

**The Flowers of
Andromache:
Allegory, Ontology,
and Tragedy in
in Baudelaire's
"Le Cygne"**

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Abstract: Tracing the allegorical scenario of Baudelaire’s apostrophic address to Andromache in “Le Cygne” back from Virgil to its earliest source in Book XXII of *The Iliad*, this article reads Andromache as a figure of temporally divided non-identity, riven between anticipation and belatedness. From this perspective, I draw upon Heidegger’s reading of Kant to develop a transcendental theory of allegorical imagination which links two conditions of allegorical representation in Baudelaire’s poem: the temporal opening of the subject to historicity and the transformation of empirical particulars into abstract universals. Approaching allegory at the transcendental level of the *determinability* of the given, I argue, allows us to understand *how* allegory can function as “the rhetoric of temporality” (de Man) and also *why* Benjamin’s theory of melancholic allegory in the *Trauerspiel* book must be understood as incompatible with his opposition of the figural to the temporal in his theory of the dialectical image. Finally, I trace the figure of Andromache from Homer through incompatible representations of her fate in Euripides and Racine in order to show how contradiction and non-identity—inhabiting the apparent unity of the name—are not only the ground of the tragic, but also of tragedy’s circulation through epic, drama, and lyric.

Keywords: Allegory, Melancholy, Tragedy, Baudelaire, Homer, Benjamin, Heidegger, Kant

For in the tragic lies the completion of the epic, in the lyric the completion of the tragic, in the epic the completion of the lyric.
– Friedrich Hölderlin

Allegory

The basic operation of Baudelaire’s allegorical style is disarmingly simple. He confers a majuscule upon an abstract noun, thus stamping it with the mark of the universal and personifying it as an agent that may be addressed through the rhetoric of apostrophe, as in the poem “Hymn to Beauty”: “Do you fall from the heavens or rise from the abyss, / O Beauty.”¹ Yet this apparently simple operation implies a redoubling of the given which is more metaphysically complex: conceived under the implicit sign of an allegorical name, every beautiful thing implies the presence of Beauty, every instance of boredom or *taedium vitae* suggests the existence of Ennui. In “Le Cygne,” one of Baudelaire’s most important poems in part because it implies a theory of allegory, the three allegorical figures are Work, Sorrow, and Memory (Travail,

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¹ Baudelaire 2021, p. 63.

Douleur, Souvenir).² Work awakens at the cold and clear hour when the street cleaners carry out their task; Sorrow is described as a gracious she-wolf who nurses those “who have lost what cannot be found”; and in the final stanza, Memory rises within “the forest of my mind’s exile,” where it “sounds a full-throated horn.” The allegorical names of Work, Sorrow, and Memory punctuate the movement of the poem and populate it with figures that represent the social reproduction of the city while transcending it, and that commemorate the suffering of isolated exiles as a collective. But the poem also involves another allegorical level: it constructs a historical and mythopoetic allegory wherein the transformation of Paris by Baron Hausmann’s renovation in the 1850s evokes the fall of Troy, mapping the melancholic mood of the speaker onto the sufferings of Andromache and the death of Hector. One of the interpretive demands imposed by the poem is to understand the relation between these two levels of allegorical meaning.

At the center of the poem, we find the association, through rhyme, of melancholy and allegory that will be so crucial to Walter Benjamin’s theory of baroque allegory in the *Trauerspiel* book:

Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancholie
N’a bougé. palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,
Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie,
Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs.

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Paris changes! but nothing in my melancholy
Has stirred! new palaces, scaffoldings, blocks,
Old neighborhoods, for me everything becomes allegory,
And my cherished memories more weighty than rocks.

Written in 1859, the poem articulates a melancholic attachment to the city of Baudelaire’s youth:

Le vieux Paris n’est plus (la forme d’une ville
Change plus vite, hélas! que le coeur d’un mortel);

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The Paris of old is no more (the form of a city
Changes more swiftly, alas! than a mortal heart);

Thus the transformation of the old Paris by Hausmann’s modern renovation gives rise to a meditation upon the differential rhythm or chronology of historical and subjective time, the disjunction between these gives rise to melancholy, and the stasis of such melancholy amid the mutability of the city confers allegorical significance upon its

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² Baudelaire 2021, p. 254-259. All subsequent quotations from “Le Cygne” are from these pages.

inorganic elements (new palaces, scaffoldings, blocks) while turning the affective intimacy of “cherished memories” to stone. “Allegories are in the realm of thought what ruins are in the realm of things,” writes Benjamin.³ In Baudelaire’s famous quatrain, the melancholic attunement of thought converts things into allegory and memories into ruins.⁴

But how, exactly, does the disjunction between historical and subjective temporality relate to Baudelaire’s particular practice of allegory, in which abstract nouns are personified as universals? And what does the kind of temporality at issue in that practice have to do with its attachment to thinking, in the iconic apostrophe that opens Baudelaire’s poem: “Andromache, I think of you!” This is well-trodden ground, and the centrality of “Le Cygne” to modern literature and literary theory is such that these or similar questions are inextricable from Benjamin’s theory of the dialectical image, from Paul de Man’s essay on allegory as “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” and from Fredric Jameson’s understanding of allegory’s relationship to ideology, which situates the subject within a collective social structure. With Benjamin, de Man, and Jameson in mind, one notes that the poem’s opening invocation of Andromache performs the recuperative gesture of linking the transformation of the modern city to ancient myth, honorifically compensating for the lyric speaker’s subjective powerlessness in the face of historical change and its social consequences—which had been driven home, for Baudelaire, by the violent suppression of the revolution of 1848 and the bathos of the subsequent *coup d’état*. Recalling a figure from epic poetry and tragic drama, modern lyric bathes the brute facticity of material power in the light of a classical ideal of melancholic fidelity, bestowing archetypal meaning upon historical contingency and subjective defeat. In the image of the swan, to which we will return, Baudelaire produces a correlate of Andromache adequate to both the nobility of her pathos and the degraded conditions of modernity.

I want to sharpen these questions about the temporality of melancholic allegory and their relation to the figure of Andromache by asking about the transcendental conditions of this kind of figuration. What are the conditions of possibility for that cognitive act which stamps an abstract noun with the significance of the universal, and for that act of imagination which relates this allegorical gesture to a mythic figure through the sign of the proper name? How does the temporality of these figurative gestures partake of those conditions of possibility? These questions may take us behind or beneath, as it were, those theories of allegory produced by Benjamin, de Man, and Jameson,

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3 Benjamin, 2019, p. 188.

4 In addition to the Benjamin’s foundational study, other approaches to the relation between allegory and melancholy in Baudelaire that have informed my thinking include Agamben, 1993; Kukuljevic, 2017; Labarthe, 2015; Newmark, 2011; Stamelman, 1983; and Starobinski, 1963.

illuminating the ontological ground of their references to temporality and history. But to see how and why that is so, we have to start over by looking into the Homeric scene in which Andromache becomes the melancholic figure she will be in Baudelaire's poem.

The opening of "Le Cygne" recalls not Homer but Virgil:

Andromaque, je pense à vous! Ce petit fleuve,
Pauvre et triste miroir où jadis resplendit
L'immense majesté de vos douleurs de veuve,
Ce Simois menteur qui par vos pleurs grandit,

A fécondé soudain ma mémoire fertile,
Comme je traversais le nouveau Carrousel.

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Andromache, I think of you! This little stream,
Poor and sad mirror where once reflected
The immense majesty of your widow's grief,
This duplicitous Simois swelled by your tears,

Suddenly made fecund my fertile memory,
As I was crossing the new Carrousel.

The Andromache invoked here is described in Book III of the *Aeneid*, where Aeneas finds her in a grove beside a stream, "offering her yearly feast and gifts of mourning to the dust, and calling the ghost to Hector's tomb—the empty mound of green turf that she had hallowed with twin altars, there to shed her tears."⁵ The stream beside which she makes her offering is referred to by Baudelaire as "Ce Simois menteur" and by Virgil as "falsi Simoentis"⁶—that is, a false and diminished double of the river Simois on the Trojan plain. By now, after having for years been a slave to Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles, Andromache has passed after his death into the hands of Helenus, a Trojan, who has established "a little Troy" in Greece, to the amazement of Aeneas. This is the sequence compressed into Baudelaire's other reference to Andromache in the second half of "Le Cygne," where she is described as:

des bras d'un grand époux tombée,
Vil bétail, sous la main du superbe Pyrrhus,
Après d'un tombeau vide en extase courbée;
Veuve d'Hector, hélas! et femme d'Hélénus!

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5 Virgil, 1999, p. 393.

6 Virgil, 1999, p. 392.

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fallen from the arms of a mighty husband,
Lowly chattel, under the sway of haughty Pyrrhus,
Bowed in a trance beside an empty tomb;
Widow of Hector, alas! and wife of Helenus.

Andromache is the widow of a mighty husband, the slave of Pyrrhus, and now the wife of Helenus, a poor substitute for the Trojan hero she first married—Hector the glorious, breaker of horses, scourge of the Achaians. The chronology of this sequence situates us in the Virgilian context after the Homeric epics, and subsequent to the moment depicted by the plays of Euripides and Racine in which we find Andromache “under the sway of haughty Pyrrhus,” prior to his murder by Orestes.

But what can we learn from the moment at which Andromache first becomes what she will always thereafter be, widow of Hector, a moment that already encapsulates the melancholic temporality Baudelaire will evoke when he thinks of her? The scene is narrated with crushing pathos in Book XXII of *The Iliad*. Hector remains alone outside the gates of Troy, after the Trojan army has retreated within the battlements. Achilles closes in on him and begins to chase Hector around the walls of the city, but is unable to close the distance between them:

As in a dream a man is not able to follow one who runs from him, nor can the runner escape, nor the other pursue him, so he could not run him down in his speed, nor the other get clear.⁷

The scene is locked in a state of temporal stasis, as if they were standing still, or as if they might run for all eternity, Achilles the demigod and Hector aided by Apollo, who has lightened his knees. But Zeus has granted Athena’s wish to send Hector to his fate; disguised as his comrade she runs alongside him and persuades him to stand and fight. Achilles drives a spear through Hector’s throat, taunts him as he dies, strips off his armor, and drags his body around the walls of Troy behind his chariot:

A cloud of dust rose where Hektor was dragged, his dark hair falling about him, and all that head that was once so handsome was tumbled in the dust; since by this time Zeus had given him over to his enemies, to be defiled in the land of his fathers.⁸

Hector’s mother and father look on from the battlements, and Hecabe leads the women of Troy in a chant of sorrow.

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7 Homer, 1951, p. 440, ll. 199-201.

8 Homer, 1951, p. 446, ll. 401-404.

All this time, however, Andromache has been at her loom, unaware of what is taking place outside the city. “So she spoke in tears,” Homer says of Hector’s mother, “but the wife of Hektor had not yet heard”:

for no sure messenger had come to her and told her
how her husband had held his ground there outside the gates;
but she was weaving a web in the inner room of the high house,
a red folding robe, and inworking elaborate figures.
She called out through the house to her lovely-haired handmaidens
to set a great cauldron over the fire, so that there would be
hot water for Hektor’s bath as he came back out of the fighting;
poor innocent, nor knew how, far from the waters for bathing,
Pallas Athene had cut him down at the hands of Achilles.
She heard from the great bastion the noise of mourning and
sorrow.
Her limbs spun, and the shuttle dropped from her hand to the
ground.⁹

Andromache’s solitude, “in the inner room of the high house,” is contrasted with the communal mourning of the women on the walls, and the pathos of the scene is constructed through a riven temporality: events taking place at the same time may be spatially divided, and thus belatedly registered through deferred recognition. Intertextually, the scene looks both forward and backward. It anticipates Penelope’s weaving in the *Odyssey*, where a comic resolution reverses the telos of Andromache’s tragic labor. It also recalls Helen’s weaving in Book III of *The Iliad*, where she works scenes of battle into a tapestry even as, unbeknownst to her, Hector has achieved a temporary truce between Trojans and Achaians outside the walls of Troy. In Richard Lattimore’s translation, both Helen and Andromache are weaving “a red folding robe,” but the Greek in each case is *diplaka porphyrein* (δίπλακα πορφυρέην),¹⁰ where *porphyrein* refers to royal purple, and *diplaka* refers specifically to a double-folded cloak (large enough to be wrapped around twice). The color is the same as the fine purple fabric spread before Agamemnon as he returns to the house of Atreus after the Trojan war. The family of adjectives to which *diplaka* belongs describes that which is two-fold more generally: pairs or twins; things doubled or two-sided; an ambivalent or equivocal story; feelings of doubt or indecision; duplicity of conduct. The time of Andromache’s weaving extends retroactively across the scenes of pursuit, battle, desecration, and lamentation we have witnessed, and forward to the punctual moment at which she hears “the

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9 Homer, 1951, pp. 447, ll. 438-448.

10 Homer, 1999, pp. 484, ll. 441.

noise of mourning and sorrow / Her limbs spun, and the shuttle dropped from her hand to the ground.” Hector’s death means that the red folding robe will remain unfinished, and he will never take the bath prepared for him, since he is “far from the waters for bathing.” As the shuttle falls to the ground, the interruption of Andromache’s weaving occurs after, yet doubles, the moment at which death and fate catch up with her husband.

Lattimore’s translation has Andromache “inworking elaborate figures” as she weaves. The Greek is *en dé throna poikil epasse* (ἐν δὲ θρόνα ποικίλ’ ἔπασσε)¹¹ glossed by Gregory Nagy as “inworking varied patterns of flowers,” where *throna* refers to floral patterns. Tracing the relationship between the adjective *poikila* (varied) and the verb *poikillein*, which refers to pattern-weaving, Nagy argues that Andromache’s inworking of patterns amid her weaving figures the pattern-weaving of Homeric narrative, in which the intersection of proleptic and analeptic implications constructs a double-folded temporality of anticipated recollections and recollected anticipations.¹² Andromache’s weaving recalls Helen’s, while the temporary truce of which Helen was unaware comes to retroactively anticipate, double, and ironically invert Andromache’s unawareness of Hector’s death. The *elsewhere* of simultaneity in both these scenes—what happens inside and outside the city walls—is the spatial double of a temporal exteriority, of the *not-yet* and the *already* inscribed in the narrative structure of the epic, its pattern-weaving. What is happening here and now is marked as *the present* through its simultaneity with something happening elsewhere, *at the same time*, but the simultaneity of this *at the same time*, as a construction of the present, is made structurally necessary by the differential temporality of anticipation and recollection, by the exteriority of the now. It is because the now is outside of itself, is never present, that it has to be marked in its passage through an operation of spatial doubling, the simultaneity of here and there. The pattern-weaving of the double-folded cloak may be taken as a figure of this spatio-temporal operation.

As the shuttle drops and her weaving leavings off, Andromache begins to catch up with her fate. “I heard the voice of Hektor’s honored mother,” she tells her handmaidens, and now, she says, “my own heart rising beats in my mouth, my limbs under me / are frozen.” “Surely some evil is near for the children of Priam,” she continues, and as she speaks out the prophecy of a death that has already happened, she hopes not to hear her own voice: “May what I say never come close to my ear.”¹³ Andromache is double to herself, beside herself amid the double

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11 Homer, 1999, p. 484, l. 441.

12 Nagy, 2012, pp. 482-487, digital edition: http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn3:hul.ebook:CHS_Nagy.Homer_the_Preclassic.2009

13 Homer, 1951, p. 447, ll. 451-454.

temporality of melancholic prophecy, as Cassandra will be outside the house of Atreus. The flowers she has been weaving are what Baudelaire will call *Les Fleurs du mal*: even as they express her innocence, her not-yet knowing, their pattern bodes ill. Andromache's proleptic dread at hearing the voice of Hecabe anticipates an evil which is then confirmed in a moment of vision that gives way to blindness:

But when she came to the bastion where the men were gathered she stopped, staring, on the wall; and she saw him being dragged in front of the city, and the running horses dragged him at random toward the hollow ships of the Achaians. The darkness of night misted over the eyes of Andromache.¹⁴

Only at this moment in the scene, when she knows she has become a widow, is Andromache named in Lattimore's translation, but she is not named at all in the Greek. Throughout the entire seventy-seven lines of the scene in which she appears—as she weaves, speaks with her handmaids, rushes to the wall, mourns Hector's death, anticipates the unhappy childhood of their son Astyanax, and imagines the desecration and decomposition of Hector's body—Andromache's name never appears in the Greek text, even as the names of Hector, Athena, Achilles, Priam, Astyanax, and Aphrodite all pass through the narrative discourse. First she is referred to as “wife of Hektor” and then as “widowed mother.”¹⁵ In between, at the very moment when she sees Hector's body, the proper name is held in abeyance. It is as if the temporal chasm opened by death holds open the empty place of the generic figure of the widowed mother, of Work and Sorrow and Memory. This is the form of the figure we find in Euripides, in Virgil, in Racine, and in “Le Cygne,” where the apostrophic invocation of the name inaugurates the lyric recollection of epic poetry and tragic drama.

Attending to Book XXII of *The Iliad* allows us to register how the riven temporality of Homer's epic narrative involves a drama of the name, where it is precisely the absence of the proper name “Andromache” that marks a change of state from wife to widow, a transformation that will seal thereafter the significance of the name itself. I mean to imply, and eventually to argue, that this relationship between riven temporality, punctual transformation, and the drama of the name has something to do with Baudelaire's allegorical style, where the capitalization of abstract nouns marks the gathering up of particulars into figures of the universal.

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14 Homer, 1951, p. 447, ll. 462-466.

15 Homer, 1951, p.447-448, ll. 437, 499.

Moreover, close attention to Homer allows us to recognize that Baudelaire's opening apostrophe—"Andromache, je pense à vous!" performs not only an invocation of Andromache but also the displacement of another name, "Hector," which is invoked in Andromache's own apostrophic address to her dead husband just after she sees his body below the walls. "Hektor, I grieve for you," she begins in Lattimore's translation. The Greek is *Ektor, ego dustenos* (Ἔκτορ, ἐγὼ δύστηνος) where *dustanos* means unhappy, unfortunate, wretched, or miserable—so a more direct translation would be "Hektor, I am unhappy." Hector, I am unhappy; Andromache, I think of you; I think of your unhappiness, of the "immense majesty of your widow's grief." In *The Iliad* the absence of Andromache's name marks the place where "wife of Hector" becomes "widowed mother." In Baudelaire's lyric, the inaugural presence of her name occupies the place, in Andromache's own speech, of the dead husband who is also a dead father. Beginning with Hector's name, her speech will go on to mourn the bereavement of their son, Astyanax, whose name means "lord of the city." Andromache anticipates the humiliations of his fatherless childhood: he "who in days before on the knees of his father / would eat only the marrow or the flesh of sheep that was fattest" will now be driven out of banquets by those "whose parents are living," such that "the boy goes away in tears to his widowed mother."¹⁶ At the intersection of two apostrophes, ancient and modern, one invoking Hector and the other Andromache, we might locate the poet's own position: Astyanax becomes the absent name, never articulated in Baudelaire's poem, of the "I" who thinks, the silent name of the melancholic son. The relation between these two apostrophes would mark the place of a double displacement, suturing the name of the widowed mother and the dead father to the voice of the disinherited son. And even to this day Baudelaire remains the lord of the city of Paris, since it is literature that enables the transmigration of souls.

But for now, my point is that when the lyric I thinks of Andromache it implicitly thinks of Hector as well, and we could even say that the displaced name of the father is transfigured into the title of the poem, "Le Cygne." (This would be one sense in which the title is "The Sign" as well as "The Swan"). Like the desecrated body of Hector, Baudelaire's swan is "far from the waters for bathing," exiled from its native lake and bathing its wings only in the dust of a waterless gutter. The swan's "convulsive neck" cruelly recalls the unarmored throat of Hector, through which Achilles drives his spear. As the lyric speaker recalls the menagerie from which the swan had escaped long ago, his invocation of the street cleaners suggests the cloud of dust rising as Hector is dragged around the walls of Troy behind a chariot. One referential complex flickers, allegorically, with its evocation of another:

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16 Homer, 1951, p. 448, ll. 485-486, 500-501, 499.

Là je vis, un matin, à l'heure où sous les cieux
Froids et clairs le Travail s'éveille, où la voirie
Pousse un sombre ouragan dans l'air silencieux,

Un cygne qui s'était évadé de sa cage

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There I saw, one morning, at the hour when under the sky
Cold and clear Work awakens, when the street cleaners
Drive a somber storm in the silent air,

A swan that had escaped its cage

Here the first of the poem's three allegorical names, Travail, appears just as the somber storm of dust might recall the desecration of Hector's body. Thus it also recalls the simultaneous scene of domestic labor inside the walls of the city, where Andromache works at her weaving, and we might note that the work of craft and artistic production, weaving figures of flowers, doubles that of the poet, who observes the street cleaners as he meanders through the city gathering materials for his verse, "Sniffing every corner for the chance of rhyme, / Stumbling over words like paving stones," as Baudelaire puts it in "Le Soleil."¹⁷

In "Le Cygne," the temporal disjunction between the pace at which the city and the heart change, between the transformation of Paris and the stasis of melancholy, is the rift wherein *everything* becomes allegory, where everything perceived maps onto the "strange and fatal" myth evoked by the exiled swan, and where every material element of the city comes to signify such essences as Travail, Douleur, Souvenir. Here we return to the two allegorical levels of the poem mentioned earlier: one mapping the modern city onto classical epic, the transformation of Paris onto the fall of Troy, and the other—emerging from the elements of this allegory—producing allegorical names of abstract universals which traverse and conjoin the ancient and the modern. Benjamin (after both Dürer and Baudelaire) theorizes the melancholic production of allegory as a mode of perception whereby "the profane world is both elevated in rank and devalued": elevated by virtue of pointing to *something other*, raised to higher plane and thus sacralized; devalued by virtue of the sense that, as he puts it, "any person, any object, any relation can signify any other whatever."¹⁸ A state in which "everything becomes allegory" is one in which every person or object—and thus every name—marks the place of a possible substitution, and is thus related to not only in its concrete determinacy but also as an empty place, or placeholder.

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17 Baudelaire, 2021, p. 247.

18 Benjamin, 2019, p. 184.

My question is: what is the ground of this allegorical operation of the melancholic subject? What are the conditions of possibility for this act of imagination?

Ontology

We can put this problem in Kantian terms before interrogating the ground of those terms as well: what is at issue here is how the cognition of a determinate object also requires the generic presupposition of an “object in general,” the transcendental “something = x.” Allegory involves a kind of double vision, wherein this generic place of the object is sustained beneath the determinacy of its concept as the place of its possible transformation into *something else*. Note that this implies the metonymic ground of all metaphorical identity theorized by Lacan: behind the identity swan = Hector or Andromache = exile lies the operation whereby the concept of an object is held in place while it comes to refer to another object, or such that a universal may stand in for a multiplicity of particulars, the universal Sorrow traversing the particular sorrow of any individual. The substitution of one thing for another implies this relation between empirical and transcendental levels of determination, constituting and holding, as if beneath its determinacy, the empty place of a name, an image, or a thing.

Yet understanding the relation of allegory to melancholy at the core of Baudelaire’s poem requires us to go beyond Kant through a theoretical framework conjoining the transcendental constitution of objects with a theory of how the exteriority of temporal disjunction—the misalignment of subjective and historical time—is related to the determinacy of moods. It is at this level that Heidegger’s reading of Kant, which subtends the whole project of *Being and Time*, becomes essential. In particular, it is Heidegger’s displacement of the transcendental unity of apperception—the atemporal unity of the “I think”—through a radicalization of the temporality of imagination that will enable not only a transcendental but also an ontological understanding of the melancholic production of allegorical signs. Though Benjamin is frequently at pains to dissociate himself from Heidegger, I would argue that Heidegger’s theory of ecstatic temporalization is a logical condition of intelligibility for Benjamin’s theory of allegory.

Benjamin’s famous fragment on dialectical images in Convolute N of the *Arcades Project* begins with a parenthetical dismissal of Heidegger: “What distinguishes images from the ‘essences’ of phenomenology is their historical index. (Heidegger seeks in vain to rescue history for phenomenology abstractly through ‘historicity.’)”¹⁹ Heidegger’s theory of *Geschichtlichkeit*, however, is *necessarily* abstract

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¹⁹ Benjamin, 1999, p. 462.

insofar as it is concerned with the conditions of possibility for any historical index whatsoever, and this has less to do with an opportunistic effort to “rescue history for phenomenology” than with determining the necessary ground of *any* methodological orientation toward history. Benjamin argues that “it is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation.” According to Benjamin, such a dialectical image, dialectics at a standstill, is “not temporal in nature but figural.”²⁰ What is at stake here is nothing less than the temporality of figuration, which is denied. But what is the ground of the distinction between “what has been” and “the now,” such that they can come together in a flash? And what enables this condition of possibility to be related to a form of intuition in which, as Benjamin puts it regarding allegorical perception, “any person, any object, any relation can signify any other whatever”?

One might note that the unity of “what has been” with the “now” is itself a temporal determination: namely, simultaneity. What Benjamin seems to mean is that the image is not determined by temporal *succession*, since the past and the present are immanently unified in the dialectical image. But the coming together of “what has been” with the “now” in a composition (the constellation) depends upon holding together reciprocal relations in what Kant calls a dynamical community, such that elements of something like a constellation may be distinguished even as they are unified as simultaneous. The dialectical image is simultaneous rather than successive, but simultaneity is not non-temporal; it is a modality of temporality. Thus there is no opposition between the temporal and the figural; the constellation is itself the figure of a time determination, and the figure can only be grasped temporally.

Of course, Benjamin’s theory of the dialectical image does not involve an experience of *empirical* simultaneity. Rather, it involves the advent of historical simultaneity, through the “historical index” of a sign. In the case of Baudelaire’s poem, this sign is a swan suturing the transformation of Paris to the sorrow of Andromache and the death of Hector. As it is crossed, the appearance of the new Carrousel is displaced by the power of imagination, such that the memory of *what was seen* (“There long ago...”) becomes *what is seen* in the mind’s eye. The image of the swan appears through the power of imagination, stretching its avid head toward a sky which is ironic because it offers the sensible presentation of what is desired, the blue of the lake, without actually being that object of desire. At the moment of the Swan’s reported speech—“Water, when will you rain? thunder, when will you boom?”—the anticipation of the future enters the poem through the temporal language of yearning—*when, when*—synthesizing an originary absence

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20 Benjamin, 1999, p. 463.

(“son beau lac natal”) with a desired future through the immanence of what is imagined to the language of the poem itself: the enunciation of the question. The swan’s desperate question *makes* the present of the poem as the recollection of the past, in the desperate anticipation of a future which may or may not come to pass (the thunder, the rain). Hector, far from waters for bathing, speaks as Andromache, the unhappy one, *malheureux*, through the mouth of a swan ventriloquized by the poet in the mind of the reader, via the materiality of the signifier, *le signe*.

Heidegger’s analysis of historicity elaborates the existential-ontological condition of possibility for the coming together of “what has been” with the “now”: “*The analysis of the historicity of Dasein attempts to show that this being is not ‘temporal’ because it ‘is in history,’ but that, on the contrary, it exists and can exist historically only because it is temporal in the ground of its being.*”²¹ Such temporality, moreover, must be understood in the sense delivered by Heidegger two chapters earlier, in what I regard as the most important sentence of *Being and Time*: “*Temporality is the primordial ‘outside of itself’ in and for itself.*”²² Time is the being of beings that is not a being, insofar as its constitutive exteriority never has the self-identical unity of a substance but only the unity of a synthesis, transpiring through the intersection of the *not-yet* and the *already* with the horizontal constitution of the present as the *in-order-to*. The ecstatic unity of temporality, Heidegger shows, “is the condition of the possibility that there can be a being that exists as its there.”²³ Book XXII of *The Iliad* is a paradigmatic dramatization of such existence, wherein the not-yet and the already encounter one another first through anticipation, then in the belated recognition of Hector’s body below the battlements, then as anticipatory mourning for the future of Astyanax. It is the meaning of widowhood that is constructed here, and thus the significance of the name Andromache: the projection of a future bound to what has already happened yet which will be repeated, in fidelity, as the meaning of a now that is never *here* but is always *there*, and this is what is repeated by the complex rendering of temporal exteriority in Baudelaire’s poem.

In his seminar on the *Critique of Pure Reason* and in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger rigorously elaborates the deconstruction of the transcendental unity of apperception that is implicit throughout *Being and Time*. His argument hinges on a reassertion of what he sees suppressed in the second edition of Kant’s First Critique: the status of imagination as the common root of intuition and understanding—that is, the common root of the subject’s capacity for

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21 Heidegger, 2010, p. 359.

22 Heidegger, 2010, p. 314.

23 Heidegger, 2010, p. 334.

both sensible receptivity (pure sensibility) and productive determination (the spontaneity of pure thinking). There is thus a double function of the imagination. Its *empirical* function is the capacity to produce an image in the absence of an object (just as Baudelaire's speaker sees only in the mind's eye the markets and the menagerie of the old Place du Carrousel when passing through the new one). But the *transcendental* function of the imagination is the power to produce conditions of objectivity *per se*, in the first instance. That is, imagination is the power of "transcendence" which opens the subject to any exteriority at all, which makes it possible to hold any object whatever over against oneself as a determinate being. Imagination is the condition of possibility, at the common root of intuition and understanding, for the transcendental constitution of the object = x, prior to the determination of the *particularity* of any object.

In his detailed reconstruction of the three syntheses in the A edition Kant's transcendental deduction, Heidegger shows that imagination is not only the faculty which makes possible the synthesis of reproduction (as in Kant), but that it must also be the ground of the synthesis of apprehension in intuition and the ground of the synthesis of recognition in the concept. He argues that this last synthesis should be named pre-cognition rather than recognition, since it is already implicit as a condition of possibility for the combination of apprehension and reproduction in the constitution of objectivity. Reconstructing what would have to be the case for these three syntheses to come together through "the formal condition of the inner sense, namely time,"²⁴ Heidegger interprets the three modes of transcendental syntheses as correlates of the three ecstases of temporality: seizing the present (apprehension), reaching back (reproduction), and reaching ahead (precognition). It is the *horizontal* character of subjective temporality which Heidegger reads as at issue in transcendence (the opening of exteriority) and in the transcendental synthesis not only of conditions for the experience of "an isolated object of an isolated perception," but also for the possibility of relation to any object at all, indeed "to nature in general."²⁵

Heidegger's project, then, is to show that an atemporal transcendental unity of apperception cannot be the ground of the unity of the subject, since this renders incoherent the relationship of such unity to temporality: it renders unthinkable the opening of the subject to exteriority, which is also the condition of possibility for the unity of such exteriority. The project of *Being and Time* is therefore to overcome this difficulty in Kant by showing that it is possible to understand the synthesis of a self, a unity of temporal existence and experience, without

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24 Kant, 1998, p. 228, A99.

25 Heidegger, 1997, p. 242.

grounding this in the formal condition of an atemporal unity. The upshot of Heidegger's reading of Kant for his project in *Being and Time* is that, as he puts it in the Kant seminar, grasping the constitutive temporality of imagination makes intelligible how existential-ontological reflection is possible at all:

But if the productive power of imagination is in this way nothing but the most original unity of the three modes of synthesis, then this power has essentially already unified in itself pure intuition and pure thinking, pure receptivity and pure spontaneity—or put more precisely, this power is the root which releases both from out of itself. The productive power of imagination is the root of the faculties of subjectivity; it is the basic constitution of the subject, of Dasein itself. Insofar as the power of imagination releases pure time from out of itself, as we have shown (and this means that the power of imagination contains pure time as a possibility), it is original temporality and therefore the radical faculty of ontological knowledge.²⁶

What constitutes the *existence* of the subject—its being outside itself—is also the condition of possibility for knowledge of the being of beings: time.

I am arguing that such an account of the subject and the faculty of imagination renders comprehensible an approach to allegory as what de Man calls “the rhetoric of temporality,” reconstructed as that rhetoric which *figures* the crux of exteriority and synthesis in the transcendental constitution of the object = x. Allegory involves a double movement, a double-folded process of figuration. There is a movement of subtraction from the empirical to the transcendental, from the particularity of “any person, any object, any relation” to a generic condition in which these may *come* to “signify any other whatever,” as Benjamin puts it. And there is a movement of figurative determination, the construction of a parallel level of significance or the assignment of a universal name. My claim is that Heidegger's account of imagination, reconstructing transcendental conditions of exteriority and synthesis, makes intelligible the allegorical operations of substitution, parallelism, and universalization. As the common root of understanding and intuition, imagination is the common source of the capacity for determination and of the temporal constitution of exteriority, opening the transcendental dimension of *determinability*. The temporality of imagination enables displacements of conceptual determination, wherein allegory may draw *everything* (“everything becomes allegory”) back to transcendental conditions of determinability and reassign its sense.

When Baudelaire's speaker, immersed in the stasis of melancholy,

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26 Heidegger, 2010, p. 283.

declares that “everything becomes allegory,” it seems to be this transcendental field of determinability in which he is immersed, where the empirical is exposed to the implicit determinations of another scene, which will be articulated by the poem. But why would melancholy have this effect? Because melancholy is a psychic structure productive of a peculiar *Stimmung*, an attunement to the ungrounding of origin, to an abyss of loss exposing the ungroundedness of the subject and indeed of nature which is implicit in temporality *per se*. It is an attunement to the absolute outside of itself in and for itself. Melancholy involves an orientation toward the inextricability of temporal synthesis and temporal exteriority, the exposure of subjective unity and conditions of objectivity to an outside that only holds together through the synthesis of the *already* and the *not yet*, and which binds the self as a structure already outside itself, such that cherished memories may seem exterior elements, “more weighty than rocks.” This structure of temporal exteriority, of thrown projection, is precisely what we find in Book XXII of *The Iliad*, where Andromache becomes what she already is—the Widow—through a scene of delayed recognition traversed by proleptic anticipation wherein she hopes that what she says may never come close to her ear. Through an inconsolable, self-lacerating attachment to irrevocable loss, melancholy attunes the subject to the strange play of indetermination and determination operating between transcendental and empirical levels, to the ungroundedness of both subjective and objective synthesis, and to the power of imagination to produce determinate figures in the absence of an object: for example, the double image of Andromache and the Swan, or the allegorical names of Work, Sorrow, and Memory. If melancholy orients one to the universal Loss behind or beneath every particular loss, thereby making insufficient the mourning of that particularity, melancholic allegory compensates by *attaching* a subject exposed to its own nullity to a series of substitutions, such that insubstantial memories are exteriorized as images or universals which then weigh upon the subject with oppressive heft.

What I mean to formulate are the ontological-existential conditions of possibility for Benjamin’s thinking of allegory in the *Trauerspiel* book, of de Man’s analysis of allegory as the rhetoric of temporality, or of a theory like Jameson’s in which

allegory raises its head as a solution when beneath this or that seemingly stable or unified reality the tectonic plates of deeper contradictory levels of the Real shift and grate ominously against one another and demand a representation, or at least an acknowledgement, which they are unable to find in the *Schein* or illusory surfaces of existential or social life.²⁷

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27 Jameson, 2019, p. 34.

These approaches require a transcendental theory of imagination such as that offered by Heidegger's reading of Kant: a theory of both *how* we are open to historicity at all, and of *why* this openness to historicity can be experienced as figurative. And they require a theory of the unity of the self synthesized *through* temporal disjunction, such as that developed in *Being and Time*.

How then does this bring us to understand differently what is at stake in allegory, as a rhetorical trope and as a mode of melancholic intuition? It enables us to recognize that allegory is not only the rhetoric of temporality, but also the rhetoric of the ontological difference. Time is the being of beings which is not a being. It is the movement of exteriority, the disjunctive synthesis of the *already* and the *not yet* that divides all beings from self-identity even as it enables their temporal determinacy, and which is the condition of possibility for openness to the receptivity of beings in general. Melancholy is an inconsolable attunement to such constitutive exteriority, to the *not a being* of the being of beings, to the irrevocable negativity of time, finitude, death, and loss. It is an attunement that interrupts the Work of mourning, that is cathected to loss through Sorrow, that holds within the heart's core the absence of what is desired through Memory. In a word, melancholy is an orientation toward being as *exile*, the being-outside-itself of any determinate being which renders it other than itself, which subjects it to suffering, and which opens it to tragedy. It is this ontological level of reflection that delivers the extraordinary tension between figural synthesis and allegorical displacement achieved by Baudelaire's poem, in which "whoever has lost what can never be found" is gathered under the sign of Sorrow and commemorated by Memory through the figure of Andromache.

The relation between melancholy and allegory thus involves an understanding of allegory as the rhetoric and perceptual modality of this affective attunement to constitutive exteriority, which potentially grasps any particular thing as *something other*. Allegory implies, as a kind of substructure, the transcendental power of imagination which opens the field of determinate objects, and the empirical power to transform these "in the mind's eye" into something else, through the negativity of their temporal constitution. Understood not only as the rhetoric of temporality, but also as the rhetoric of the ontological difference, allegory might be figured as a double-folded fabric, *diplaka*, woven at the switching point of the transcendental and always exposed to incompleteness.

If imagination is the faculty of ontological knowledge, then fundamental ontology is not only a philosophical discourse on the being of beings. It also enables us to grasp how and why the beings we encounter may be transmuted into signs and transformed into something else, conceived anew through rhetorical operations that redouble the empirical and disjoin the immediacy of the present, weaving together the ancient and the modern and folding figures of what we

cannot see into the experience of what is right before our eyes. Like so:

This little stream,
Poor and sad mirror where once reflected
The immense majesty of your widow's grief,
This duplicitous Simois swelled by your tears,

Suddenly made fecund my fertile memory,
As I was crossing the new Carrousel.

Tragedy

A final question: how does the ontological significance of the melancholic production of allegorical signs bear upon the circulation of tragic representation through epic, drama, and lyric?

Consider the relation between the genesis of Andromache as tragic figure of the Widow in *The Iliad* and the representation of her fate in the tragic dramas of Euripides and Racine. Homer's epic narrates Hector's heroism, his death, his desecration, and his funeral rites. This narrative is interrupted and *punctuated* by the scene of Andromache's weaving, which moves us from those mourning Hector's death on the city walls to her interior chamber, and then back out to the walls for the moment of belated vision. When Andromache sees Hector being dragged by Achilles beneath the walls of Troy, the perception of what she sees already has the structure of a recognition, of *anagnorisis*: she had anticipated Hector's death through other sensory signs ("the noise of mourning and sorrow"), she had prophesied Hector's death at the hands of Achilles, and now she sees what was anticipated. The veil of night falls as she sees, and forever after she will *look back* upon what she had *foreseen*. Unmentioned throughout this scene, the name Andromache has come to mean she whose identity, whose tragic fate, is determined at that moment in which anticipation and recollection are interwoven.

Yet as the representation of Andromache moves from epic to tragic drama, that identity, determined through division, will itself be divided. Andromache's first speech after her recognition of the death of Hector prophesies the wretched childhood of Astyanax. But in *Trojan Women*, even before that fate can find him, Astyanax will be taken from Andromache by the Greeks and hurled to his death from the walls of Troy. Thus, in the *Andromache* of Euripides Astyanax is dead, and Andromache clings to her second son, fathered by Pyrrhus. In the *Andromache* of Racine, on the other hand, Astyanax is alive, since another infant was substituted by Andromache to bear his fate. "I hear," says Orestes at the beginning of the play,

to snatch his infancy from the sword,
Andromache deceived the astute Ulysses,
that, wrested from her arms, another child
under her son's name went to death.²⁸

Moreover, in Racine's play Andromache has not borne a son fathered by Pyrrhus: her refusal of his advances, and his efforts to seduce rather than violate her, drive the whole dramatic action of the play.

Andromache enters Baudelaire's lyric poem through the recollective thinking of its speaker, and the referential field established by her name does not exclude the representations of either Euripides or Racine. Virgil's depiction of Andromache, to which the poem most clearly alludes, stems from Euripides and also inspires Racine, who notes that the "the whole subject" of his play is drawn from this passage in the *Aeneid*.²⁹ We could say that Baudelaire's speaker thinks of an Andromache who is the mother of a son who is *either* dead or alive, who is the mother of *either* one son or two. But gathering together the movement of tragic representation through both Euripides and Racine into Baudelaire's referential field, we could say that "Andromache" is the name of a widow who both does and does not have son by Pyrrhus; it is the name of a mother whose son by Hector, Astyanax, is both living and dead.

Let us elaborate two consequences of this perspective. First, the sense of the name "Andromache" in Baudelaire's lyric apostrophe entails a synthetic contradiction, implicitly including contradictory predicates of the tragic heroine within the speaker's allegorical meditation. The inclusion of these contradictions is possible, at the most obvious level, because Andromache is a literary and mythic figure, but it is more specifically made possible by the relation between tragic drama and epic poetry. The dramas of Euripides and Racine extend the sense of the name "Andromache" along contradictory paths, Euripides drawing from Homer and inspiring Virgil, Racine revising Euripides by working backwards from *The Aeneid*. If these two tragic dramas endow the figure of Andromache with contradictory predicates, their double elaboration thereby returns us to the complex temporality of tragic determination in Homer, wherein Andromache appears at her loom as she who both is and is not a widow. She is a widow insofar as Hector is already dead, but she is not a widow insofar as she "had not yet / heard." At the moment when she sees the desecration of Hector's body below the walls she both is and is not Hector's wife, since she has already become his widow: he appears as the corpse of marriage itself, its dead survival. Indeed, this contradictory state is the essence of what will be Andromache's

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28 Racine, 1961, p. 7, ll. 73-76.

29 Racine, 1961, p. 2.

tragic character, of her melancholia: unable to work through the work of mourning, she will not pass from wife to widow, nor from widow to wife, sustaining the riven temporality of the moment of recognition that marks the divided synthesis of anticipation and belatedness.

Such contradiction is the essence not only of Andromache's character, but of tragedy itself, "the suffering contradiction" (Kierkegaard) wherein "everything is based upon an irreconcilable opposition" (Goethe).³⁰ Hölderlin's paragraph on the paradoxical significance of tragedies is the most vertiginous and profound distillation of their grounding in contradiction: "If nature actually represents itself in its weakest gift, then the sign when it represents itself in its strongest gift = 0."³¹ Because all potential deriving from what is originary is manifest as divided through individuation, the originary is only presented in its weakness, its division. But through the explicit presentation by tragedy of the individual as weakness, as tragic fate, as 0, as nullity, the originary which is "the hidden ground of every nature" can become manifest in all its power. The nullity of the representative individual—of individuation *per se*—is what enables the explosive force of the hidden ground to emerge within the field of representation.

In the case of Andromache, it is not in tragic drama but in Homeric epic where this synthesis of nullity and totality is first and properly presented. Indeed, it is presented through the absence of the name "Andromache" itself, its suppression throughout Book XXII of *The Iliad*. It is also presented in that moment of recognition wherein what is seen suspends the heroine between wife and widow: here the presentation of the absolute in and through the nullity of the individual is achieved through a negation of sight at the moment of vision, a descent of night—a figural structure that will recur in the Oedipal enucleation. We might then see the representations of Andromache's fate by Euripides and Racine—tragic dramas in which the tragic heroine does not even die—as durational extensions of the nullity crystallized in Homer's scene: extensions of a punctual division of identity, of non-identical identity, extensions of the temporal non-being of identity which, though it may be covered over and forgotten, is "the hidden ground of every nature." The contradictory determinations of Andromache's tragic situation that we find in the dramas of Euripides and Racine might be taken to redouble the non-identity of "Andromache" in the pivotal scene of Homer's epic, which will seal her fate. Cancelled out between wife and widow, Andromache does not die but persists as the 0, and this is what makes her a representative figure of melancholia.

This persistence persists into Baudelaire's modern lyric, where the

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30 For discussion of these and other key philosophical concepts of the tragic, see Szondi, 2002, pp. 34, 25.

31 Hölderlin, 2009, p. 316.

thinking of Andromache is the thinking of this ongoing contradiction, the durational extension of a change of state that is both punctual and temporally divided, seeping into a nineteenth century where “the form of a city / Changes more swiftly, alas! than a human heart.” Considered from the perspective of the lyric speaker’s allegorical recollection of Andromache, Hölderlin’s gnomic formula offers a precise exposition of the circulation of tragic representation from Homer to Euripides and from Virgil to Racine, from these to Baudelaire, and from Baudelaire back to the Homeric source: “For in the tragic lies the completion of the epic, in the lyric the completion of the tragic, in the epic the completion of the lyric.”³² The contradictory representation of Andromache in the tragic dramas of Euripides and Racine completes the moment of contradiction, in Homer, which is the essence of her fate itself. Baudelaire’s lyric completes the contradictory representation of Andromache in tragic drama by drawing the division of her predicates back under the purview of a single apostrophe—“Andromache, I think of you!”—thus synthesizing the contradiction of her character in a punctual address akin to the punctual determination of her destiny in Homer, where the name was suppressed. Baudelaire’s lyric thus returns us to epic: it returns us to *The Aeneid* and, beneath it, to *The Iliad*. Baudelaire’s lyric allegory must be “completed” by understanding the relation between Andromache, the swan, and the desecration of Hector’s body; it is thus completed by returning to the pattern weaving of Homer’s epic narrative. This recursive literary historical movement of tragic representation through epic, drama, and lyric is itself an expression of the staggered, split, exteriorizing force of time upon the determination of identity: the meaning of a name, the sense of its recollection, cannot only be determined through its coherence; one must also register the incoherence of the contradictions that subtend it, symptomatic of the contingencies to which the representation of the name is destined through its exposure to history.

We can now return to melancholic allegory by taking up a second consequence of understanding Andromache as the mother of a son who is both alive and dead. What is at issue here is the profoundly relevant biographical substrate of Baudelaire’s poem and of its lyric “I,” which we alluded to earlier and of which we can now measure the full significance. The disinherited son of a revered father who terminally mourns his widowed mother’s remarriage, Baudelaire is the melancholic double not of Andromache but of her son, Astyanax. If we situate this conscious or unconscious identification as the genesis of the lyric “I” who thinks of Andromache, then the “I” who speaks, the subject of the apostrophe, is a son who is both alive and dead. In the crypt of the name Andromache, the figure of Astyanax is divided between two candles: one

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32 Hölderlin, 2009, p. 311.

burning, the other extinguished. “Le Cygne” is a corpse poem: it tragically recomposes the comedy of “Le Mort Joyeux” on a scale so thematically vast and historically ramified that only the poem’s complex relation to ancient epic and the split determinations of tragic drama could account for so imposing an expansion of poetic vision.³³

From this perspective, the melancholic ground tone of allegorical vision takes on a new cast. As Astyanax, both dead and alive, looks upon the transmutation of modern Paris, it flickers into figures of the ancient city from whose walls he fell and did not fall. Oppressed by a transfigured image of his dead father, he thinks of the fate of his exiled mother, who then becomes a figure of the constitutive exteriority at the core of European modernity: the exiled “negress” who sees within the city what is not there, “the absent palms of splendid Africa.” His thoughts turning, in the “forest of my mind’s exile,” to the indetermination of “many more,” the lyric I seems to regard all the broken subjects “of ancient and of modern history” in the manner of the undead cavalier in “A Fantastic Engraving,” surveying a “horizonless cemetery.”³⁴ All the disinherited, abandoned, vanquished figures of “whoever has lost what can never be found,” binding Sorrow with Memory, both rise from and sink into the tomb, as if their unmarked grave were just the surface of the earth itself, their burial or resurrection suspended like an ellipsis.

Imagination bears the empirical power to bring what is not there into being, to redouble the world through a second series of signs and to raise the particular to the universal. But (and) the strength of this power is also its weakness: the transcendental opening of exteriority it enables stems from a default of interiority, from the groundless self-division of temporal non-identity that undoes the security of every determinate being, thereby exposing each and every one not only to transformation but also to ruin. Melancholic allegory knows this tragic default, abides within it, and makes it manifest as the ungrounding of the “I think,” as the genesis of *poiesis* in contradiction and duplicity, in libations poured alongside a “falsi Simoentis.” It is necessary that the subject of such knowledge, the melancholic subject of allegorical thinking, not enter the poem by name. Rather, at the apogee of modern lyric’s relation to tragic drama and epic narrative, the “I” will be the synthesis of an absence both living and dead, the void of whose presence breeds allegorical signs gathering the ancient and modern into mineral ideality.³⁵ Such would be the completion of the tragic by the lyric, which would require its own completion through a return to epic, there to find the figure of another

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33 On the melancholic poetics of “Le Mort Joyeux,” see Kukuljevic, 2017.

34 Baudelaire, 2021, p. 209.

35 Here I have in mind the conversion of memories to rocks, but for a brilliant reading of phonemic and graphemic materiality in relation to the glass of shop windows in “Le Cygne,” see Newmark, 2011.

absent name whose work is interrupted by wails of sorrow, whose
double-folded robe goes unfinished, whose limbs spin as the shuttle
drops from her hand to the ground, who hopes what she says will never
come close to her ear, and whose sees what she hoped never to see as
the darkness of night veils her vision.

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