it is the founding or originating contradiction of the work itself. The Boy stands alone amidst and almost dwarfed by the grand movements of the stars "along the edges of the hills" (1. 367). The stars and the Boy are at two extremes, at two horizons, of the coming conflict. By gathering his fingers together and then his interwoven hands to his mouth, the Boy gathers himself as if to summon the distant:

with fingers interwoven, both hands
Pressed closely palm to palm, and to his mouth
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,

Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
That they might answer him. (11. 370-74)

He must mimic the sounds of the distant in order for it to respond to his summons. The owls, once silent, now call back to him, "responsive to his call" (1. 376). The exchange of summonings and answerings and the redoubling echoes of these callings create that "concourse wild / Of jocund din" which brings both horizons together in pure sound. This communion of summoning and answering breaks over into "a lengthened pause / Of silence" in which the Boy is prepared to receive, though with "a gentle shock of mild surprise," the distant "voice / Of mountain torrents" (11. 379-84). The appearance of the Boy at the lake's edge and his initial hootings have established a demand and a conflict that is answered equally by the initially distant, and together they create a concourse that brings them into an intimate, give- and-take conflict. That intimate conflict and exchange then makes possible the speaking of an otherwise imperceptible or inaudible truth. But that conflict between opposing horizons is essential to the speaking of that truth; it is only in the conflict and the conflict and the concourse between opposites that something distant and hidden shows itself and enters deep. The establishment of this conflict, the positing of this contradiction within the one "visible scene," is the necessary foundation for the other three readings and their instances of contradiction. The element common to the three of them, though they each treat it differently, is the contradictory disparity between the final possibility of the passage and its actual beginnings. These instances of contradiction imply that the possible cannot show itself unless the actual is consumed in the process of showing. Yet there is the more fundamental and intimate contradiction between horizons in the text that nonetheless holds the struggle between the actual and the possible *as a potentially self-consuming conflict*. Similarly with the sentence itself, there is a conflict commenced with the very first words of the passage "There was a Boy:". Those words establish a conflict to be developed by positing one of the poles, one of the horizons, of that conflict. The sentence creates and holds its struggle until it too comes to rest after the showing of its truth in the conflict.

The "Boy of Winander" passage, however, concludes with "the visible scene" entering the Boy's mind, and for all practical purposes the actual conflict is destroyed in the momentary and "hanging" merger of the two horizons. The conflict is not preserved in its contradictory status but succumbs to a new possibility. This factor is precisely what makes possible the viability of the other three readings and the other three instances of contradiction. Yet it also means that a deception has been carried out. For each of those first three readings, an appeal has been made to a wider context, of which the "Boy of Winander"

passage itself is only a part, in order to see how those readings fail to match Hegel's notion of contradiction. The recognition of a fourth type of contradiction in the Wordsworth passage becomes precarious if the appeal to a wider context cannot be made, for the end of the passage seems to obliterate the maintenance of such a contradiction or struggle. The "Boy of Winander" passage is a moment in the wider context of "Book Fifth" of *The Prelude*. The narrator has been discoursing about "a wiser spirit at work for us" and pauses to speak about the Boy. The pause is broken when the narrator returns to his regular narration, but the "hanging" moment he has let happen comes under indirect questioning. The possibility suggested in the Boy's momentary straining towards and merging with the outer horizon is consumed when we learn that the Boy has died soon after these mystical moments have occurred. In his place, Wordsworth wishes "a race of real children" to be raised properly so that the knowledge they find may not be the knowledge that is only "purchased by the loss of power." In essence, the Boy was not mature enough to maintain the struggle and the contradiction of his state so that he might know in a non-self-consuming way that "wiser spirit." The voice which enters him enters "unawares into his mind"; it seizes him completely and destroys, in the contradictory fashion of the first three readings, that originating and fundamental contradiction which is "the essential nature of things," according to Hegel. The text of the "Boy of Winander" passage is bracketed with a context that bears upon the readings of contradiction in the passage. Analogously, the four readings of contradiction in that passage are here bracketed by Hegel's notion of contradiction and a theory of contradiction as the source and mode of existence of works of art that follows below in section.IV.

II

There are, however, two fine examples of a later, and perhaps more mature, vision of this originating and fundamental contradiction in Wordsworth; one is located at the beginning of "Book Fourteenth" of *The Prelude* and the other near the end of "Book Fourth" of *The Excursion*.¹⁵ In the passage from *The Prelude* the poet-narrator, a friend and a shepherd begin to climb a mountainside in Cambria during "a close, warm breezeless summer night." The climb is an intense struggle during those dark hours before morning, and the closeness of the atmosphere accentuates the fact. "The mist soon girt (them) round" as if burdening them with unwanted clothing, and they "pensively" sink into their own "thoughts" and "musings." "With forehead bent / Earthward, as if in opposition set against an enemy," the narrator continues to struggle with and against the dark mountainside until suddenly "the ground appeared to brighten" at his feet and "instantly a light upon the turf / Fell like a flash." The moon shows itself shorn of its clothing ("hung naked in a firmament / Of azure without cloud")

and reveals to the poet the profit of his struggle. The moon lights up the "headlands" and "the ethereal vault" as far "as the sight could reach," and the mist below becomes a "billowy ocean" upon whose "shore" the poet and his friends stand. And in this silent, "visible Scene," "a rift" opens not distant from that shore; and "roaring with one voice," the sound of "innumerable" waters is "heard over earth and sea, and, in that hour, / For so it seemed, felt by the starry heavens." The fruit of the struggle is to hear that voice speaking through the rift opened by one's struggle with the earth; and that voice speaks only in that rifting, in that conflict and contradiction between opposite horizons. The vision does not consume itself, for that speaking rift is not usurped by the humans listening to it from their shore. They come to meet it through their struggle, and "that vision, given to spirits of the night / And three chance human wanderers," is held by them "in calm thought" after the moment of the vision dissolves. Only in contradiction, in intimate conflict, does vision appear to offer itself and the unswayable chance to be heard.

The passage from the fourth book of *The Excursion* (ll. 1133-87) offers yet another "visible scene" in which contradiction works in its originating and fundamental way. There is another boy in this section, "a curious child, who dwelt upon a tract / Of inland ground." Much like the Boy of Winander, this child listens for that distant voice; he applies "to his ear / The convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell; / To which, in silence hushed, his very soul / Listened intensely." With the lips of the shell pressed to his ear, the child hears "murmurings, whereby the monitor expressed / Mysterious union with its native sea." Yet, at this enchanting point, there is a sudden bridge made into a fuller vision. Even as the shell now speaks to the child when he would listen, then

Even such a shell the universe itself
Is to the ear of Faith; and there are times,
I doubt not, when to you it doth impart

Authentic tidings of invisible things. (ll. 11412-44)

The passage goes on to present the moment when such tidings are brought to men: when "the ear of Faith" would listen "intensely" to the universe. Such a moment happens as "a shock of awful consciousness" (reminiscent and yet of greater intensity than the Boy of Winander's "gentle shock of mild surprise") when at twilight a mountain scape brings the sky down to rest upon its peaks and composes a "temple" of "dimensions vast." In this temple hootings are not mimicked and redoubled, but "human anthems" can be heard which none the less do not have to "break the stillness that prevails" there. Nature supports the human songs in kind:

Nature fails not to provide
Impulse and utterance. The whispering air
Sends inspiration from the shadowy heights,
And blind recesses of the caved rocks;
The little rills, and waters numberless,
Inaudible by daylight, blend their notes
With the loud streams. (11. 1169-75)

The temple has brought the human and the natural into an intimate conflict with one another so that nature itself can now take up the "anthems" and sing them with its own sounds. In this moment the human and natural horizons meet in "song" within the "temple" that their intimacy brings into being. And because of this intimate conflict of the human and natural horizons, "authentic tidings of invisible things" are heard by the wanderer in the precincts of this temple:

and often, at the hour
When issue forth the first pale stars, is heard,
Within the circuit of this fabric huge,
One voice—the solitary raven, flying
Athwart the concave of the dark blue dome,
Unseen, perchance above all power of sight—
An iron knell! (11. 1175-81)

The temple, "this fabric huge," opens a space, through its intimate conflict of human and natural, for the "unseen" raven to be heard. The "one voice" of the raven enters this "visible scene" which is prepared to hear it, for it has been prepared precisely by way of the intimate conflict. The wanderer catches this voice and traces its echoes and thereby "accompanies (the raven's flight / Through the calm region." Yet the cry

fades upon the ear,
Diminishing by distance till it seemed
To expire: yet from the abyss is caught again,
And yet again recovered! (11. 1184-87)

The wanderer accompanies the raven's cry just as the curious child delights in the murmurings of the shell, but they do not seek a mystical union with the invisible and abyssal. The conflict is preserved as a conflict so that one may hear again and yet again the "authentic tidings of invisible things." The fundamental and originating contradiction is maintained and celebrated in preference to consuming oneself in the contradiction between what is seen as actual and what is proposed as possible. The possible, or rather the voice of "invisible things," is audible again and again because it occurs in the conflicts of the actual.

III

This split in the actual is, nevertheless, the design in which and through which the unswayable can be heard. This same problem happens in the self as well as the work of art, and Henry W. Johnstone's book *The Problem of the Self* sketches this ontological dimension of contradiction. In the activity of self-reference a person is implicitly saying that he knows himself, that he can become discontinuous and speak about himself as if he were an object. Yet at the same time that person maintains a continuity.

If you say "I am tired," it is one identical person who *says* he is tired and *is* tired. This performance has no mechanical or logical model. If a machine ever said "I am tired," its provisional unity would break down into the duality of a reporting part and a tired part. But the unity of the person is powerful enough to fuse these parts into one, however inconsistent this fusion may be.¹⁶

The speaking person cannot reconcile this inconsistency or contradiction within himself. Instead the person must appeal to the self as the mean of explaining the inconsistency. "The self is alleged to be the *locus* of the inconsistency, and hence explains it without repudiating it" (PS, p. 19). Thus the person has a continual problematic at its foundation; it has a tension in its self that it cannot and should not escape:

Tension presupposes a *single* self, which has both decided and not decided. The schizophrenic alteration of true self and false self, as for example in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, is in fact an evasion of tension. We see a person undergoing tension only when we see him as having both poles of a contradiction; that is, as having brought them within a single perspective. This perspective is the person's self. It is the self that establishes the contradiction by bringing its poles together within a single perspective. Thus contradiction and self presuppose one another (PS, pp. 19-20)

Tension, then, involves the acceptance of a contradiction in the self and the acknowledgement of its necessity for the well-being of the person. "The actual person . . . is haunted by the genuine and inescapable possibility of falling into contradiction. He is haunted by the possibility of a self" (PS, p. 26). The inescapable and fundamental nature of contradiction threatens the person with uncertainty and insecurity concerning his origins. He cannot rest comfortably in the assertion that he is an irreducible and unified ego. When the ego would be confronted with a contradiction at its source, for instance in the problematic of self-reference, then it must assert itself as irreducible or be consumed in the contradiction.¹⁷ But when the contradiction is accepted and acknowledged as the

problem of the self and the foundation of the person, then a new perspective on the actual person and his possibility of a self is gained. Thus *the possible* which presents contradiction to the person does not consume that *actual* person, for "the appearance of a genuine self" necessarily presupposes "the unity of the person" (PS, p.29). If the person was not a unity, however inconsistent, then the self would not be called upon in the first place to present its fundamental contradiction; instead, the person would function as if he were the machine that tried to monitor itself—in essence, two machines. This perspective on the actual person and the possible self shows that the contradiction "is unified through the evocation of [the] self," and that the "self, in unifying the contradiction, both confirms [this] unity as a person and stamps [it] with this unity" (PS, p. 29). This account of contradiction, Johnston concludes, is a "more fundamental account" of contradiction than skepticism or dissimulation because only here is the genuine self evoked—that is, seen emerging from the split in the actual person in order to accept the burden and responsibility of maintaining the contradiction and thereby maintaining the genuine unity of the person (PS, p.150).

This sketch of the ontological dimension of contradiction in *The Problem of the Self* provides key relationships in the elaboration of contradiction as fundamental and originating for works of art. Analogous to the person in Johnstone's study, the passages (or the work of art, generally) from Wordsworth would present an actual unity which is thrown into a tension with itself. The person presents himself with the two poles that arise in self-reference, and each Wordsworth passage establishes a conflict between two horizons—one human and one natural. These two types of tension are the originating and fundamental contradictions in their respective contexts. The tension, on the one hand, and the conflict of horizons, on the other, both seek a unity in which their fundamental contradictions will be preserved in all their originating power. If these contradictions are not accepted and acknowledged as necessary contradictions, then the person might fall into a state of despair or schizophrenia and the art work could consume itself in one of the three ways, for instance, that the first three approaches to the "Boy of Winander" passage consumed themselves in their contradictions. These fundamental contradictions, however, are maintained in the self for Johnstone and in the visible scene, the night climb and the temple for Wordsworth. Just as the self holds the two poles of contradiction together through a tension within itself, so also do the sites of conflict between horizons in the three Wordsworth passages considered above maintain their contradictions in intimate struggles. And finally, through the maintaining of these contradictions different yet corresponding tidings are brought. To the person who evokes his genuine self in order to accept the inherent and inescapable contradiction, the message of his burden and

responsibility are brought; and to the wanderers to struggle with the earth in intimate conflict until a rift opens, the "authentic tidings of invisible things" are given. Thus there are a series of correspondences possible between contradiction cited in the Wordsworth passages and the ontological dimension of contradiction in the theory of the self. These correspondences can constitute a pathway into the ontological dimension of contradiction in the theory of the work of art.

IV

The initial formulation of contradiction as originating and fundamental in works of art, for this essay, was derived from Hegel's discussion of contradiction in logic. This formulation was then tested for its comparative viability in the "Boy of Winander" passage. Two further passages from Wordsworth, as well as a sketch of Johnstone's project on the self, have spelled out practically the crucial nature of contradiction in the workings of Wordsworth's poetry, or at least in the workings of those two passages. A theory of the work of art which could place all these elements and observations on contradiction into a systematic form, one in which contradiction would be present at or as the ground of works of art and would be the mode of appearance and existence of a work of art, is, I believe, the theory offered by Martin Heidegger in his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art."

Truth can be said to happen, according to Heidegger, in and through contradiction. Truth, when taken in the original Greek sense of the word "aletheia," "means the unconcealment of that which is."¹⁸ This unconcealment is possible in the work because the work opens up a place in which truth shows itself. Or in other words, "the work as work sets up a world. The work holds open the Open of the world" ("OWA," p. 672). Heidegger also calls the Open or the open place "a clearing" or "a lighting". Truth is lit up or illuminated when it is unconcealed in the Open, the clearing of what is. An emblem of this process, for Heidegger, is the temple. The Greek temple in its worked form allows the god to be unconcealed, to be illuminated, in the holy space that the temple clears and stands in ("OWA," pp. 669-70). Similarly with the two Wordsworth passages considered as mature visions of the originating and fundamental contradiction, there is a holy space opened in the work in which "invisible things" are brought into the Open and their voices heard. Yet these "invisible things" remain invisible in their very speaking. The work or the temple and their truth cannot yield total unconcealment. The unconcealment of what is also entails its contradiction, the concealment of what is. The "visible scene" must not enter wholly into the wanderer and destroy the intimate conflict of horizons. There must always be that countermovement of concealment in order to preserve the contradiction and in order to guarantee the possibility of sighting or hearing the truth unconcealed

"again, / And yet again." In Heidegger, this countermovement of concealment and unconcealment is called an "essential strife" in which the "opponents," though opposed in an inescapable and contradictory struggle, do not consume themselves but instead "raise each other into the self-assertion of their essence" ("OWA," p.675). The one opponent or horizon is the "world," the open place of unconcealment, while the other is the "earth," the concealed and the perpetually concealing. Thus the attempt to light up truth finds its source and its mode of existence in the perpetual and essential struggle between two opposites, world and earth. World must not usurp earth, nor earth world; but the contradiction must be maintained for truth to happen. And this maintenance is not a violence done to either opponent, for in conflict and only in conflict can they "raise each other in the self-assertion" of what they are :

Self-assertion of essence, however, is never the fixing of self in some contingent circumstance, but the surrender of self to the secret originality of the source of one's own being. In strife, each opponent carries the other beyond itself. Thus the strife becomes ever more intense as strife, and more authentically what it is. The more the struggle exceeds itself on its own account, the more inflexibly do the opponents release themselves into the intimacy of simply belonging to one another. The earth cannot dispense with the Open of the world if it itself is to appear as earth in the liberated impulse of its self-enclosure. The world, again, cannot float off from the earth if it is to ground itself on a firm foundation as the governing breadth and path of all essential destiny. ("OWA," p.675)

This strife and continual contradiction between the openness of world and the concealing power of earth is fundamental and originating for the happening of truth. This strife is instigated in the work of art. It is there that truth shows itself in the "simple intimacy" of contradiction and that "the unity of the work" can rest upon itself—an acceptance and acknowledgement of its necessary struggle—as a temple or a night struggle and vision ("OWA," pp. 674-75).

Truth, then, happens in the struggle between earth and world, and the locus or the composing of that struggle is the work itself.

Truth establishes itself in the work. Truth is present only as the conflict between lighting and concealing in the opposition of world and earth. The aim of truth is to be established in the work as this conflict of world and earth. The conflict should not be resolved in an entity produced for the purpose, nor should it be merely housed there, but it should be disclosed by way of this entity. This entity must therefore contain within itself the essential traits of conflict. In the conflict the unity of world and earth is won. ("OWA," p. 686)

The work **must** both disclose and preserve the conflict of world and earth by originating and existing in that opposition. So the work is composed by contradiction as well as composing contradiction in the entity. Thus, the unity of the work, and the **truth** that thereby appears, depends on the status of contradiction in the work.

Contradiction in the work of art stands as originating and fundamental contradiction, according to Heidegger, when the status of contradiction is realized as "rift-design."¹⁹ There is a rift between earth and world, but it is not an isolating kind of rift.

This rift draws (*resist*) the opponents together into the source of their unity out of the single ground. It is a ground-plan (*Grundriss*). It is an elevation (*Auf-riss*) that draws the basic features of the rising up of the lighting of what is. This rift does not let the opponents break apart; it brings the opposition of measure and limit into the single boundary (*Umriss*). ("OWA," p. 686)

Thus, at the same time that contradiction cleaves earth and world into an opposition, it also provides the very design for their drawing into a unity that is held by a single boundary. But that unity that the opponents are drawn into is not the unity of world fully concealed in earth.²⁰ Instead, it is the unity of an intimate struggle between "opponents that belong to each other" and who in their struggle rise up from the ground into their single boundary. The struggle that draws into a unity, then, moves upward (elevation, *Aufriss*) from breach through ground-plan to boundary. The riftesign brings into the work and maintains the struggle and its rising movement; for "the rift-design is the drawing together into a unity of elevation and ground-plan, breach and boundary." Truth establishes and discloses itself in the Open that is unconcealed by the conflict brought into the work as the rift-design. Therefore "truth establishes itself in something that *is* in such a way, indeed, that the latter entity itself occupies the Open of truth" ("OWA," p. 686). Yet this occupying of the Open of truth by the rift-design depends upon the rift-design's trusting itself to the earth which can conceal it again ("OWA," pp. 686-87). In other words, the rift-design must entrust itself to contradiction; it must not seek to tear itself from its ground but must preserve the conflict.

Hegel's notion of contradiction, in this general way, can be seen as borne out in this Heideggerian theory of the work of art. Contradiction arises in the conflict between earth and world in which both opponents meditate one another into appearance as a contradiction. The pattern of this struggling, contradictory movement in the work is the rift-design, and this pattern has made it possible for the contradictory movement to be brought into the work. The rift-design

draws and holds contradiction in a unity so that not only will contradiction be preserved in the work but also so that truth will reveal (or "unconceal") itself by means of that contradiction. Yet this truth always has the possibility of contradicting itself by being concealed once more in the continual conflict. Contradiction is therefore both source and mode of existence of a work of art. It is both that initial breach and that limit or boundary of a work of art. There is activity or movement in the work only because there is originating and fundamental contradiction which has been brought into the work as unifying rift-design. The wanderer can enter the temple composed by the intimate conflict between the horizons of man and nature and hear at the boundary of that rift-design the one voice that reveals and yet conceals its "authentic tidings." He can do this only because that temple originates in and maintains the existence of contradiction. Yet in contradiction, and it would seem only in contradiction, is the "one voice" at the boundary "caught again, / And yet again recovered!"²¹

Notes and References

- 1 G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 439. Additional quotations from this one-volume translation of Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik*, which are used in my first paragraph, are taken from this same translation and page.
- 2 J.N. Findlay, *The Philosophy of Hegel : An Introduction and Re- Examination* (N.Y.: Collier Books, 1966), p. 195.
3. In drawing upon *Hegel's Science of Logic* for an approach to the mode of existence of works of art, I am deliberately ignoring Hegel's own rather copious work in the field of aesthetics. Hegel's posthumously collected *Asthetik*—variously known in English under the titles *Aesthetics*, *Lectures on Aesthetics* and *The Philosophy of Fine Art*—offers an elaborate treatment of the notion of beauty and of the appearance of "the Ideal" in the sensuous material of art. Hegel also generates an extensive historical topology of the particular forms or genres of art, a typology which is rooted in the progress of concrete determination which "the Ideal" undergoes. The notion of contradiction is not really featured in Hegel's *Aesthetics*; the coincidence and harmony of opposites seem supreme :
 the nature of the artistic Ideal is to be sought in [the] reconveyance of external existence into the spiritual realm, so that the external appearance, by being adequate to the spirit, is the revelation thereof.[T]his... reconveyance ...remains in the centre where the purely external and the purely internal coincide. Accordingly, the Ideal is actuality, withdrawn from the profusion of details and accidents, in so far as the inner appears itself in this externality, lifted above and opposed to universality, as living individuality. (Hegel, *Aesthetics : Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. I, trans. T. M. Knox [Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1975], p.156.)
 The idea of divine incarnation, of the miraculous appearance of divine universality in the historical materiality of living human individual, clearly shapes this desire for a coincidence and harmony of opposites. A Kierkegardian sense of "paradox" (*Philosophical Fragments*) and "dialectical contradiction" (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*) will soon problematize the religious source of this idea or Ideal. Hegel himself in analyzing the determinacy or actualization of "the Ideal" in human activity, though, dwells at length on the social and psychological "collision" or "conflict" which obtains in the determinate situations which art enacts or dramatizes; contradictory views and intense and intimate intrapsychic struggles are keen here (*Aesthetics*, Vol. I, pp. 204-217).

- 4 Hegel's *Science of Logic*, pp. 438-9. Hegel objects that "the law of the excluded middle ...implies that there is nothing that is neither *A* nor *not-A* that there is not a third that is indifferent to the opposition" (p.438).
- 5 All quotations from this passage will be taken from the 1850 edition of *The Prelude* in William Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, eds. Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest de Selincourt (London : Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 525-6. The line references are to this text and edition. Perhaps it should be noted that the readings of the "Boy of Winander" passage given in this essay depart from the more conventional emphasis placed upon themes of death and mortality and the poet-narrator's response to the Boy. However, if the passage is examined in the context of the thoughts and positions articulated in the fifth book of *The Prelude*, the struggle of the poet-narrator to limn a delicate balance among pedagogical and developmental excesses gains the foreground of attention. The poet-narrator has rejoiced that he "was reared/ Safe from an evil which these days have laid/Upon the children of the land, a pest/That might have dried me up, body and soul" (ll. 226-9). That "evil" is a closely watched and strictly managed "modern system" of childrearing and pedagogy (l. 295). The poet recounts his own "open ground/ Of Fancy" and praises his mother's unselfish and unanxious "benignity and hope" in providing the needed "centre," "the heart/ And hinge of all our learnings and our loves" (ll. 236-7, 292, 252, 257-8). He includes himself as one of a number of siblings ("Trooping together", l. 260) and images the relation of mother to children as "the parent hen amid her brood" (l.246). In sharp contrast to this model of up-bringing, the poet-narrator satirizes the "model of a child" who is quite solitary and "early trained to worship seemliness" and who "can read lectures upon innocence" (ll. 298-9, 314). Such a tamed and managed child will not do because, except for its vanity, "little would be left/Which he could truly love" and he would forsake "the playthings" which "old grandam earth" in "her love designed for him" (ll. 329-31, 337-8). Perhaps worst of all, he would never be able to forget himself in the love of others, even in the love of other things as fanciful as fairy tales (ll. 341-6). The Boy of Winander, in sharp juxtaposition, is one who does forget himself in innocent delight in the playthings of the earth. This child, though, as solitary in his own way as the "model" child, marks out another pedagogical extreme, an extreme of imaginative power which Wordsworth himself on a number of occasions reveals strong attraction towards. The Boy strives too far and seems overtaken, indeed quite overwhelmed, by what his calls have initiated; the "voice" of "torrents" overpowers his "heart," the "visible scene" his "mind," and an "uncertain heaven" descends as well to "the bosom of the steady lake" which appears to swallow the Boy's heart and mind as they unwittingly give themselves over to powers beyond their control. Such overpowering leveling of horizons is fatal to imaginative growth; and, though this Boy commands the onlooker's mute and rapt attention and awe, he seems nonetheless forgotten by the village church who overlooks and listens to "the gladsome sounds" of the children playing below, "a race of young ones like to those/ With whom I herded" (ll. 407-8). Such children are "A race of real children" who, unlike both the extremes of the "model" child and the Boy of Winander, gain "Knowledge not purchased by the loss of power!" (l. 425). For two different readings, see G. H. Hartman, "The Boy of Winander", *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 19-22. and John Beer, *Wordsworth in Time* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), pp. 85-6.
- 6 This reading is based upon the technique and theory developed in Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts : The Experience of Seventeenth Century Literature* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1972), especially pp. 1-4. In this paragraph and the next, I will be using such terms and concepts, borrowed from this text of Fish, as "self-consuming", "dialectical thrust" and "epistemological insight".
- 7 Wordsworth, p. 526. This phrase is from the end of the passage which begins "this Boy was..." What the poet-narrator does is to describe wishfully "A race of real children" after standing over the grave of the Boy. These "real children, "unlike the Boy, would seek "Knowledge not purchased

by the loss of power"; and that "loss of power" characterizes precisely the kind of knowledge which the Boy achieves in his "hanging" silence. See also note 5 above.

- 8 Per Aage Brandt, "The White-Haired Generator," trans. Linda Tagliaferro, *Poetics*, VI (1972), 72.
- 9 The terminology here alludes to Brandt, p.75. Brandt's terms for his three levels of the text are "aesthetic" (first level), "oneiric" (second level) and "political" (third level); the oneiric level "mediates" the conflict between the actual or aesthetic text and the "liberation" which is possible at the political level of the text. See Brandt, pp. 74-5.
- 10 Again, some of the terminology here alludes to Brandt, p. 82.
- 11 Brandt, p. 82.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 David Ferry, *The Limits of Mortality* (Middletown, Conn. : Wesleyaan University Press, 1959), p. 8. Ferry quotes from Spinoza at this point.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 All quotations from the passage in *The Prelude* will be taken from the 1850 edition of the poem in Wordsworth, pp. 583-4. All quotations from the passage in *the Excursion* will be taken from the same text, p. 639.
- 16 Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., *The Problem of the Self* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), pp. 12-3. Additional quotations from this book will be designated with the abbreviation *PS* and the relevant page numbers.
- 17 For some philosophical examples, see Johnstone's account of Descartes, Kant and Husserl (*PS*, p. 25 and Ch. 2, "Persons and Selves," pp. 15-29, in passing.)
- 18 Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, eds. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (N.Y. : Modern Library, 1964), p. 676. Additional quotations from this essay will be designated with the abbreviation "OWA" and the relevant page numbers. This essay, a translation of "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," also appears, with slight modification, as the second chapter in Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A Hofstadter (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 17-87.
In his essay "Heidegger and the Work of Art" in *Aesthetics Today*, ed. Morris Philipson (N. Y.: New American Library, 1961), pp. 413-31, Hans Jaeger outlines and evaluates Heidegger's essay "The Origin of the Work of Art". He aptly articulates at some length Heidegger's concept of truth with regard to the work of art, and I refer the reader to his elucidation rather than to try to summarize it here. See especially pp. 421-3.
- 19 "Rift-design" is the translator's approximation of Heidegger's term "der Riss". The German word means both "rift", in the sense of a break or a splitting or opening, and "design," in the sense of a plan for drawing together and holding in one unity two or more elements. The term as well as a footnote on the term by the translator are found in Heidegger, p.686.
- 20 This point is not really made explicit in the body of this essay because it is more or less a hypothetical situation. One can say that the original (in the sense of primal) unity of "the single ground" is a hypothesis not necessarily demanded by this approach. We live in contradiction or the possibility of contradiction and, therefore, can only attempt to imagine a unity or ground before contradiction. This situation is a rather Kantian one, especially in the context of Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic, and not at all a Fichtean one, one in which a single ground of primal unity is posited (see Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*). Or in Heidegger's terms, we are in the opposition between earth and world when we try to think of the ground where world would be concealed completely in earth. Similarly, when we try to talk or think about an original silence which concealed all language or a "person" acting out a life in which self-reference is never thought or spoken, then perhaps we see we are constructing a hypothetical origin. This activity—essentially, the search for the origin—is not in and of itself erroneous; but the point is that as humans we live in contradiction. As Johnstone points out, we must accept the burden and responsibility of

this situation; we should not seek to escape it in the dreams of—or nostalgia for—primal unity or non-contradictory reunion to come.

- 21 An important implication of this way of looking at a work of art is that it reverses the possible reductionistic and nihilistic reverberations of taking repetition as *compulsion*. Instead, repetition may be seen or experienced as a frequently contingent feature of the temporal unfolding of a work of art; it may be a way of insistently calling attention to the operation of contradiction.

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