

CHAPTER ONE

The Genesis of the Speaking Subject

Fantasies of Origins and their Realization in the Poetic Text

As its title might suggest, this book has a double focus: it presents a reading of Dylan Thomas, and a subjectivist poetics that is guided by contemporary psycho-semiological theory. The proposed poetics is formulated through dialogue with works by Thomas. My reading of Thomas at once illustrates and further informs an attempt to understand the dynamics of poetic language from the point of view of the subjective, and the *subjectifying*, experience of its articulation. In its to and fro movement between theory and textual analysis, this book traces the textual—linguistic as well as psychic—processes that generate the experience of subjectivity undergone in the course of poetic signification. Its concern is thus the genesis of the speaking subject as the simultaneous effect of the poetic text in the actuality of its realization—in writing and in reading alike.

The affinity between writing and reading, and between writers and readers, is established through analysis of the generative properties of the poetic text in its relational, intersubjective dimension. This dimension encompasses the dialogical and the transferential identificatory relations that animate both textual communication and intertextuality. The working of these relations are central to the shape and substance of this book. While its

main focus is the dynamic correlation between meaning and subjectivity in Thomas's poetic writing, it also displays how that correlation figures in the reading process, both through its reflexive unfolding and through direct analysis in the concluding chapter.

My attempt to understand the subjectifying dynamics of poetic language is largely inspired by the work of Julia Kristeva.¹ Its point of departure is a dynamic conception of the poetic text as a performance, or act, and as a process of signification that generates, or rather re-generates its speaking subject in the course of its realization.² The textual genesis, as I understand it, consists in the positioning of an initially split subject in a meaningful symbolic relation toward an other, a relation which facilitates a momentary sense of internal unity. This generative dynamics is viewed as a repetition of early integrative processes that constitute the subject's "original" advent—as imagined by psychoanalytical theory.

The psychoanalytical approach informing this generative hypothesis synthesizes various Freudian and post-Freudian notions of the subject and his or her advent.³ The latter pertain, by and large, to French Lacanian and British object relations theories (Klein, Winnicott, and others) and to syntheses of both, notably Kristeva's. Though often irreconcilable in their basic orientations and in their definitions of the subject, these different schools nonetheless seem to share a semiological perspective which, as Kristeva has so effectively shown, provides a basis for understanding the link between meaning and subjectivity in the matrix of the literary text. From this perspective, the subject is, by origin at least, a *signifying subject*, namely, a subject constituted by psychic processes that are essentially semiotic, or *semiological*, and by acts of symbolization that activate or enhance these processes. The subject's psycho-semiological being is founded on a lack that is associated with the archaic separation from the maternal. This lack—ultimately of a secure sense of being—propels and animates the subject's constitutive significations. Motivating his conscious as well as his unconscious representations, it gives rise to fantasies of origins that are projected back onto the subject's immemorial beginning. The representation and enactment of these fantasies indeed constitute the origin of the subject both in his "original" advent—and in the actuality of its reconstitution in the poetic text.

Underlying poetic signification there seems to be a nostalgic fantasy of prior identity, of a lost unity of being, which motivates the text as an act of nostalgic recuperation. Seen in the light of Kristeva's *Black Sun*, this fantasy is the idealized figuration of the object of *melancholic loss*; an affective representation of the paradisaic plenitude of a maternal symbiosis that has been lost

in the course of a more or less traumatic separation.⁴ The loss of the maternal object—or “pre-object,” for it is the configuration of the mother before she becomes distinguished as separate from the infant—is, according to Kristeva, the origin of all symbolization. It is thus that the origin of the signifying subject’s psychic life—as a recuperative motion of displacement of loss by imaginary representation. And it is through poetic symbolization that the nostalgic original integrity is most effectively restored—or rather *originated*: for the “melancholic imaginary,” as Kristeva calls it, is a fantasy which neither had nor has a conscious perceptible reality outside its symbolic representations. The enchanting suggestiveness of poetic rhythms, sounds, and semantic polyphonies invokes, or indeed, re-presents, as it were, the plentitude of the archaic object, to the effect of actually realizing its speaking subject’s fantasy of origins.

But this realization is not only fantasmatic; it is also real, in that it sets in motion an integrative process in which the melancholic fragmentation that splits the subject gives way and begins a momentum towards a unifying desire. The subject’s split is a psychic mark of the separation, manifested in affective, “psycho-somatic” dissociation and primary conflictual structures. As such, it is ultimately a defensive, *ambivalent* response to the loss of the maternal. In the simplest, Kleinian terms, the archaic object is both “good” and “bad,” a polarization that configures the nostalgic idealization of satisfying aspects or experiences of the maternal object, and its resentment for being lost or experienced as rejecting or, alternatively, persecuting, devouring, or castrating. In its association with the (rejected) somatic aspect of the symbiotic object and its symbolic sublimation, the ambivalent polarization of these terms becomes a psycho-somatic split, that is, a dissociation between the body as the center of experience and a repressive mental consciousness. The melancholic effect of this primary, splitting ambivalence is that it suspends the articulation of affect, thus preventing the symbolic sublimation of the longing for the lost object in meaningful sign and object relations. Ambivalence is melancholic, in other words, in so far as it suspends the symbolic thrust of desire. Poetic texts enhance desire in the dynamic course of their articulation: the expressive and the relational (cohesive and communicative) properties particular to poetic language heal the melancholic split, as it were, by facilitating a process of “binding” otherwise loose and conflicting drive-energies into a unifying other-oriented, or other-bound, disposition. This accounts, I think, for the sensation of vitality and relatedness that “regenerates” the speaking subject of effective poetry—effective, that is, as the *topos* of desire and integration which realizes the subject’s nostalgic longing for an original integrity of being.

In tracing the dynamics of the genesis of the textual subject as a repetition of his “original” advent, I have tried to remain as faithful as possible to a notion of the subjective experience of that repetition in the actuality of the textual performance, while taking into consideration its aesthetic and cultural dimensions. Therefore, in keeping with Kristeva and others, notably Winnicott, the book’s psychoanalytical approach is existentially and phenomenologically oriented. Far from seeking to reduce poetic signification to a schematic psychological model and its speaking subject to a narrative of origins or a semiological formula, this writing seeks to maintain a double perspective. While tracing the psycho-symbolic mechanisms that realize the poetic text and its subject from the outside, “objectively,” as it were, it also considers, and in principle prioritizes, the internal texture of their affective and imaginative experience. Central to this consideration is an emphasis on the poetic imaginary, whose fantasmatic *topoi* are valorized for their aesthetic effect per se, as well as in terms of their providing intriguing and stimulative spaces for the experience of subjective “being.” I use the word “being” to suggest, precisely, a subjective ontology that seems to be at the heart of the aesthetic experience and hence of the poetic event. It refers, quite simply, to the sense of being—alive or real—in the time-space of the text. Indeed, it seems to me that the textual effect of the subject’s integrative positioning in relation to an other corresponds, precisely, to the sensation of vitality and “thereness” generated by effective poetry, which places us in a state of *inner and outward relatedness*, or, alternatively, of being *wholly* “there,” both body and mind, in the imaginative vitality of desire.

This internal relational perspective essentially coincides with current psychoanalytical approaches which are *not* part of the dialogue between literature and psychoanalysis conducted in this book. Of special relevance is the theory of intersubjectivity introduced by Stolorow and Atwood, which proclaims an existential-phenomenological orientation and an affinity with modern hermeneutic traditions.⁵ Some of the intersubjective notions with regard to both the psychoanalytic subject and hermeneutics may help clarify my own, subjectivist perspective, especially as regards the indeterminate question of the identity of the subject I am writing about: who is it, ultimately or predominantly, the poet or the reader?

Intersubjective theory is defined by its authors as “a field theory or systems theory that seeks to comprehend psychological phenomena not as products of isolated intrapsychic mechanisms, but as forming at the interface of reciprocally interacting subjectivities.”⁶ Underlying this approach is an intent to avoid reification of the psychoanalytic subject. Originally in-

roduced as psychoanalytic phenomenology,⁷ intersubjective theory defines the subject in terms of his particular *lived experience* of himself in particular relational contexts.⁸ Its concern is with affective meaning and its articulation rather than with objective mechanisms and forces—with the significance of the subject's interactions with the world for *him*, as, one might say, their signifying subject. The intersubjective relational model accounts for the recurrent and the changing “configurations of self and other in the person's subjective universe” which are manifested and perpetually generated in the course of his human interactions. Therefore, “it is not the isolated individual mind . . . but the larger system created by the mutual interplay between the subjective worlds of patient and analyst, or of child and caregiver, that constitute the . . . domain of [intersubjective] psychoanalytic inquiry.”⁹

The methodological implications of all this for psychoanalytic interpretation are the need for empathic attunement to the analysand's articulation of his affects and, correlatively, reliance on the subjectivity of the analyst as an involved participant as well as an observer in the analytic situation. In the psychoanalytical encounter as an intersubjective “field,” where analyst and analysand are engaged in a mutually effective relation of transference and countertransference, the analyst's subjective perspective is necessarily central, more central than in more traditional schools of psychoanalysis. But just as the subjective bias, or “prejudice” is seen by modern hermeneutics as a prerequisite to understanding,¹⁰ so is countertransference a principal tool, rather than an obstacle, in intersubjective hermeneutics, where it is conceived of as a necessary condition for empathy. Empathy is a central term in self-psychology, which is a major influence on the intersubjective approach. But if empathy, as Kohut saw it, is what facilitates one's “attempt to enter another's subjective reality,”¹¹ it is by no means—from an intersubjective perspective—a matter of neutralizing one's personal psychological prejudice. The rationale for this is pertinently formulated by Gadamer, in his insistence on the “positive concept of prejudice” in the hermeneutic process: “Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us.”¹² The subjective investment in the empathic attunement to the other and his texts, though yielding, as Dilthey put it, a “rediscovery of the I in the Thou,”¹³ also enables us to touch on what is essential to the other—precisely because it touches on what is essential to us. Therefore, I believe that the subject I have written about in my reading of Dylan Thomas is *both* Thomas and myself in a *particular* intersubjective encounter. The principal subject matter

of this book is, therefore, a dialogue between two subjectivities, which have evolved in the process of its articulation.



In light of the psychoanalytical fantasy of origins that is projected in this book, the articulation of the poetic text involves the reproduction of the onset of desire through the re-enactment of the subject's primordial separation and his integrative entrance into the symbolic order of sign and object relations. The subject's "original" genesis is effected by primitive processes of signification which facilitate the separation from the maternal symbiosis and its substitution by object relations and linguistic representations. Drawing on rudimentary acts of symbolization, these processes enhance the elaboration of the archaic loss of the maternal through its "primal" repression and sublimation, and through the partial integration of the intrapsychic schisms and conflicts that split the subject-to-be in defense against the separation. Though pre-verbal, the early integrative, sublimatory processes are essentially symbolic in that they involve differential and combinatory operations within a preexisting "oedipal" schema. Indeed, it is only within a ternary structure that the experience of the symbiotic dyad can be made sense of, or even cognized, affectively and imaginatively.

The original psycho-semiological processes draw on imaginary functions of identification that mark the "oral phase" in the subject's development, in which his experience is expressed and organized in fantasies associated with the activity of nutrition and ingesting. That is, the form and substance of these fantasies is provided by the palpable experience of eating, chewing, sucking, swallowing, spitting, keeping something inside, etc., but also of being the object of these activities (being bitten, devoured, etc.). In effect, the identificatory dynamics at work in the emerging subject's archaic symbolic functioning—projection, introjection, incorporation, etc.—derive from the "oral" activities of expulsion, or "excorporation" and incorporation.¹⁴ Initially organizing experience in terms of pleasure and unpleasure—"good" and "bad" (pre-) objects which are to be incorporated and expelled respectively—these imaginary functions provide the differential and identificatory basis for the relation between the discrete realities of inside and outside, me and not-me, I and other. These pre-verbal symbolic acts demarcate the boundaries of the subject as a *relatively* autonomous and integral being, constituted *in relation* to the otherness of the external world and its representations.

What sustains this transition from the symbiotic to the relational mode of being is, according to Kristeva's model of primary narcissism, a pre-ver-

bal and pre-genital symbolic function that makes possible the psychic representation of the somatic experience of the symbiotic dyad.¹⁵ Inherent in the terms in which the mother experiences and expresses her relation to the child, and inherited through primary identification, that symbolic function is always already there as a virtual other which mediates the symbiotic dyad, and thus opens the way for its eventual substitution by sign-relations and other object relations. Its virtual alterity is implied in the very articulation of maternal love, constituting the “third party” with respect to which that love is articulated as such (as distinct from a non-articulated, symbiotic attitude). In its ternary context and by its association with maternal desire, that mediating alterity figures as a *paternal* function that conforms, under the pre-genital circumstances, to the logic of a retroacted Oedipus complex. By projecting the oedipal structure back onto the mother-child bond, this logic accounts for the “semiotic leap” from the somatic to the psychic, as well as for the constitution of the archaic object relations as symbolic *relations* rather than a state of symbiotic fusion or defensive splitting. The symbolic mediation of the pre-oedipal “*imaginary father*” which fosters the narcissistic foundations of love and of subjective identity is primarily cohesive in its function.¹⁶ It is thereby distinguished from the primarily differential function of Lacan’s oedipal, “phallic” “Symbolic” father, who will enter the life of Kristeva’s subject only at the later stage of sexual differentiation, to introduce law and prohibition and to be associated, in retrospect, with the archaic separation as “castration.”¹⁷ From that point on, the role of the more archaic, *maternal*, father will be to ensure imaginary and affective cohesiveness *within* the differential, symbolic systems of language and other social codes. Indeed, the archaic imaginary processes facilitated by this maternal-paternal function lay the foundations for these symbolic systems.¹⁸

Though the psychoanalytic notions of psychic origins and stages or phases of development may make it seem as if the primordial processes of emergence have a measure of finality in them, these generative processes are never quite completed. Hence the *inherent*, continuing split of the subject and his recurrent need for the corrective repetition of his unachieved advent in perpetual acts of symbolization that yield his always *provisional* being as a (perpetually self-) signifying subject. Thus, it is precisely the unfinished business of his genesis that motivates the subject of poetry to repeat it in and through the poetic text, which “identifies” him only for as long as it lasts. The speaking subject has “being” “only insofar as he speaks” (writes, reads), that is, speaks himself *toward* being what he is: “a subject . . . in process” of *becoming*—in and through the poetic text (Lacan; Kristeva).¹⁹

The dialectic of being and becoming summarizes, and perhaps also resolves, the apparent paradoxicality of the psychoanalytical synthesis which guides this book's generative hypothesis. That synthesis combines opposing positions regarding the controversial question of the subject's integrity of being. For clearly, the idea of integrative "being," which may be taken to correspond to the essentialist notion of identity or the "self," is antagonistic to Lacanian theory, which relegates the integrated self to the specular domain of the imaginary. Lacan's distinction between the subject and the self (*je; moi*) underscores the inherent condition of a subject split by a separation that can never be worked through, a subject who is therefore destined to repeated processes of "becoming" through symbolic expressions of his desire for an impossible integrity.²⁰ Lacan's notion of the self designates, precisely, the *illusion* of that integrity—a projective reflection as in a mirror, whose redoubling effect manifests the very split which it seeks to heal. As the metaphor of the mirror suggests, the self is always external to the subject; the narcissistic identification with it, which gives the illusion of integrity during the "mirror stage" and in the subsequent erections of the imaginary that repress, or "misrecognize" the separation as "castration," cannot be other than temporary and evasive: it is a dim mirror bound to be cracked before it clears up and to be displaced by an endless chain of inappropriate signifiers.

For the psychoanalytical theories that affirm a more continuous, stable notion of the self, by contrast, the imaginary is an actually formative force. The subject's identity is established by his identifications; the core of the self as "being" is constituted by the *introjection* of maternal love—an other's affect that becomes an integral part of the self, through and beyond the *incorporation* of her discourse, or parts of her, as foreign bodies within the self.²¹ Such "appropriation" is denied Lacan's subject, who is no more than the *agent* of his impossible quest for identity. For him, seeing can never turn into being; taking something in does not make it part of one's *proper* self. And so, identified only with/by his desire, that would-be subject is forever destined to seek his original integrity in the perpetual erection and crumbling of his signs, doomed to an eternal split by the very medium of his quest.

A reconciliation of self and subject may be conceived, as it is in this book, as taking place during provisional moments of subjective "being," or integration, in the signifying process.²² Essentially split, the speaking subject can nevertheless attain a real, if temporary, integrity in moments of meaningful relatedness in the process of articulating the text. In these moments, the transferential dynamics of signification enhance the introjection of oth-

erwise split-off affects, through the incorporation of the textual or intertextual discourse of another. This issue is further elaborated on later in this chapter, in the discussion of Thomas's poetics.

To conceive the paradoxical coincidence of being and becoming in the textual performance takes some faith in the imaginary—more faith, at least, than Lacan has in it—and in the poetic imaginary in particular. And if that is not available a priori, then a little imagination will do, under the necessary condition of a provisional suspension of disbelief which makes possible the actual experience of being *in* the text. That experience may become clearer if we look at it from outside as well as from inside—from a semiological perspective, which perceives the poetic text as a *heterogeneous utterance*, and from a phenomenological perspective which sees it as a *chronotopos of wish fulfillment*.

The experience of being in the text is at the center of my phenomenological analysis, which is concerned with the situation of the subject as a *signifying body* in the spatio-temporal reality of the text, and with the correlative intensity or palpability of that reality. Such a "situation" implies, then, a view of the text as a *space* for being as well as a process of becoming, a space which, in order to accommodate the subject, must transcend the specular dimension of representation. It does so by dint of its heterogeneity and its dynamic aspect as a performative space. The textual space is heterogeneous in that it combines linguistic as well as trans-linguistic modes of representation. Kristeva calls the former mode *symbolic* and the latter *semiotic*.²³ The *symbolic* designates the determinate denotative signification of predicative language that is subjected to the differential and the combinatory laws of grammar and logic. The *semiotic* is the distinctive mode of poetic signification. It is operative in the symbolic indeterminacy of sound and metaphor which generates the translinguistic connotative element of poetic meaning. The latter is the imaginary-somatic (as distinct from symbolic) meaning-effect, irreducible to language, of affects, sensations, and sense perceptions. It is what yields the dynamic *topoi* of the poetic imaginary in the "aura" of poetic meaning. It draws on the materiality of language for its distinctively suggestive, connotative representation of the subject's signifying "body," and in doing so it signifies the subject's body deictically, or iconically, rather than by the symbolic conventionality of the arbitrary sign.

Thus, the heterogeneous text does not only reflect the subject, through a mediating symbolic representation (of a "world" as a mirroring other). It also signifies him as it were directly, metonymically (deictically): it contains, or "embodies" the subject in the translinguistic realization of the *semiotic*

representation of his “body” in its affectively and imaginatively invested materiality. For while subverting the determinacy of the denotative, *symbolic* representation, the *semiotic* (“somatic”) inscriptions of the signifying subject’s body also charge it with the connotative—affective and imaginary—intensity that lends it its efficacy as a space for being. Indeed, it is the investment of the linguistic representation of the textual “world” with the subject’s *intimate* relation to it that make the representational space real—real, that is, for the subject who responds to it with his whole, psychic-*cum*-somatic being, while at once constituting and inhabiting it, and being constituted by it. At this dynamic, temporal point of intimacy it seems as though the subject and the text are one; as if the textual time-space—a version of Bakhtin’s *chronotopos*—and the subject who both realizes it and is being realized by it are united in the dialectic motion of mutual creation, as in Yeats’s poem, where you cannot “know the dancer from the dance.”²⁴ You cannot tell, because their common space is one that allows for positive being by controlling the negativity of *différance*: a performative space whose boundaries are delineated by the motion of dancing; a space spanned by the trace-work of the motion like the circular tail of a comet.

The logic governing this simultaneity is the logic of desire, realized in meaning as a creative intentionality toward an other. The textual space for *actual* being is spanned by way of *imaginary* wish fulfillment, that is to say, *by the way*, as it were, of the articulation of the desire for meaning, which is the desire for being *in* an intimately significant relation to the world’s otherness. Such a meaning-full relation takes place—and *makes* a place for the subject—in the *transitional space* of the text.²⁵ Winnicott’s term designates the experience of the self in its imaginative, projective relation to the external reality in the early, narcissistic stages of its development, as well as in adult life. Replacing the traditional psychoanalytical distinction between internal and external reality, this notion of intermediary reality reflects Winnicott’s existential approach to the self in terms of the subjective experience of one’s intimate and creative relation to one’s environment. In this, Winnicott anticipates the redefinition of psychic reality achieved in the theory of intersubjectivity. In its application here, Winnicott’s notion qualifies the heterogeneous space of the text as representing both me and not me; both my desiring body in its metonymical gesture of signification and its metaphorical object which, as it now appears, is not quite an other but rather the space of *transition*, of movement toward it; it is precisely where I *am*, where I am fulfilled. For the object of poetic representation is, so it seems to me, not so much (or not only) the world as other, but mainly the

subject's relation to it—or rather his desire for such a relation, which is realized within the narcissistic bounds of the textual space.



Winnicott's intermediary spaces illustrate the close connection between subjectivity and narcissism by foregrounding, like Kristeva in her analysis of primary identification, the relational aspect of narcissism as a symbolic (or proto-symbolic) disposition that adheres to an alterity. Winnicott's intermediary spaces—which, like signs, mediate, that is, both separate and relate the subject and his environment—are also called *potential spaces*, which suggests his emphasis on the role of creativity in the subject's "narcissistic" self-realization. Winnicott stresses the generative function of illusion and the experience of narcissistic omnipotence in the subject's "original" advent, as well as in the constant creation in adult life of intermediary spaces that realize his potential for relational being. As distinct from the subject of traditional psychoanalysis (Freud, Klein), who is immanently defined in terms of his separateness, as the product of "an ongoing process of rational coming to terms with the limits of his being, a kind of cumulative process of disillusionment and mature mourning," Winnicott's subject continually transgresses his "objective" limits by creating both himself and his world.²⁶ This transgression is part of the subject's constitution as such because it sustains his imaginative, desirous relation to his perpetually re-created world, a world which, however, does *not* thereby lose its effective otherness for him. This paradox may be formulated as follows: "I create the world and the world is me, although it is there before me and for itself, as it yields itself to me and for me, so that I may create it."²⁷ The reciprocal relation between me and the world suggests my awareness of the world's alterity as distinct from my imaginary recreation of it—which is nonetheless necessary in order to make that otherness accessible to me, and me capable of relating to *it*. It is this dialectic which characterizes the function of the text as a relational space for being and becoming.

Within Kristeva's and Winnicott's conceptualizations, subjectivity is bound up with narcissism in its life-oriented—relational and desiring—aspect. This life-oriented, or "erotic" aspect is opposed to the unrelated, "autistic," or "autoerotic" aspect of narcissism, whose regressive, introverted disposition is melancholic and dominated by the death drive.²⁸ Kristeva, who sees narcissism as the foundation of the speaking subject's psychic life as well as of the poetic text, distinguishes narcissism from autoeroticism by its ternary structure, which is founded on the archaic symbolic disposition she associates

with the mediating otherness of a pre-oedipal paternal function.²⁹ Drawing on Freud's essay "On Narcissism," she adopts the view of narcissism he proposes there, and affirms his notion that narcissism develops from the autoerotic state of the mother-child dyad, by dint of a "new psychical action."³⁰ This new action she associates with Freud's notion that the foundation of the ego lies in an idealizing "primary identification" with the "father of individual prehistory" who is conceived to be "the origin of the ego ideal."³¹ She calls that paternal function the "imaginary father," distinguishing its particular function from that of the oedipal, "Symbolic" father. Assimilated through "primary," that is, "direct and immediate identification [that] takes place earlier than any object-cathexis" (Freud),³² the imaginary father is not an object, but rather a model—an ideal otherness to *be like* rather than an object to *have*—set up by the symbolic adherence of maternal speech. The pre-objectal paternal model is a "simple virtuality, a potential presence, a *form* to be cathected"³³—a relational pattern or metaphorical *schema* to be invested with affective or imaginary content.³⁴ Its assimilation facilitates the separation from the mother and the beginning of psychic life through the "primal repression" and sublimation of the separation and its maternal "object." It opens and sustains a psychic space—narcissism—which functions as a "screen": while at once performing and repressing the separation, its receptive emptiness is the "zero degree of the imagination" which, under the aegis of the cohesive paternal function, sublimates the object and its loss into nostalgic, affective, and imaginary plenitude. Thus primary identification opens the way for the imaginary and subsequent symbolic displacements of the autoerotic "object," establishing narcissism as an intermediary state of transition between autoeroticism, with its melancholic leaning towards death, and object relations, which hold out the promise of vitality and life.

In the textual context, such a transition occurs through the transformation of melancholy into desire, a *nostalgic* desire which sublimates its underlying melancholic loss. Although it is clear that it is the life- or Eros-driven thrust of narcissism that sets the poetic process in motion, textual desire is not self-evident. With a hidden or manifest melancholia as its point of departure, poetic signification is animated by a conflict which may be called "oedipal." While moving towards a symbolic displacement of the lost maternal object, it is also subject to a regressive, incestuous, and melancholic pull toward its silent materiality, that is, away from erotic difference towards the autoerotic return of, or to, the same. At the hesitant intervals of poetic indeterminacy, when the habitual meaning of signifiers is suspended to give way to new meanings, the silence of tautology and the prospect of further

metaphorical displacement contend with one another. Their contention constitutes the text as a point of intersection between nostalgia and melancholia, between the erotic orientation of narcissism and its thanatic counterpart. The resolution of this tension on the side of Eros and metaphor is the effect of the binding motion of signification, which consolidates its initially weak disposition towards the other through the integrative reenactment of the pre-oedipal conflicts of an ambivalence that splits the subject and suspends both desire and signification.

The imaginative and emotional logic of this ambivalence can be elucidated in terms of Melanie Klein's conception of the subject's coming into being. Indeed, primary ambivalence is the predominant factor in Klein's psychoanalytical model. The Kleinian subject oscillates throughout his life between dissociative and integrative "positions" that perpetuate the economy of ambivalence which marks the early phases of his development.³⁵ In the first, pre-objectal, "paranoid-schizoid" phase, the ambivalence is not experienced as such, but manifests itself in the defense mechanism of splitting. This mechanism involves the polarized projection of ambivalence onto "good" and "bad" parts of the mother's imagined configuration. The projection of the internally threatening hate for the mother onto an objectified image perceived to be "outside" establishes it, in Klein's understanding of the process, as a persecutory object or "part-object," against which the subject-to-be defends himself by introjecting the "good" part-object, which is the image of his projected love. The predominant factor in this phase is aggression, displayed in the defensive projection (i.e. expulsion) of the "bad" object and in the "paranoid" experience of persecution by it. In the following phase in Klein's scheme, the "depressive" phase, aggression and fragmentation are displaced by guilt and the need for restoration. In this phase the subject-to-be comes to recognize the mother and relate to her as a whole object, assimilating rather than polarizing and projecting his ambivalence. It is at this point that he becomes an ambivalent *subject*—an event which generates the anxiety of facing his own conflicts and destructiveness, and gives rise to the "depressive" mourning of the object which he imagines to have destroyed in the previous phase. The anxiety is attenuated by the intensification of the introjective processes and the reinforcing, through idealization, of the introjected "good object" that constitutes, according to Klein, the positive (loving) core of the ego. The idealization of the maternal object, which reduces the conflictual intensity of the ambivalence, is a part of a sublimational process in the course of which splitting begins to give way to repression. Feeling a "depressive" guilt for his destructiveness and anxiety about its effect—the loss of his

object—the subject represses his aggressive impulses in order to restore the integrity of his lost, fragmented object. This sublimatory work of *reparation* is, for Klein, the origin of symbol-formation. Thus, it is the earlier “schizoid” rather than the later “depressive” manifestation of ambivalence that corresponds to the notion of melancholia introduced earlier, where it is conceived as a disintegrative state in which one is subject to primary ambivalence rather than assuming it. The depressive position, as Klein suggests, corresponds to Freud’s notion of mourning—as distinct from melancholia—as the working through of loss in a whole-object-relation. But “the depressive position is never fully worked through,”³⁶ and so the melancholic schisms keep surfacing to subvert the integrity of the subject and his symbolizations, alternating with sublimative reparations of the subject’s nostalgically mourned and projected “original” integrity.

The integrative failure which impedes the full working through of the depressive position (and hence the stability of the subject’s integrity and his symbolizations) is inherent to the mechanism of sublimation which facilitates that position. The idealization necessary for introjecting the “good” maternal object and the internal reparation of the mother’s split image draw, according to Klein, on defensive mechanisms of *denial* that are in themselves “schizoid.”³⁷ What is being denied is the psychic reality of the depressive loss and the related conflicts of ambivalence. The affective dissociation from them by the correlatives of depression, *mania* and *obsessional mechanisms*, permit at once a detachment from the affective meaning of loss and an illusory omnipotent sense of control over it.³⁸ While negating the negativity of loss and ambivalence—protecting the subject from the anxieties of dependency, his mournful sadness, and the fear of his own destructiveness—the manic and obsessional dispositions in effect enact that negativity in the form of an aggressive annihilation, or control over, the object, thus subverting, to a varying degree, the work of mourning and internal reparation.³⁹

Kristeva applies Klein’s notions of reparation and denial in her *manic-depressive* model of the advent of symbolization and of aesthetic sublimation. She thus sees poetic symbolization as often involving a cathartic (rather than integrative or elaborative) manic negation of depressive (“melancholic”) loss within a representation which at once restores and annihilates the lost maternal “object.”⁴⁰ Primary ambivalence is thus enacted here, as in the child’s entrance into the world of signs, as simultaneous reparation and matricide.⁴¹

Kristeva’s notion of sublimation differs, however, from Klein’s, in the oedipal framework within which it posits the earliest phases of the subject’s development. Her tripartite, narcissistic model condenses the processes of

splitting and sublimation into the simultaneous occurrence of primary repression and sublimation at the originary moment of primary identification. Indeed, the presence of the paternal function in Kristeva's construct accounts for the differential distance that is necessary for mourning and sublimation in the "depressive position." Polarized accordingly, the projective correlatives of Klein's "bad" and "good" objects in Kristeva's model are, roughly speaking, the objects of primary repression and sublimation, namely, the maternal "abject" and the archaic "Thing."⁴² The "abject" object of primary repression represents the negativity of the separation, including the defensive ambivalence in response to it, while the "Thing" represents the plenitude of the idealized symbiotic state in a nostalgic affect. Thus, the maternal abject represents autoerotic ambiguity and melancholic splitting, or fragmentation, whereas the Thing is the sublimative product of the integrative aspect of the *nostalgic* narcissistic imagination.

The maternal abject is the phobic imaginary figuration of the abhorred materiality of the *undifferentiated* somatic-symbiotic object, as well as of its traumatic loss, which is associated with maternal violence or *abjection*. Maternal abjection is anxiously associated with death and maternal castration, while the materiality of the maternal abject is linked with death through the fantasy of being devoured by the mother and then putrefying within her body. Hence the defensive need to abject (expel) the abject—the "bad" somatic-symbiotic "object"—a maneuver which gives rise to the unseparated subject's psycho-somatic split, as well as to his advent as a signifying being. Like schizoid splitting in Klein's system, abjection is the most archaic, defensive form of separation, whereby the subject-to-be delineates his boundaries against the maternal abject. But in order for it to delineate *something*, this act of negation needs to be complemented by some correlative of Klein's introjection. This is where the Thing comes *in*, literally, as the heterogeneous, *symbolic* sublimation of the ambiguous object. Like the sublimative, reparational "good object" which becomes "a symbol within the ego,"⁴³ the affective *representation* of both the object and its loss in the nostalgic Thing is both differential and recuperative. It serves both to differentiate the emerging subject from the threatening mother and to recover an imaginary representation of her, thus functioning as the prototypical basis for signification. In its heterogeneous, semiological function, it integrates primary ambivalence by subordinating the negativity of loss to an affirmative, recuperative displacement.

But primary narcissism is fragile. Its tension-film—the projective "screen" of primal repression—is easily broken, giving way to the negativity

of abjection that subverts the provisional imaginary plenitude, and creates the need for its displacement by further sublimations. When abjection surfaces, it encroaches on the narcissistic assimilation, undoing the introjection of the affirmative maternal affect of the Thing. At this point affective dissociation abandons the subject to the throes of abjection and conflict, which constitutes the melancholic foundation of poetic sublimation.

Melancholia, as I understand it in the light of Freud and Kristeva,⁴⁴ is a fixation on the splitting loss of the ambivalent archaic "object," manifested in the withdrawal of desire from objects and signs into the autistic, autoerotic non-space of psychic fragmentation. In her book on melancholia, Kristeva associates this non-space with the "narcissistic emptiness" generated by the separation, and with Freud's notion of "open wound" which drains the melancholic subject's drive-energies, "drawing to itself cathectic energies . . . from all directions, and emptying the ego until it is totally impoverished."⁴⁵ This draining, which Freud terms "anticathexes," accounts for the dissolution of desire in melancholia, caused by the fragmentation of drives and the "disintegration of bonds" within psychic structures and their representation (Kristeva).⁴⁶ This disintegration testifies to the work of the death drive either in its archaic form, linked to the psyche's fragile constitution prior to its organization in relation to "good" and "bad" part-objects, or in its secondary, "schizoid" form of turning round upon the ego of the "paranoid" aggressiveness toward the ambiguous archaic "object," or in both. Kristeva is more interested in the manifestation of the first, Thanatic process, which characterizes what she calls "narcissistic melancholy." Her melancholic subject in *Black Sun* is immersed in sadness in the face of his narcissistic emptiness, seduced by his dissociated Thing—the unconscious representation of his lost object that beckons him to a lethal reunion in the bottomless pit of loss. Freud's melancholic, however, has more in common with Klein's schizoid subject and Kristeva's abject. The subject of introverted aggression, he is split by a fragmenting conflict of ambivalence. In a Freudian perspective, the fragmented non-space of melancholia is the site of identification with the ambivalent "original object."⁴⁷ Fusional and murderous, melancholic identification enacts the twofold negativity of its object. It perpetuates the cherished negativity of the object's symbiotic-somatic materiality, which the melancholic as it were preserves by embodying it—rather than representing it—in the space of his autistic silence. And he also perpetuates the negativity of its loss by denying it conscious representation. Thus, melancholic identification *enacts* the primal ambivalence by at once preserving and annih-

lating the ambiguous object. As Kristeva maintains, the subject of melancholia withdraws from the world in order to retain his original integrity (which never was) in the maternal Thing. In doing so, he clings to the affective idealization of the somatic-symbiotic fusion in an unconscious image of paradisaical plenitude. But by denying his affect conscious articulation—which would betray its representational difference from the thing itself—he at once disavows the separation from it and repeats it. He repeats, that is, maternal abjection in the form of internal splitting, or affective dissociation, from what thereby becomes the abjected part of himself, namely, his disowned affect (the longing for recuperation) or desiring “body.” For the melancholic subject, who is dissociated from his affects, the Thing is not an expression of his nostalgia, but rather a lost *object*. The split, introverted subject objectifies his affect, identifying it with the melancholic object with which he wishes to reunite. In other words, if, as Kristeva suggests, the melancholic is “a prisoner” of the affect, it is because in his unconscious, fusional submergence in it, he fails to contain, or to “own” it—by way of its imaginary or symbolic articulation.⁴⁸



The manifest or hidden melancholia of the speaking subject of poetry accounts for his conflictual attitude towards language, which is reflected in the creative violation of its rules. At the onset of poetic creation there seems to be, alongside and in direct correlation with the pleasure of it, a frustration with language as an alienating symbolic order which distances us from the world, and which needs to be modified so that it corresponds to our unmediated experience of the world—as if such an experience ever took place. Poetic language is thus an attempt to force language to bring about, or restore the nostalgic intimacy of the Thing itself which, in our never-quite-separated, dissociated condition, we long to experience in our relation with the objectal world. From a Lacanian perspective, which associates the order of language with a paternal *law*, the speaking subject's conflict with language is an oedipal conflict with a “castrating” Symbolic father who separates him, as it were, from an “incestuous” maternal unity. A secondary, oedipalized version of primary ambivalence, this conflict is enacted in the poetic text as a tension between symbolic and subversive asymbolic dispositions, which are encoded, as Kristeva points out, in the heterogeneity of the textual signification. The dialectic between the *symbolic* and the *semiotic* modes of signification constitutes the text as a simultaneous movement toward the sublimation of the maternal object in the “Name of the Father” on the one

hand, and, on the other, of regression towards the fusional silence—or silent tautology—of the self-signifying Thing itself.

The *symbolic*, in its propositional function and its denotative determinacy, conforms to the “castrating” law of differentiation and substitution. It displaces the materiality of the maternal object and of the objectal by the arbitrary sign, and disrupts its nostalgic symbiotic unity by syntactic relations that draw on categorical differentiation. The “castrating” arbitrariness of the *symbolic* sign is in effect a paternal, legalized form of abjection, in that it excludes the somatic, affective expression of the subject, and hence also precludes relation to the other as an object of desire. A “castrated” sublimation, it thus bars off both the nostalgic object and its effective substitution by an intimate, affective, and sensuous experience of the objectal world. The *semiotic* aims to undo the alienating effect of language, but it also threatens to annihilate the other from the opposite direction—by subverting *symbolic* signification through connotative indeterminacy. In drawing on the translanguistic materiality of language, it fulfills the Russian Formalists’ “poetic function” of breaking and “de-familiarizing” the *symbolic* code.⁴⁹

The *semiotic* is the wild, indeterminate associative aspect of language that is never totally bound semantically. It is perceived most clearly in the suggestive non-sense of poetic incantation or “music,” as well as in the surplus connotative charges of poetic collocations, notably metaphor. The *semiotic* is operative where metaphor, like sound, signifies something beyond a specific cognitive content; where, as Donald Davidson puts it, “it does not say and it does not hide, [but] intimates”⁵⁰—something intimate. A material gesture of indication rather than a representation, *semiotic* signification opts for transcending the *medium* of language through that very medium, by pointing directly to, or invoking something that resists the limiting and distancing confinement of *symbolic* mediation. The *semiotic* defies the paternal law of language by a “direct semantization” of the material signifier which, by subverting the signifier’s symbolic determinacy, seems to retain the lost unity of its ultimate, nostalgic signified.⁵¹ As a continuous material equivalent, the *semiotic* signifier functions as a “psychosomatic modality” that restores the affective and sensory traces of the somatic-symbiotic object by way of metonymic signification.⁵² It functions, in its materiality, as a kind of *index*—instead of a substitutive sign—to the extralinguistic object and the objectal.

The tension between the *semiotic* and the *symbolic* foregrounds the “castrating” arbitrariness of normative language, which the melancholic subject fails to forget, or repress.⁵³ It challenges the solidarity between signifier and

signified which, drawing on this repression, ensures the functioning of the sign and the subject's integrative, relational positioning. The absence of this solidarity—for the split subject—places him in the non-space between two equally negative dispositions which reflect his dissociated condition: a meaningless (affectively disembodied) relation to the alienated other of the (therefore) “empty” *symbolic* signifiers; and a death-bound, autoerotic movement toward a fusional, objectless intimacy. A third and more pleasurable option, that of an intimate relation to the other, is attained through the integrative, *dialectical* actualization of the heterogeneous modes in the binding dynamic course of the textual articulation. The articulation of the text “motivates” the arbitrariness of the sign by binding the *semiotic* traces to the “empty” *symbolic* signification, to the effect of “filling” it with affective significance.⁵⁴ What it fills it with, ultimately, is the initially unbound drive energy turned into an other-bound desire, a desire that is sustained by the twofold—symbolic and metonymical—functioning of poetic language. The dialectic of the *symbolic* and the *semiotic* superimposes their respective signifieds, the symbiotic object and the represented objectal world, so that the longing for the first is transferred onto the representation of the latter. The result of this transference is that the meaningfulness (or subjective significance) of the textual world is sustained by the looming of the *semiotic* signified in the suggestive horizon of its *symbolic* representation. In other words, the textual heterogeneity facilitates the simultaneous representation and realization of the desire for the intimate otherness of the world.

In light of the foregoing description, the speaking subject's constitutive reentry into the Symbolic order is almost literal. In motivating the arbitrariness of the sign, the subject introduces (the translinguistic representation of) his “body” into the differential space between signifier and signified, thus entering it, as it were, *in person*. But this is a transgression of the Symbolic law, one might protest in the name of the Symbolic father. Indeed, in the dialectics of the poetic performance one may detect the concurrence and the resolution of the conflictual motions of the oedipal narrative (and of its underlying primary ambivalence): murder and incest in the *semiotic* transgression of the *symbolic* toward the barred-off maternal object, to the effect of its re-naming in the *inherited* Name of the Father in the new code of the poem. In taking the law into his hands in order to adapt it to his needs, the poet indeed usurps the Symbolic father; but it is precisely through such murderous identification that he can realize the Symbolic function of the paternal order as such, that is, that he gives it its efficiency as an integrative, regulative order.

The imaginary motivation of that order—a transgression which poets perform each in his own *style*—draws on a regression, through and beyond the Oedipus, to the more archaic origins of language associated with the narcissistic “imaginary father.” It is to that archaic semiological function that the transsymbolic cohesiveness of poetic language is owed, a cohesiveness that marks both the level of the signifiers and that of the relation between signifier and signified. That archaic semiotic function accounts for the alternative *orders* that constitute poetic form—the material patterns of repetition and the associative equivalences in phonic and rhythmical as well as figurative structures. These patterns and figurative transpositions provide alternative (*semiotic*) orders of material concatenation which both displace and complement the *symbolic*, syntactic, and logical order of predicative language, while naturalizing, as it were, the latter’s alienating arbitrariness.⁵⁵ For the archaic paternal function ensures the imaginary cohesion—as distinct from the conventional symbolic relation—between signifier and signified. Repressing the negativity of both maternal abjection and paternal castration, it is what enables us to forget that poetry, like any discourse, signifies absence. It allows us to suspend our melancholic disbelief in language, or in its possibility to procure a sense of plenitude—a possibility which poetry realizes when it is effective. Beyond the paraphrasable sense of a poem, poetic meaning is primarily a matter of *meaning-fullness*, which has its origin in the wishful filling of the negative space between signifier and signified—between representation and its impossible object—with an affectively charged, wish-fulfilling fantasy. The virtual alterity of the archaic father as a “schema,” or pattern, provides a gestalt of meaning as plenitude. Preceding sexual and linguistic differentiation, the paternal “schema” which gives meaning to the articulation of maternal love represents, as Kristeva proposes, a “conglomerate of the mother and her desire,” and thus of the mother and the father in a wishful, narcissistic bi-sexual (or pre-sexual) plenitude. It gives meaning, and thereby constitutes maternal love as such by dint of the “oral” dynamics involved in its assimilation through “direct” and “immediate” primary identification. It is this oral assimilation that makes possible the introjection (internalization as identification) of the maternal affect through the incorporation (internalization of a foreign body) of its material articulation. The introjected affect is thus appropriated—made part of one’s proper self—by dint of its rearticulation in the *form* of a narcissistic affect, or fantasy. Hence the symbolic origin of our “being” as the subjects of a love that is perpetually introjected, decentered or dissociated from, and then again reintroduced in “oral” acts of signification.