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THE ROLE OF POETRY AND LANGUAGE IN HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF ART

by

DANIEL GRIFFIN

Under the Direction of Sebastian Rand

ABSTRACT

Hegel's view of poetry clarifies the overall role of language in his system and allows him to makes sense of a difficult linguistic issue: how to distinguish between poetry and prose. For Hegel, this distinction is crucial because it illuminates the different ways poetry and prose allow us to understand ourselves as members of an ethical community. In this paper, I argue, using Hegel, that the distinction between poetry and prose can only properly be understood in terms of their fundamentally different kinds of content instead of in terms of any formal differences between the two. Then, I address an objection to Hegel by Paul de Man which uses Hegel's concept of memory to collapse the distinction between poetry and philosophical prose. Finally, I argue that Hegel can respond to this objection by showing how de Man misunderstands how philosophical thought conceptually develops from memory.

INDEX WORDS: Hegel, Poetry, Philosophy of art, Philosophy of language, Paul de Man, German Idealism

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by

DANIEL GRIFFIN

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DEDICATION

I must dedicate this thesis to G.W.F. Hegel. Without his vast, intricate system, his copious insights into normativity, and his incredibly difficult prose, this thesis would never have been written (and would never have taken as long to sort out). I also dedicate this thesis to poetry and the incredibly difficult (and invaluable) task of the poet in composing each and every work. Philosophy is often timid to directly examine the nature of the literary arts (particularly poetry), and admittedly, engaging with poets and novelists in literature, on their own turf so to speak, can be a daunting task. This thesis is meant to illuminate the value of poetry for us as communal beings, both for those who practice philosophy and those who do not.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To define the poetic as such or to give a description of what is poetic horrifies nearly all who have written about poetry. And in fact if a man begins to talk about poetry as an imaginative art without having previously examined what art's content and general mode of representation is, he will find it extremely difficult to know where to look for the proper essence of poetry.[1]

...

[They] are thoughts of the common spirit,

Quietly ending in the mind of the poet,

Which, long familiar with the infinite,

Is struck quickly, and shakes with the memory.

Set on fire by the holy radiance,

It creates a song – the fruit born of love,

The works of gods and man,

Bearing witness to both.[2]

1 Hegel's Distinction Between Poetry and Prose: The Convergence of Form and Content

Poetry as an art plays a crucial role within Hegel's system, both in his philosophy of art and his philosophy of language. In the *Aesthetics*, Hegel bestows the title of "poetry" on the "universal art" which "runs through [all other art-forms] and develops itself independently in each of them."[3] Thus for Hegel poetry ties the other art-forms together in some way and expresses an artistic characteristic common to them all. To contemporary readers, and particularly philosophers, the position of poetry in Hegel's overall system may seem significantly inflated. In order to see what he is after, we must grasp his larger understanding of what poetry is and of its role for us qua individual members of a community. For

in the end, Hegel wants to claim that understanding poetry in his way is crucial for understanding ourselves as philosophical thinkers capable of justifying norms held by us and our community.

My goal in this paper is to examine the distinction Hegel makes between poetry and prose. In so doing, I will defend both the esteemed position Hegel gives to poetry in his system and the distinction between poetry and prose against a particular objection by Paul de Man that collapses the distinction. In the Introduction to the *Aesthetics*, Hegel is clear that his claims about art and poetry and their respective positions in his system can only fully be understood by deriving their particular characteristics from the general concept of art. Such a derivation involves working through a large number of contentious claims and commitments. Yet it seems we might be able at least to understand a significant part of Hegel's concept of poetry without digging through too much of his complicated conceptual apparatus. So rather than trying to approach the issue by starting with his concept of art, I will consider a series of Hegelian arguments about how to distinguish poetry from prose correctly. Such a consideration, I claim, gives us a relatively straightforward way to clarify Hegel's concept of poetry.

The correct distinction between poetry and prose is important for understanding Hegel because it directly confronts a continuous theme found throughout his system—the separation of form and content. Moreover, understanding the relationship of form and content in poetry by directly distinguishing between poetry and prose is methodologically different and less difficult than approaching this relationship by understanding poetry in relation to other art-forms, such as sculpture or painting. Both poetry and prose use the same medium—natural language, words, sentences—to convey some sort of meaning, whereas other art-forms convey meaning through different media, such as stone or paint. Both poetry and prose present a particular *content* through a linguistic medium, so the ways in which poetry and prose convey meaning to an audience are obviously similar in many ways. Thus an approach to understanding poetry by distinguishing it from prose will allow easier access to Hegel's concept of poetry by avoiding any questions concerning differences among media and focusing on questions about the forms of the linguistic medium shared by both and, as it turns out, differences in content as well.

Despite their shared linguistic medium, it is clear that poetry and prose use language in different ways. For instance, poetry often comes in verse form and usually employs rhyme and meter, whereas prose typically does not. Thus I will begin (Section II) by examining two seemingly obvious formal differences between poetry and prose—poetry's use of figurative and what we might call "musical" language, and prose's lack thereof. Figurative language is *formal* insofar as its use in a poem is not necessarily dependent on the content of that poem. In other words, the meaning a poem wishes to convey is not dependent on the conceptual relation it establishes between two particular objects (e.g., in a metaphor), even if the articulation of such a relation contributes to what a poem actually does convey. Similarly, the "musical" aspects of language—meter and rhyme—are *formal* insofar as the meaning musical language can convey is not restricted at all by the meter and rhyme; thus musical language can be understood as merely a way or form of conveying any meaning whatsoever. In essence, the use of figurative or musical language does not constrain the content or meaning of any linguistic work, and it thus appears that these two forms of language seem only to aid in or detract from the presentation of a specific content.

Of course, figurative and musical language constrain the form of a poem, for the use of figure requires that the two objects being related stand in some recognizable conceptual relationship with each other, just as the use of rhyme requires a certain auditory relationship between two syllables. Yet these forms limit how a poet can structure a poem in different ways because language can be understood as having many different "forms," depending on how we designate linguistic form and content.[4] Here, the important difference is between two conceptual levels of linguistic form: semantic form and material form. This difference in the levels of linguistic form accounts for why both figurative and musical language must be addressed as candidates for distinguishing poetry from prose formally. For the normative scheme governing the semantic relationship between words and phrases is different than the scheme governing the material relationship between words, syllables, and phrases. For Hegel, good poets are inventive in their use of figurative and musical language even while still working within the formal constraints of each.[5] Nevertheless, neither figurative nor musical language constrains what content a poem can contain or what meaning it can convey. So if the difference between poetry and prose can be ground-

ed in either figurative or musical language, then poetry differs from prose only in the way or *form* by which it conveys meaning and not in any difference in the *content* that it can or does conveys.

Yet for Hegel, a distinction between poetry and prose based merely on such formal differences—the ways in which figurative and musical language convey meaning—fails to provide a real criterion for distinguishing between the two. Instead, he argues that poetry and prose are in fact distinguished by the different kinds of *content* that each best conveys. This difference between poetic and prose content, in turn, provides the best way to understand why Hegel attributes such an important role to poetry within his systematic philosophy. Hence after considering Hegel's arguments against the adequacy of the proposed formal distinctions, I will examine (in Section III) the content of poetry with respect to the content of two different kinds of prose that Hegel discusses: scientific prose and conceptual or philosophical prose. The content-based differences between poetry and these kinds of prose will thus serve to clarify why formal characteristics of poetry—such as its use of figurative and musical language—are necessary for poetry's task of conveying its proper content, while also insufficient as marks of the essential distinction between poetry and prose. In so doing, I will show why this distinction between poetry and prose matters for understanding the respective roles of each, both in Hegel's aesthetics and in his systematic philosophy as a whole. Moreover, I will show why this distinction is important for understanding both the place of art in Hegel's system (and hence understanding the systematic role of his *Aesthetics*) and the relationship between art and philosophy that Hegel posits.

1.1   Poetry and Prose: Purely Formal Differences

The two formal characteristics of poetry that I will examine here are poetry's use of (A) figurative language and (B) musical language. Again, these characteristics are *formal* insofar as they do not restrict the language that employs them to any particular content. In other words, neither the conceptual relation established in figure nor the meter or rhyme of words or syllables wholly determines what the content or meaning of that poem must be. This is not to say that figurative and musical language do not have content—in fact they must have content—but rather to say that their content is not determined merely by the

structure of figure, rhyme, or meter. So the formal characteristics of a simile in general do not restrict the objects that are compared to each other in any particular simile. The structure of an actual simile, for example, "This house is like an oven," does not on its own require that the two objects being compared be a house and an oven. I could just as easily replace "this house" and "an oven" with "Achilles" and "a lion" and still obey the formal restrictions of simile. These two similes are, of course, different (in content), but they are the same insofar as they are both similes (i.e. they both have the form "A is like B"). Likewise, with any meter or rhyme scheme, we can replace any words and phrases with any others as long as they conform to the formal restrictions of the meter and rhyme scheme. In a poem with an ABAB rhyme scheme, if the first line ended in the word "cat," I could just as well replace it with "bat" or "fat" and still obey the formal restrictions of the rhyme scheme. In a poem with any iambic metrical scheme, I could replace the name "Romeo" with "Theodore" each time, while still conforming to the formal restrictions of an iambic metrical scheme. Hence, insofar as figurative and musical language do not restrict the kind of content poetry conveys, they are formal characteristics of poetry.

This form/content distinction with respect to poetry is a particular instance of a common idea that the way in which content is presented should be distinguishable from the content presented itself. Yet while maintaining that form and content are distinguishable, Hegel continuously emphasizes their necessary union, arguing not just that all form is a form of some content and vice versa but, more strongly, that particular forms (whether of language, thought, physical structure, etc.) are essentially suited to particular contents.[6] Hegel claims the same is true of poetry, yet the first step in discovering why the union of form and content is important in poetry—how the form of poetry is necessary to convey, but insufficient to determine the content of poetry—is to understand why the distinction between poetry and prose cannot be grounded on a purely formal difference.

1.1.1 Figurative Language: Symbol and Metaphor

At first glance, poetry's use of figurative language appears clearly to distinguish it from prose on formal grounds. Poetry seems to use figurative language far more frequently than prose does, and in a

way that is far more essential to its nature. Even recent research shows that, in general, poetry uses figurative language more frequently than prose does.[7] Yet this distinction runs into trouble immediately, since prose not only can, but in fact often does, use figurative language just as naturally or properly as poetry. For instance, figurative language is common in clichés, such as "it's raining cats and dogs," or "the pen is mightier than the sword." And philosophers have often used figurative language as well, from Descartes[8] to Marx.[9]

Yet even if we recognize the common use of figurative language in prose, we might hope that the structure of figurative language itself could provide a way of distinguishing its "appropriate" use in poetry from its "inappropriate" use in prose. If we could distinguish its "appropriate" use from its "inappropriate" use, then we might be able to understand the distinction between poetry and prose as one between a kind of language that correctly and even necessarily uses figure, as part of its essence, and a kind of language that only incorrectly or contingently uses figure, as decoration. This is in fact how Hegel will make the distinction. But as I will show, figurative language understood purely formally cannot account for the true difference between poetry and prose on its own; instead, the "appropriate" use of figure in poetry can only be distinguished from its "inappropriate" use in prose by appealing to the difference between poetic and prosaic content. That is, it is the (proper) content of poetry that demands the use of figure, while the (proper) content of prose does not. In order to indicate what Hegel is after here, I will examine two varieties of figure—symbol and metaphor—and explain Hegel's arguments for why they both fail, on their own, to provide an adequate way of distinguishing poetry from prose.

1.1.1.1   The Symbol: Representing the Divine

Hegel's most extensive treatment of figurative language comes in his discussion of "symbolic art." For Hegel, metaphors, similes, allegories, and so on all attempt to convey the meaning of an object by relating it to another object conceptually, and they are used simply because the nature of one object is supposed to somehow be illuminated or explained through its comparison with another object.[10] For example, Homer's elegiac metaphor, "the generation of men is like that of leaves," attempts to illuminate

the generational quality of humans by relating it to the concept of a leaf and its seasonal development and demise: "one generation grows on, and another is passing away."[11] For Hegel, figure can be used either as a mere shortcut (or decoration) for the author, or as necessary to explain the nature of an object by comparison to another object.[12] If necessary, the use of figure presupposes that its object cannot adequately be described directly, in reference to its own features, and so must be described indirectly, by being compared with another object, which illuminates the nature of both objects. But while such a figurative representational strategy may seem promising, with respect to symbolism in particular, Hegel claims it is doomed to fail at conveying the very content it attempts to convey. Symbolic art, on his view, is art marked by the inability of its form to convey its content adequately, and symbolic poetry is poetry whose linguistic form cannot adequately convey its intended content or meaning.

Hegel takes Indian poetry as his main historical example of symbolic linguistic art, and claims that it exemplifies the conceptual structure of symbolism in general.[13] On his view, Indian poetry has as its content the depiction of a divinity. Moreover, the symbolic nature of Indian poetry means that its use of figure is seen as necessary to represent the nature of the divine.[14] As symbolic, such poetry operates on the assumption that this divinity cannot be directly represented, but can only be represented by means of descriptions of other, usually natural, objects. Yet at the same time, according to Hegel, there can be no one object that most correctly symbolizes any divinity, or else the divinity would end up identified with that object, and lose its essentially non-representable nature. Thus while the symbolic poem is required to use the representation of a symbol to convey its (divine) content, it must also hold that the objects themselves that the poem linguistically represents cannot capture the true nature of the divine. So this symbolic poetry presents *mere* symbols of the divine and implicitly asserts that these symbols are inadequate to symbolize the divine. The fact that Indian poetry is *poetry* and not prose is not what makes its symbols inadequate to convey the content of the divine. Rather, symbols in general are assumed to be inadequate to reveal the nature of the divine.

This symbolic inadequacy in turn leads to a kind of pantheism, on Hegel's view: because the divine cannot be identified with any particular object, it must be conceived of as embodied in all things,

humans and natural objects, often as the "most excellent" parts of humanity and nature.[15] The result of this pantheism is that the divine, which in one sense cannot be symbolized by any object, in another sense can be symbolized by any object whatsoever; thus every object, whether a natural one or even a psychological "object" such as an emotion or thought, can be used as a symbol of the divine. Yet this very pantheism, again, means that the divine could just as well be symbolized and expressed by an object different than the one actually used to symbolize it; hence no single object can ever completely express the content of the divine. Expressed modally, there can be only a contingent relationship between the divine and any object used to symbolize it in a poem, so we can never fully understand the divine by symbolizing it with any single object, or any series of objects. In effect, no symbolic poem, and in fact no work of art whatsoever, could ever convey or capture the content of the divine using such a symbolic strategy.

The important aspect of this argument for our concern in this paper is what this pantheism of Indian poetry reveals about the nature of symbolism in general. A symbol always maintains a distinction between the symbol and the object that is symbolized; a symbol and the symbolized object or idea cannot be the same, or there would no longer exist any structure of symbolism between the two. So a symbol, by definition, can never completely convey the true nature of the object it symbolizes. In Indian poetry, we get only the most extreme version of this idea, insofar as the symbolized idea is a divinity recognized as being ultimately wholly incomprehensible, and hence as being something no symbol or set of symbols can adequately capture.

At this point, we can return to Hegel's original question concerning figurative language: can we distinguish poetry from prose by understanding the former as involving an appropriate use of figure as opposed to the latter's inappropriate use? In terms of symbolism, it seems such a distinction is impossible to make, given that a symbol is always inadequate as a means for expressing the nature of what it symbolizes. In other words, assuming that appropriate uses of symbols are successful, we can never distinguish an appropriate use of symbol from an inappropriate use, because symbolism is always inherently unsuccessful—the connection between symbol and symbolized can never be a necessary connection. Hence we

have no criterion for judging the correctness of any use of symbol whatsoever, and so we cannot distinguish poetry from prose by the former's correct use of symbol.

1.1.1.2   Metaphor: A Necessary Comparison

For Hegel, other varieties of figurative language appear to share relevant similar conceptual features with symbolism. Metaphor also relies on comparing two different objects while maintaining that the objects being compared are in fact distinct. Moreover, the idea behind metaphor seems to be that we can understand one object better by comparing it with another object. The problem for metaphor seems to be a similar problem to that of symbol—namely, the contingent relation between the two objects being compared. In Indian poetry, the symbol for the divine could always be replaced by another symbol because no symbol could ever capture the true nature of the divine. In metaphor, if the relation between the two objects of comparison is not a necessary relation, then one of the objects could be replaced by another (just as in symbolism, another symbol could refer to the same object) without losing any of the meaning of the original metaphor. As Hegel points out, the problem for metaphor then, in a way similar to symbol, is in drawing merely a contingent relation between two objects, such that it would not be necessary for one particular object to be compared to another particular object within the metaphor. A symbol, by its very nature, always has a contingent relation to the symbolized; the relevant issue for metaphor is if the relation between the objects it relates must always likewise be contingent.

Yet because the objects in a metaphor relate to each other not as one symbolizing or representing the other but as one being compared to another in order to illuminate the nature of both, metaphor is interestingly different from symbolism. A symbol is used when only the nature of the symbolized needs clarification or in cases of convenience where it is easier to symbolize an object or idea that possesses it. For example, Hegel claims, "the lion [...] is taken as a symbol of magnanimity, the fox of cunning, the circle of eternity, the triangle of the Trinity."[16] The symbol of a lion symbolizes magnanimity because lions share a conceptual relation with the idea of magnanimity—lions are conceived of as being magnanimous and courageous because we observe them acting in that way. Hence, the symbol of the lion ties the idea

or characteristic of magnanimity to a known physical object and clarifies that abstract idea by representing it by a symbol which is understood. In the case of convenience, symbols like road signs with images of animals on them indicate the possibility that a driver may come across such an animal on the road. The symbol on the road sign displays the shape of the animal and clearly symbolizes that animal, not, as with some symbols, to clarify the idea of an animal crossing but as a convenient and practical warning to be careful on the road.

On the other hand, a metaphor relates two objects that are both (yet perhaps not equally) in need of clarification, so certain characteristics of both objects, through their relation, become clearer. A metaphor takes two objects that are often known to have certain characteristics and relates them in such a way as to illuminate certain features of both that were previously overlooked or unrecognized. Take, for example, the metaphorical phrase from Homer's *Iliad* that I discussed previously—"the generation of men is like that of leaves." In this simile (for Hegel, a form of metaphor), the generational quality of both leaves (or trees) and humans is highlighted in order to illuminate certain characteristics of both. We know certain features of both leaves and humans, but by conceptually relating them, other characteristics of both objects (or set of objects) are clarified by exploiting their common natural characteristics. In essence, the metaphor illuminates our conception of both leaves (or trees) and humans and highlights characteristics about both objects that we may have previously overlooked.

Importantly, Hegel claims poetry that employs metaphorical language can only avoid a failure similar to that of symbolic poetry if the comparisons it draws between two objects are necessary relations such that neither of the objects can be replaced by a different object without the metaphor losing its significant role in illuminating the nature of both objects. For Hegel, if the two objects compared in a metaphor are not related to each other such that their connection is an objective truth about both objects, then the metaphor relies on a connection made by the author or poet that is not wholly dependent upon the meaning of the words themselves.[17] Instead, the "subjective" whim of the poet becomes at least one reason that accounts for why the objects are tied together in the language of the poem, and hence the connection between the objects remains contingent upon the subjective associations of the poet. Hegel's point

here is that for a metaphor to exist as something more than mere "decoration and adornment" in poetry, the structure of a metaphor must be such that the objects being compared share a necessary relationship with one another, where both objects are objectively required to explain or illuminate the nature of each other.[18] But it is precisely this that cannot happen, given that the structure of metaphor alone is insufficient to determine whether the objects related have a necessary connection to each other.

We can again return to Hegel's primary question concerning whether we can distinguish poetry from prose by understanding the former's appropriate use of metaphor as opposed to the latter's inappropriate use of it. Hegel's criterion for distinguishing a metaphor's appropriate use from inappropriate use seems to be that it is appropriate to use metaphor only when the connection between the objects it compares is a necessary connection. An inappropriate use of metaphor is one in which the objects compared in the metaphor have merely a contingent relationship to one another—i.e. one of the objects could be replaced by a different object and the metaphor would lose little or none of its original meaning. For Hegel, metaphors that draw contingent connections are mere linguistic decoration.

So if poetry uses metaphor appropriately and prose uses it inappropriately, poetry must draw necessary connections between the objects in metaphors, and prose must somehow lack the ability to draw such necessary connections. Yet necessary relationships between objects in general, where one is necessary to illuminate the nature of another, are predicated on the nature of the objects themselves, and not merely on the fact that they are related to one another. The nature of an object itself must be understood to even comprehend how it could stand in a necessary relation with another object. In other words, a necessary connection between objects cannot be understood purely from the *formal* linguistic structure of metaphor in which they are linked. Instead, to know whether the connection between objects in a metaphor actually is a necessary connection, we need to know the nature of the actual objects; or, as this pertains to poetry, we need to know the meaning of the words or linguistic structures that represent both objects being compared. The formal structure of metaphor cannot show whether two objects have a necessary relationship with one another. Rather, poetry must also provide a particular content which on its own

provides the basis on which the multiple objects linguistically represented stand in necessary relations with each other, and this content must not be available to prose in order to distinguish poetry from prose.

So the appropriate use of metaphor is dependent upon the content of the linguistic work in which it appears, and this means that metaphor alone, as a kind of form, cannot distinguish poetry from prose. For if poetry and prose actually have the same content and attempt to convey the same meaning, then metaphor can be used appropriately in prose just as well as it can be in poetry. The content of a poetic or prosaic work is what determines whether a metaphor draws a necessary connection between objects, and so we can only account for poetry's appropriate use of metaphor as opposed to prose's inappropriate use if there is a fundamental difference in the content of poetry and prose, such that the content of poetry is essentially more suited to drawing necessary connections between objects, or certain aspects of objects, than prose. And in fact, Hegel does want to maintain that metaphor (and figurative language in general) has its appropriate place in poetry and not in prose: "The poetic way of putting things stands in contrast to the prosaic one. In the latter there is no question of anything figurative but only of the meaning as such."[19] He even goes so far as to posit "general rules for prose," those being "literal accuracy, unmistakable definiteness, and clear intelligibility," in contrast to metaphorical and figurative language which he claims is "always relatively unclear."[20] Hegel clearly regards the employment of metaphor to be not only unnecessary but even counterproductive for the proper task of prose. As we will see below, Hegel distinguishes between a few different types of prose, and he seems to have one particular type—what he will call the prose of the understanding—in mind here. The goal of that type of prose is clarity, and its use of language is a means to "some particular practical end."[21]

For Hegel, the "general rules" for poetry are different: "In poetry, on the other hand, the essential law is not merely accuracy and an immediate and adequate correspondence with the topic simply as it is."[22] Rather, poetry describes "the *appearance* of the subject-matter itself or [...] other analogous appearances."[23] The primary distinction that Hegel emphasizes here is poetry's interest in the nature of the *appearances* of objects and prose's interest in the *utility* of prose itself in bringing about some practical end. So for Hegel, the reason poetry uses metaphor appropriately is because the content of poetry is bet-

ter suited to the use of metaphor than prose. Thus the formal structure of metaphor alone cannot account for its appropriate or inappropriate use and hence cannot account for the difference between poetry and prose. Instead, it seems the content of poetry must be fundamentally different from the content of prose, such that we can both understand the true difference between poetry and prose as based on their respective contents and understand the appropriate use of metaphor by understanding how it gives form to the particular content of poetry.

As it turns out, Hegel holds that poetry's proper content is the representation of particular circumstances, actions, events, and feelings, while prose's proper content is either the bringing about of some practical end, the development of a scientific theory, or the examination of universal concepts that govern our communal norms. This content-based distinction will clarify why figurative language is uniquely suited to poetry and not to prose.

Yet before I examine the content-based difference between poetry and prose that Hegel provides, I will explain Hegel's argument for why another formal characteristic of poetry, musical language, can also not account for the difference between poetry and prose. As I mentioned previously, we are interested here in two conceptual levels of linguistic form: semantic form and material form. The proposal, then, is that the norms governing the materially formal relation of words and syllables could account for the difference between poetry and prose even if the norms governing the semantically formal relation of words cannot. Figurative language is semantically formal insofar as it shapes the content of literary texts by relating the *meaning* of different words and phrases. Musical language, on the other hand, is materially formal insofar as it relates the linguistic *material* of different words, syllables, and phrases. In other words, material linguistic form shapes the content of literary texts according to the sounds and appearances of words, syllables, and phrases, and its use is governed by norms of pronunciation and visual similarities and not norms of linguistic meaning. For instance, norms governing the rhyming of "bat" and "cat" have no connection to the meaning of those words—the two formal levels are governed by distinct normative schemes. Hence, examining Hegel's understanding of these two conceptual levels of linguistic form, including why they fail to distinguish poetry from prose, will give us a better understanding of He-

gel's general notion of linguistic form, so we can later see how he juxtaposes that notion with poetic and prosaic content.

In the *Aesthetics*, Hegel bluntly claims that "[v]ersified prose does not give us any poetry, but only verse."[24] Here Hegel suggests that we cannot use the "musicality" of poetry to distinguish it from prose, for roughly the same reason given for the failure of figurative language to make this distinction—namely, that no purely formal characteristic of poetry can serve to distinguish it from prose. Still, because so-called musical language does seem more commonly used in poetry than prose, Hegel takes steps to explain the mistaken notion that we can draw a materially formal distinction between poetry and prose based on musical language. Together with figurative language, both forms clarify Hegel's general notion of form and why form is never sufficient for distinguishing between poetry and prose.

Hegel's discussion of meter (the "natural length and shortness of syllables") and rhyme (the repetition of the "sound of the syllables") in poetic language is fairly extensive, despite his assertion that we cannot use the musicality of poetry to distinguish it from prose.[25] And while the formal characteristics of meter and rhyme are, as I mentioned, different than those of figure, both involve identity of some kind. Figure identifies some common aspects of two objects represented in language, while meter and rhyme depend on the identities of the material and pronunciation of words, syllables, and phrases themselves rather than on what those words, syllables, and phrases represent. Despite these differences, it appears that the obvious difficulty in using figurative language to distinguish poetry from prose is shared by musical language—namely, that prose can seemingly utilize a musicality in its language just as much as poetry.

The question for Hegel then becomes how we might understand poetry as using meter and rhyme appropriately or successfully, while prose does not. Indeed, poetry is not merely allowed to use meter and rhyme, but must; Hegel claims that "meter or rhyme is absolutely necessary for poetry, as its one and only sensuous fragrance, and indeed it is even more necessary than the rich imagery of a so-called 'beautiful'

diction."[26] To understand this claim, we must first understand the difference for Hegel between music properly so called and musical language. This difference highlights how language and music differ formally in their use of words and notes, respectively. Then we can understand how poetry necessarily uses meter and rhyme and how that accounts for their appropriate use in poetry and not in prose.

1.1.2.1   Music as Non-Signifying

In differentiating poetry from music in the *Aesthetics*, Hegel points out that "music does not make sound subservient to speech but takes sound independently as its medium, so that sound, just as sound, is treated as an end in itself."[27] According to Hegel, music is determined only by the range of possible sounds (and their harmonic combination) and is, therefore, a more "free" artistic form, whereas poetry is dependent upon what sounds natural language allows it to employ by convention. In other words, poetry cannot use just any sounds to express its content but is constrained by the sounds of (usually one) natural language. Music, however, is not constrained in its use of sound by any restrictions other than the ability of instruments to play the sounds and our ability to hear them.

Moreover, for Hegel, words are mere "signs," and this means that "the connection which meaning and its expression [i.e. the sound or image of a word] have with one another is only a purely arbitrary linkage."[28] We might express this in Saussure's terms, since he shares Hegel's concept of the sign as an arbitrary linkage. For Saussure, the sign is made up of two parts: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the "sound-image," and the signified is the "concept" the sound-image signifies.[29] In the case of a linguistic sign, the natural language sound or inscribed image of the word is the signifier, and it signifies some concept. The sign as a whole is arbitrary because there is no necessary connection between the image or sound of a word and the concept it signifies. For example, 'tree' as an image bears no necessary connection to the concept of a tree; rather, the connection is arbitrarily made by communal convention, which we can see in the fact that two people can pronounce the same word differently and mean the same thing. Thus whatever musical effects are produced in a poem are only arbitrarily connected to the linguistic meaning of words in the poem. Musical sounds, by contrast, are not signs, and thus in music proper

(i.e. non-lyrical or absolute music), the sounds themselves (and their relationship to each other) are what is of sole importance.

Since, for Hegel, music is not a sign, it does not signify anything outside of itself. Moreover, he distinguishes between how music expresses a meaning (or what it signifies) and the emotion it evokes in an audience. Since music is not a sign, it cannot necessarily determine the meaning it expresses. The content of music just is the sound of musical notes, and those notes do not signify. And because music cannot necessarily determine what meaning it expresses, it also cannot determine the emotion it evokes in an audience. Yet this way of distinguishing musical language from music proper leads to a strange reversal in the artistic constraints of the composer and poet. The content of music is formally bound by the (ultimately quantitative) harmony and consonance of sounds alone—"a fixed conformity to law on the part of the notes and their combination and succession." For Hegel, music is strictly determined formally by the "mathematical" combination of sounds.[30] Yet the combination and succession of sounds in music is also able to evoke many different feelings and thoughts for various listeners in a single composition.[31] For Hegel, the emotion music evokes is almost entirely subjectively determined by the listener. So because the content of music does not signify, the musical composer lacks the ability to determine adequately what meaning a musical piece expresses and the emotion it evokes in the audience. Different listeners can associate many different meanings with a given musical composition, and the musical composition itself cannot determine what any listener *should* be experiencing or feeling from the music. The listener need only be able to hear the sounds produced to understand the actual "content" of the music because there is no other content than the sounds themselves.

1.1.2.2   Music vs. Poetry: Determining Content

Hegel's main interest in the general discussion of music is to show why music, in being governed by strict "mathematical" laws that determine the combination and succession of musical notes, does not necessarily objectively determine the meaning it expresses. Since the relationships between the notes in any musical piece are purely abstract—governed by such laws—formal determination in music does not

bestow any meaning on music. In other words, no objective meaning can be attached to any given musical note or succession of notes. Even if we know that certain notes harmonize with certain other notes and that certain chords should follow certain other chords, there is no underlying meaning that governs their combination and succession—only quantitative mathematical relations. Since the combination and succession of notes cannot objectively determine the "meaning" of notes or successions of notes that share merely an abstract, mathematical relation with one another, the "meaning" of any piece of music is subjective for the listener. For Hegel, music can evoke any number of emotions in different people, and this variance may be due to a person's culture, disposition, beliefs, and so on. His main point is that music itself cannot determine which emotions are evoked, so the connection between the content of music qua notes and its meaning for the listener qua feelings evoked is always contingent on conditions outside of music.

Hegel claims that poetry is inherently different from music. Because the words themselves that poetry employs are linguistic signs, their combination does not express merely a subjective content, but instead poetry conveys "the inner objectivity of the views and ideas which poetic language sets before our apprehension."[32] Since the relations between linguistic signs are determined by language—not abstract like the relations between the notes of music—linguistic signs in combination determine the content of the poem, where the notes of the musical composition cannot. The sounds of words signify some concept, whereas the notes of music do not signify at all.

This difference between poetry and music allows us to return to the question of whether poetry uses musical language appropriately and prose does not, and, in turn, whether musical language allows us to distinguish poetry from prose. Meter and rhyme seem to be governed by rules similar to that of music—formal rules that govern the combination and succession of syllables and phrases instead of notes. For instance, a poet's use of an iambic trimeter rhyme scheme is governed by certain rules to which the poet must adhere in composing the poem—that each line must consist of three metrical feet and each foot must consist of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (e.g., "The robin is the one/That interrupts the morn[...]"[33]). These rules are formal insofar as they posit no requirements for what words

must show up on any given line, but only that each line be arranged such that it adheres with the rhyme scheme. A rule based on a rudimentary understanding of numbers governs how many metrical feet must go on each line, and an iambus can be understood analogously to the succession of an anti-accented note followed by an accented note in music. Yet neither the concept of trimeter nor the concept of iambus determines the meaning of each line of poetry or what the audience should understand when hearing each line. In a similar way to music's inability to determine the meaning of notes or the emotion it evokes in an audience, the rules of meter and rhyme only govern the abstract relations of sounds within literary works and hence provide no determinate criterion for distinguishing between poetry and prose. In other words, the rules for the appropriate use of musical language cannot determine the meaning a literary text conveys; hence they cannot determine whether poetry or prose is better suited to use musical language. Therefore, Hegel concludes that musical language is insufficient for distinguishing poetry from prose.

However, we are still confronted by Hegel's claim that it is "absolutely necessary" for poetry to employ meter and rhyme, even though such employment is not sufficient for musical language to distinguish poetry from prose (or from "mere verse").[34] Hegel argues that poetry, like music, serves to express particular feelings, thoughts, and motivations through rhythm and rhyme.[35] Yet poetry expresses feelings, thoughts, and motivations through the combination of words and not just through mere sounds, and so a poem, unlike a musical piece, can determine the content and meaning it conveys to an audience. Meter and rhyme allow poetry to combine subjective thoughts and feelings, evoked "musically," with the objective meaning, expressed conceptually in the meanings of the words. For Hegel, this objective meaning cannot be subordinate to the subjective, musical aspects of language, but in fact both must be combined within a poetic work to deliver the particular kind of meaning poetry is meant to convey—for "if the musical side of such an artistic composition remains its essential and prominent feature, then poetry, as poem, drama, etc., may not come forward with a claim to validity of its own."[36] In this case, poetry's use of language would be merely accidental, and it would be a melody, not a poem. Hence, Hegel claims that meter and rhyme are *necessary* but not *sufficient* for poetry: it requires these material linguistic structures and effects to express the type of content it is explicitly concerned with—namely, particular circumstanc-

es, actions, events, and feelings. For Hegel, the poet must balance the use of musical language to convey meaning in a very deliberate and careful way: "In general, within this link between music and poetry the preponderance of one art damages the other."[37] For Hegel, if music becomes the predominant feature of poetry, "the text in its poetic execution can only be more or less something superficial and can get no further than expressing general feelings and generally held ideas."[38] Poetry must use musical language to convey its intended meaning and not allow that meaning to be subordinated to the sounds and material relations of words.

Here, Hegel emphasizes that the content of prose is inherently different from poetry—insofar as prose concerns a practical end, developing a theory, or analyzing universal concepts—and so the use of meter and rhyme are not required for (and in some instances obfuscate) the expression of prosaic meaning. For Hegel, music is the way in which "all particular feelings spread out from one another for expression," and poetry galvanizes musical language to express feelings and their relations to "thoughts, events, and actions."[39] And even though Hegel's systematic positioning of music in his philosophy of art is not our precise concern here, this important feature of music illuminates Hegel's claim about the necessity of meter and rhyme in poetry.[40]

Up to this point, I have provided Hegel's arguments for why poetry cannot be distinguished from prose merely through its use of figurative and musical language, or, in other words, why poetry cannot be distinguished from prose on the basis of these formal differences, both semantic and material. I will now explain Hegel's position on the proper kinds of content of poetry and prose to see the basis for his claim that a distinction between poetic and prose content will provide both an adequate way of distinguishing the two, and an adequate way of understanding the appropriateness of figurative and musical language to poetry.

1.2   The Content of Poetry and Prose

So far I have been using "poetry" and "prose" to pick out distinct linguistic forms by which meaning or content is conveyed to us. But as I have shown, Hegel argues that these apparently formal

categories (poetry and prose) cannot in fact be maintained on a formal basis alone. Instead, he claims that poetry and prose can only be rigorously distinguished on the basis of how their specific forms convey their essentially distinct contents. Since the semantic and material formal differences I discussed previously proved insufficient for distinguishing between poetry and prose, I will next examine Hegel's arguments for why poetry and prose contain different kinds of content.

As I mentioned previously, Hegel makes further content-based distinctions within prose itself. He uses these distinctions in content to clarify the relations of prose content to prose form, and those relations serve to clarify the proper relation of poetic content to poetic form. In the *Aesthetics*, Hegel discusses two main types of prose and situates poetry with respect to each of them: prose of the "understanding," and conceptual or philosophical prose. He describes these types of prose as correlating to two types of thought—namely thought of the "understanding," and conceptual or speculative thought. We will look at each in turn to delineate each of their differences with respect to poetry and what Hegel calls the "poetical imagination."[41]

1.2.1   Poetry vs. Prose of the Understanding

The thought of the understanding (or the thought characteristic of the natural and physical sciences) is "restricted" in a certain sense by the categories of the understanding, "such as cause and effect, means and end, i.e., in general with relations in the field of externality and finitude."[42] This type of thought is characterized by how it draws certain kinds of connections between objects and propositions—connections governed by the categories of the understanding—and hence the prose of the understanding can convey linguistically only these particular kinds of categorical connections. For Hegel, the prose of the natural and physical sciences is structured in this way because the thoughts underlying these sciences are always directed towards satisfying one of two ends or goals: "either [the understanding] forthwith summarizes variety in a *theory* drawn from generalizations and so evaporates it into reflections and categories, or else it subordinates it to specific *practical* ends, so that the particular and individual are not given their full rights."[43] As this prose structures its propositions in order to convey the train of thought di-

rected towards meeting these two specific goals, the prose of the understanding is particularly suited to

convey the thought of the understanding. For instance, the following excerpt from a popular diet book is

indicative of the thought of the understanding:

> Just for fun, another reason to avoid the whities [i.e. white carbohydrates like bread, potatoes, and rice]: chlorine dioxide, one of the chemicals used to bleach flour (even if later made brown again, a common trick), combines with residual protein in most of these foods to form alloxan. Researchers use alloxan in lab rats to induce diabetes. That's right—it's used to *produce* diabetes. This is bad news if you eat anything white or "enriched."
> Don't eat white stuff unless you want to get fatter.[44]

This passage is indicative of the thought of the understanding because I have practical ends—preventing

diabetes and not "getting fatter"—that my thoughts and actions are directed towards accomplishing. The

passage conveys a particular train of thought which draws connections based on the categories of the un-

derstanding—in this case, cause and effect and means to an end.

For Hegel, the natural and physical sciences are representative of the thought of the understand-

ing and hence always either structure their prose so as to create general theories of nature (e.g., natural

laws) or so as to achieve some practical goal beyond the scope of the actual prose. In the case of the ex-

ample above, the goal of the text is to give reasons to avoid eating white carbohydrates in order to achieve

the practical goals of avoiding diabetes and not accumulating fat. While the passage does not explicitly

posit a general theory of health, the author directly appeals to a theory that supports the claim that white

carbohydrates form a chemical compound that leads to health problems. The author uses a scientific the-

ory, abstracted from empirical evidence, to support a general claim as to how to achieve particular ends.

Both goals of the thought of the understanding—developing a theory or achieving practical

ends—amount to the same thing fundamentally insofar as the ends of scientific prose lie outside any of its

specific parts. In other words, this scientific view of prose takes a literary text to be a means to an end

that is itself extra-linguistic, either in the form of a theory or in the form of some practical, non-linguistic

(or not-necessarily-linguistic) goal. The overarching goals of scientific thought (explicitized in the prose

of the understanding) always require an externally teleological structure wherein "the end is the inde-

pendently envisaged and willed universal which can bring into conformity with itself the particulars

through and in which it gains existence, but these particulars it uses merely as means."[45] Hence, as Hegel claims, the style of scientific prose is generally governed by rules of " literal accuracy, unmistakable definiteness, and clear intelligibility," where the linguistic nature of its prose is suited to clarifying the nature of a general theory or explaining how to achieve some practical end.[46]

Similarly, Hegel claims that "a work of art is undertaken in order to present one fundamental idea."[47] However, that fundamental idea is not a universal law or some externally teleological, practical end but a particular idea, "concrete in nature," that is not directed at achieving any goal outside of understanding the art object itself.[48] With respect to literary works, poetry takes the idea it conveys as its ultimate end and not, as in scientific prose, as a means to a different end. Poetry does not abstract from particular objects in order to posit universal laws that govern such objects, nor does poetry attempt to bring about some practical end such as teaching us how to lose fat or even how to act morally. Poetry takes as its content something particular and whole (e.g., an event, a clash of different actions, a feeling) and utilizes its particular parts in order to convey the meaning of that particular idea. Yet, "every part, every feature [of a poetic work] must be interesting and living on its own account […] in short, every particular existent is enclosed into a world of its own." Sophocles' *Antigone* conveys the ethical nature of a particular conflict between Antigone and Creon, with each character in the drama necessary to convey the full nature of this conflict. Homer's *Iliad* conveys the epic nature of events in the Trojan War, conflicts between Agamemnon, Achilles, and many others, and the results from antithetical actions that shape each character. T. S. Eliot's "Hysteria" conveys the addictive and dangerous nature of hysterical laughter, how it consumes us and isolates us from society. Each detailed description of the uncontrollable act serves to convey its powerful effect over us and our immanent proximity to madness.

At first there may appear to be a tension here between the claim that the poetic work as a whole must have a specific and self-enclosed content (i.e. the work is not aiming at something beyond the meaning of the poem itself) which everything in the poetic work contributes to conveying, and the claim that every part of the poetic work must also be somehow "distinct" from the connections that the poetic work uses to tie them together. Hegel describes this poetic structure as an "organic unity" (he uses the example

of the human body)—one in which all its parts have distinct meanings but together produce something greater than merely the sum of all the individual parts and apart from which no part makes sense on its own.[49] The parts of a poem, while remaining distinct from each other in a certain sense, must also be united and interdependent in such a way that they convey, as a whole, a particular content. As with the body, the organs are distinct from each other, but in an important sense, each organ alone ceases to have the meaning it has qua part of the body. In fact, outside of the body, each organ cannot function at all—it cannot be an organ. Every organ is important and meaningful to the operation of the body as a whole just insofar as they are all interconnected parts that get their significance from the other parts. On Hegel's view, a human body without a liver fails to be a complete body and perform the functions of a body, and a liver without a body fails to truly be a liver in the sense that it does not do what a liver does.

One example we could use to illuminate this organic structure of poetry is that of poetic drama.[50] In Sophocles' *Antigone*, for instance, we have multiple characters who are distinct from the other "parts" of the poem insofar as they are individual characters, just as the scenes of the play are distinct parts of the poem as a whole. Yet Antigone's purpose cannot be fully understood without the characters of Oedipus and Polynices being present, and hence she would be a vacuous and useless part of the poem without these other characters. Just as each scene and choral song is necessary to the unity of the poem and its overall meaning, the character of Antigone is necessary insofar as she acts and relates to other characters and their actions in order to convey the particular idea the poem has as its end. She is distinct from the other characters insofar as she is a single individual, acting upon certain motivations—she is not an abstraction of a person but a particular, concrete individual—yet she is also not independent from other characters because she does not, at first, understand her motivations and only comes to understand them after her actions conflict with the actions of other characters. The poetic descriptions of Antigone's actions and her responses to her actions only have meaning as descriptions in the overall context of the poem, with each poetic phrase relating to others and uniting in the poem as a whole. Just as each choral song cannot truly have meaning (in performing its poetic function) and be what it is outside the context of the other songs and dialogues in the poem, Antigone cannot be understood as who she is outside the context of the

other characters and actions of the poem. In other words, the overall goal of the play is not to express Antigone's fully fleshed-out character through beautiful descriptive language but to describe her motivations and actions with respect to Creon's and others' actions in the play. In fact, each character only is who they are through their actions in the play, and each choral song only is what it is in concert with the other choral songs and speeches of the characters. Antigone's character and the way in which Sophocles linguistically conveys the nature of her character is inextricably tied to the poem as a whole, and the true meaning and importance of how Sophocles describes her character through action and speech arises only through his descriptions of opposing actions by other characters in the poem.[51] For Hegel, if the descriptions of Antigone (or any other character) and her actions were not pivotal in contributing to the meaning of the dramatic poem (e.g., conveying the nature of a particular clash of motivations and actions), such descriptions would be superfluous to the drama as a whole and hence should be excluded from the play. On the other hand, each description, song, speech, and dialogue finds its true meaning and purpose only through its relation to other descriptions, songs, speeches, and dialogues, and the poem cannot occur and convey its intended meaning without all of these pivotal linguistic parts.

The "poetic imagination" must create distinct parts within a poetic work while only including those parts that contribute to the overall meaning of the work. The interplay of particular parts within the whole differs according to what kind of poetry the poetic work is (i.e. epic, lyric, dramatic), yet Hegel finds this feature to be imperative for distinguishing all poetry from forms of prose. In the case of a lyric poem like Eliot's "Hysteria," even though the goal is not to convey the nature of a clash of actions like it is in dramatic poetry, each description of the woman's hysteria interconnects with the others, creating a visceral picture of a momentary madness. Each description augments and deepens the meaning of the others, just as the waiter's frightened reaction and proprietary concerns give the previous descriptions meaning outside of a mere description of how the body looks when someone laughs. Each part interconnects with the others, such that the poem would lose some of its meaning if one were missing, and each part would lose its significant meaning without the other parts of the poem.

So the prose of the understanding is characterized by its parts being constituted merely as means to either practical or universal and abstract ends, whereas poetry constructs its particular parts both as distinct and as united in conveying a particular, concrete meaning. Poetry does not abstract from particular events, feelings, and thoughts because its goal is not to universalize its particular content into laws or general theories. For instance, *Antigone* does not tell us what all action is like nor what we should be doing or what motives we should be acting from. "Hysteria" does not tell us what all emotion is like nor what effects all bouts of laughter have on everyone. To universalize poetry—to have poetry abstract from particular circumstances (like our diet book example above)—would be to strip it of its particular content—e.g., descriptions of dramatic/comedic characters, specific emotions and motivations, series of actions that clash with one another—and hence to strip it of its poetic nature. Instead, poetry presents what Hegel calls the "idea—the absolute unity of the notion [or concept] and objectivity"—in a particular content.[52] In other words, poetry shows how universal notions—e.g., what it means to be an individual member of a certain kind of ethical community—are played out in particular circumstances, actions, events, and feelings. It thus gives meaning to those universals for the first time.

Here we can return to and more fully understand the importance of figurative language, meter, and rhyme for the kind of content specific to poetry. All three formally relate parts of the overall content within some literary work, whether by conceptual or semantic comparison, repetitive beat and meter, or repetitive sound. They all relate the parts of the entire poem to each other without making one part of the work more predominant than another, without implying a progression towards some external end (i.e. outside the poem itself). For instance, a metaphor equates some aspect of two things that illuminates the nature of both, just as a rhyme equates the pronunciation (or visual construction in the case of a sight rhyme) of one word with that of another to relate the words materially. Hence all three are valuable for poetry because the semantic and material relations they draw contribute to relating the distinct parts of a poetic work (whether they be characters, objects, feelings, etc.) to one another. On the other hand, scientific prose constructs relations between its parts (whether they be an assertion of an observation, a generalization, the positing of a law, etc.) that are dependent on a type of externally teleological progression

towards some end outside the unity of its parts. Hence figurative and musical relations are not suitable or necessary for the goals of scientific prose. Because the connection between the propositions in scientific prose is not one of *organic* unity, where each part is important because of its relation to all the other parts, figure, meter, and rhyme would merely be a superfluous addition to this kind of prose. The relations between the parts of scientific prose are conceptually linear, such that one or more propositions lead to others, the end result (e.g., losing fat) being more important than the literary means that explains how that end is achieved. In a sense, scientific prose is mechanized to the extent that it constructs its prose in a logical succession (governed by the categories of the understanding) in order to achieve its extra-linguistic ends. The relations between the parts of a poem are not conceptually linear in this fashion because the ultimate end of a poem just is the meaning conveyed by the unity of its parts.

1.2.2   Poetry vs. Conceptual Prose

The situation is not so clear with the relation of the other type of prosaic thought—conceptual/philosophical/speculative thought—to poetry. For conceptual thought is in many ways similar to what Hegel characterizes as the "poetic imagination." Paul de Man, whose objection to Hegel I will examine and argue against in the following chapter, focuses on this distinction and argues that conceptual thought and the poetic imagination cannot be distinguished within Hegel's systematic philosophy. Importantly, both arise in Hegel's system in the final section of his *Philosophy of Spirit*, "Absolute Spirit," and the three main headings in this section are art, religion, and philosophy. Each attempts to provide us with a way of understanding how we, qua individuals within a community, can understand our norms as both in force and justified, be they moral norms, political norms, or epistemic norms. In other words, Hegel is interested in determining what mode of self-conscious thought grounds the normative claims we make within our community. So we can see the three sections of Absolute Spirit as Hegel's attempt to examine progressively, from art to religion and finally to philosophy, our ways of understanding how we attempt to justify our normative claims and judgments to our fellow community members.

For Hegel, art and religion both fail to provide an adequate way of understanding and grounding our normative claims. Philosophy succeeds because the others are not truly "absolute," meaning that neither art nor religion can provide justification for its own norms. This aspect of art in particular can be seen by the fact that art cannot explicitly *speak conceptually* about itself. While we might admit that works of art often "comment" on the nature of art implicitly (e.g., post-modern art, conceptual art, abstract art, "ars poetica," etc.), art, and more specifically poetry, can only address the *particular* instances of how universal norms are embodied in certain actions, events, and feelings, so artworks cannot explicitly address the *universal* and *conceptual* norms of the community, be they artistic norms or any other.

For Hegel, poetry qua form of art must have a *particular* content insofar as it must describe particular instances of people acting according to certain norms and feeling particular ways due to certain circumstances. Moreover, Hegel emphasizes that to understand our communal norms, we must recognize the particular instances in which they are in force and acted upon. Yet the merely particular treatment of norms in poetry ignores their universal aspect—the fact that the norms should be understood by and be in force for all individuals in the community. For instance, *Antigone* describes the nature of a particular conflict of actions, performed by particular characters, who are governed by particular norms. Yet this poem cannot describe or explain the universal nature of action as such, nor can it describe or explain how anyone in the community should act in a situation similar to Antigone's. Each poetic choral song, speech, and dialogue concerns particular norms as in force for the characters in the play, and not which norms should be in force for everyone in the community and how we would recognize the correct norms as being in force. Hence, poetry only addresses universality implicitly insofar as universal norms are poetically represented in particular circumstances, actions, events, and feelings. For instance, art itself cannot conceptually justify any universal norm about the goodness of a work of art, but philosophy can (and should be able to). This aspect of universality is just what distinguishes philosophy from art and, moreover, the content of conceptual prose from poetic content.

For Hegel, conceptual thinking "results in thoughts alone; it evaporates the form of reality into the form of the pure Concept, and even if it grasps and apprehends real things in their particular character

and real existence, it nevertheless lifts even this particular sphere into the element of the universal and ideal."[53] As we saw previously, poetry is concerned with a *particular* content, such as the feeling conveyed in a lyrical poem, the clash of actions and characters portrayed in a dramatic play, or the nature of certain events in an epic poem. Philosophy is concerned with conceptual thought itself and understanding our communal use of concepts and how they reveal the nature of normative justification. So philosophy must abstract from particular situations like those poetry concerns itself with explicitly so as to examine the "truth of reality" instead of the "appearances" that poetry describes.[54] For Hegel, the *truth* of our norms can only be located within our own thought and the ways in which we act on—or, in Hegel's terms, actualize—our thoughts, where "thinking is only a reconciliation between reality and truth within thinking itself."[55] Hence for philosophy, poetry is epistemically deficient because it expresses the nature of normative justification only implicitly by describing particular embodiments of universal norms. And inferior to both poetry and philosophy (according to philosophy) is the thought of the understanding because it is constrained by the categories of the understanding; hence its thought is unconcerned with comprehending the nature of normative justification and merely assumes the truth of the conceptual categories in order to pursue general theories or practical ends.

For my purposes here, the important difference between conceptual thought and poetic imagination is that the former *explicitly* concerns itself with universal concepts (e.g. morality, art, religion, etc.) and only *implicitly* suggests how those concepts are particularized in certain real situations and instances. In other words, conceptual thought explicitly analyzes concepts which govern our communal norms, but it does not explicitly address how those concepts are actually embodied and played out in individuals and their actions within particular kinds of communities. Conceptual thought shows why certain communal norms fail to constitute proper justification for actions in a certain kind of community, but it does not address how it *appears* to particular members of a community when they act according to particular norms. Conceptual thought determines whether an individual acts according to universally justifiable norms and how we can recognize an individual acting according to such norms, but it does not concern itself with the details of how actions, circumstances, events, and feelings appear to us qua acting members of a commu-

nity. On the other hand, the poetic imagination *explicitly* concerns itself with connecting the details of particular circumstances, feelings, characters, events, etc. and only *implicitly* reveals the nature of the universal concepts under which particular characters take action and certain events take place. As Hegel concisely states, "The subject-matter of poetry is not the universal as it is abstracted in philosophy. What it has to represent is reason individualized."[56]

So poetry is particularly suited to address the specific character of certain situations, actions, events, and feelings, whereas conceptual prose is suited to examine the relationship between concepts employed and acted upon in the community. For Hegel, conceptual prose is not constrained by the thought and categories of the understanding like that of the prose of the natural and physical sciences; rather it investigates the nature of such conceptual categories themselves (ones like cause and effect, means and ends, etc.).[57] This aspect of conceptual prose is one of the reasons Hegel gives a "higher" place to philosophy in his system. Philosophy can explicitly examine the nature of art and poetry (as Hegel does in the *Aesthetics*), whereas art and poetry cannot engage philosophy in such an examination. If poetry were to universalize its particular content, even if it were dressed up in figurative and musical language, it would remain merely verse and not true poetry.

1.3   The Unity of Form and Content

Hegel's distinction between poetry and the two types of prose discussed is crucial for understanding the different roles each have for us within our community. If we merely relegate poetry to addressing the same content as one or another form of prose, and perhaps dressing it up in figurative and musical language, we misunderstand what Hegel emphasizes as the unity of poetic form and content. Poetic content concerns particular circumstances, characters, feelings, etc., and poetry necessarily conveys that particular meaning through the use of figurative and musical language. Poetry employs these formal characteristics because it is necessary for a poem qua work of art to avoid reducing the particular parts of its whole merely to a relation between means and ends, but it is equally important for a poem to remain concerned with particular circumstances and not universal concepts. The former would reduce poetry to

bringing about some practical end in the community, and the latter would distort poetry into an abstraction of a particular circumstance, preventing it from developing its parts into an "organic whole."

For instance, Wordsworth's poem, "I Wandered Lonely As A Cloud," describes a particular encounter with the natural world and its impact on the imagination of the author. The goal of the poem—the function of the poem which may or may not be identical to the author's *intended* goal—is to present this encounter as a singular experience of the author's, while also implying more general consequences about how we experience nature as observers and how our experience with beautiful natural environments shapes our imagination long after we leave those environments. The poem functions not to serve as some means to achieve some end other than the contemplation of the poem itself. Nor is its goal or function to conceptualize about our encounters with nature, the structure of our imagination, or the biological relationship between daffodils and proximate bodies of water. Rather, the poem focuses on a particular experience and draws connections with other similar human experiences, never abstracting away from the particular imaginative effect of a single stroll through a particular natural environment.

In general, figurative and musical language draw the connections between a poem's parts, yet allow those parts to remain separate and distinct in a way scientific and conceptual prose cannot allow due to their respective goals. In the specific case of Wordsworth's poem, it is littered with metaphors which serve to explicitly tie the author's human nature to nature itself, each metaphor comparing aspects of the author's unique human experience of the environment to the movements and appearances of natural objects (e.g., clouds, daffodils, stars, water). The poem anthropomorphizes natural objects in order to illuminate the shared characteristics between us and nature and how we project our own characteristics onto nature. Yet the poem illuminates all of these shared characteristics by describing a particular instance of its occurrence, so each metaphor relates two particular objects (or groups of objects) to each other conceptually in order to interconnect each part of the poem. The rhythm and rhyme scheme serve to tie the parts of the poem together materially, as the last syllable of each line rhymes with the last syllable in a different line and the iambic tetrameter rhythmic scheme relates each foot to the next (the iambic structure perhaps representing the movement of the author as "like a cloud"). These semantic and material connec-

tions in the poem serve to unite its distinct parts, such that each part gives meaningful support for understanding the other parts. On the other hand, for scientific and conceptual prose, their content is suited to a prosaic form where the connections between the parts are based on syllogisms or logical progressions; therefore, figurative and musical language exist as pure decoration for them. It is the logical progression of propositions itself that ties the parts of these kinds of prose together, such that figurative and musical relations between words and phrases would be superfluous in conveying the intended meaning of literary prose.

Hence for Hegel, poetry is distinct from prose, both in form and content, and conveys how certain universal concepts and communal norms are played out and tested in particular circumstances and phenomena. Poetry does not give us moral direction or guidance, nor does it explain how we can attain some practical goal, nor does it explain the true nature of reason we should employ within the community. Instead, poetry reveals the reasons, feelings, thoughts, and actions of particular individuals governed by certain communal norms, and hence it conveys the nature of concepts and norms particularized in certain conflicts, feelings, and events which arise from individuals and their interactions representative of our own communal life. Philosophy can then take poetry as indicative of certain normative meaning-generating commitments individuals have within a community. Moreover, philosophy can use poetry as an example by which to analyze the concepts and norms held by individuals to judge whether they are concepts and norms that we could justifiably adopt and act upon within our own community. In the case of *Antigone*, poetry can reveal conflicting norms for action and different ways those actions appear (to the characters or the chorus) within a particular kind of community, and philosophy can show why the conflict occurs by the nature of the norms in question and how such conflicts might be resolved.

Moreover, Hegel's understanding of poetic form and content allows us to make sense of his striking claim that poetry "runs through [all other art-forms] and develops itself independently in each of them."[58] Art reveals our concepts and communal norms particularized into certain materials, shapes, colors, emotions, and circumstances and hence remains distinct from the sciences of the understanding and philosophy. For Hegel, the "poetic imagination" is the kind of thought correlated with the creation of all

works of art; it draws connections between the particular parts of each "organic whole" qua singular work of art. The role of figurative and musical language in poetry allows us to understand the kinds of connections formed between the parts of a work of art. And the distinction between poetry's particular content and the practical or universal content of prosaic forms of thought allows us to understand the proper content of art in general—namely, the implicit investigation into what grounds our communal norms by looking at how those norms are embodied and played out in particular sensuous materials and poetic circumstances.

In the following chapter, I will discuss one objection to Hegel's distinction between poetry and prose proposed by Paul de Man. His objection targets a deficiency in Hegel's system as a whole, but it has direct, negative implications for Hegel's ability to draw an adequate distinction between poetry and prose. I will first explain what de Man will focus on with respect to Hegel and then explain Hegel's position on the matter of de Man's concern. Then, I will explain what de Man concludes from Hegel's position and why that conclusion collapses Hegel's distinction between poetry and prose. Finally, I will show how de Man fundamentally misunderstands Hegel's dialectic and hence fails to collapse the distinction. I will also show how de Man's critical approach to Hegel actually illuminates the distinction between poetry and prose and provides a way of understanding the difference in the context of Hegel's philosophy of language.

2   An Objection: Paul de Man on Hegel's Philosophy of Language

In *Aesthetic Ideology*, Paul de Man attempts to expose a rift between what he calls literary theory and "literary experience." Examining pivotal historical texts on aesthetics, he argues that certain systematizers of aesthetic theory, including Hegel, fail to understand the necessary inability of literary theory to capture the experience of engaging with literary texts. With specific regard to Hegel, de Man believes not only that Hegel's *Aesthetics* is outdated, having been surpassed by certain 20th century aestheticians,[59] but also, and perhaps more importantly, that Hegel's system reveals its own failure to unite literary theory and

experience—Hegel's aesthetic theory is incapable of showing us how to understand the "poetics of litera-

ture."[60] In essence, de Man argues that Hegel's system cannot unite philosophical thought or theory with

the linguistic nature of literature, such that the nature of literary language eludes Hegel's ability to under-

stand it within the confines of his philosophical system.

My interest in de Man's critical engagement with the *Aesthetics* stems from its relation to the dis-

tinction proposed previously between poetry and prose. De Man's arguments against Hegel's system bear

directly on Hegel's attempt to distinguish poetry from prose, particularly philosophical prose, adequately.

For if Hegel's system, including his aesthetic theory, is incapable of explaining the "poetics" of literary

texts in general—the relation between a text's meaning or content and how that meaning is conveyed by

its formal linguistic structure—the distinction between poetry and philosophical prose disappears or at

least cannot be accounted for by Hegel's system.

Specifically, I will address de Man's main argument in "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics."

His argument hinges on an interpretation of Hegel's concept of memory and attempts to show how think-

ing, the concept that develops from representation in the *Philosophy of Mind* and later develops into

properly philosophical thought, is reducible to memorization. De Man believes this reducibility shows

the limits of Hegel's system as a whole, and for our purposes, his conclusion eliminates Hegel's distinc-

tion between poetry and prose. Therefore, I will proceed first by briefly summarizing Hegel's concept of

memory from the *Philosophy of Mind*. Then, I will explain what de Man concludes from this concept of

memory—namely, that thinking is reducible to rote memorization—and how that conclusion eliminates

the distinction between poetry and prose. I will then argue that de Man misunderstands the dialectical

progression in Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind* and hence lacks support for his conclusion that Hegel is una-

ble to account for the distinction between poetry and prose.

2.1   Hegel on Memory

Hegel's discussion of memory comes at the end of a section on representation and immediately

before a section on thinking. The representation section contains some pivotal sections on language as a

system of linguistic signs, and hence in Hegel's discussion of memory, he is primarily concerned with how a subject memorizes linguistic signs. Therefore, I will explain Hegel's concept of memory with respect to how he thinks we memorize linguistic signs, for de Man also targets this relationship between memory and linguistic signs in drawing his own conclusions from Hegel's system.

As I discussed in the previous section on musical language, Hegel holds that natural language is a system of signs, such that words qua signs form arbitrary connections between the signifier (i.e. the image or sound of a word) and the concepts they signify. In his discussion of memory, Hegel identifies three different forms it takes: name-retaining memory, reproductive memory, and mechanical memory.[61] Name-retaining memory is the form memory takes when a subject memorizes signs as connections between a signifier and signified. This form is perhaps what is typically thought of as the way we memorize words. I memorize the image or sound of a word and represent it in my mind as signifying a particular concept. The name I memorize is a signifier of a signified. For instance, I memorize the word "tree" when I form a representation of "t-r-e-e" and assign it a permanent signified concept for me. I initially see or hear a word and then I represent the image or sound of that word to myself as a signifier of a signified concept. Yet just as the general relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary, the specific relationship between the image or sound of a word qua signifier and the concept it signifies is equally arbitrary. In other words, there is nothing about the image or sound of the word "tree" that necessarily makes it signify the concept of a tree.

Reproductive memory is the form memory takes when a subject reproduces the meaning or concept of a signifier when it sees or hears the signifier. Hence in reproductive memory, the subject is able to reproduce the concept of a word—the signified—when it sees or hears the word qua signifier without the need to see the object the concept refers to (e.g., without having to see a tree to associate the signifier "tree" and its signified concept) and without the need to associate an image of the object with the signifier (e.g., without having to see an image of a tree or mentally picture a tree to associate the signifier "tree" and its signified concept). Given the signifier—the image or sound of a word—the reproductive memory can provide the signified without associating it with an actual physical example of the signified concept or

an image of that concept. For example, given the word "tree," I can identify it with my concept of a tree without needing to see a tree or imagine what a tree looks like. For reproductive memory, the name as signifier is what is important for the subject in being able to recall the meaning of the name.

Mechanical memory is the form memory takes when a subject conceives of itself as that which represents names in its mind but not as signifiers. In other words, the subject who mechanically memorizes conceives of itself as "a mindless container of words," and it understands itself, in being such a container, as separate from what those words signify.[62] In the form of reproductive memory, the subject still connects the name as signifier to a signified, and the meaning a name has for the subject is the signified concept. So when the memorizing subject sees a name, it recalls the concept that the name signifies. But in mechanical memory, the subject understands that it is the object that is reproducing names and associating them with signified concepts. In other words, the subject understands that it is completely up to its own discretion whether it associates the names it has memorized to signified concepts or not. For the subject, there is nothing about the names themselves that determine what concept they signify; it is the subject who draws a semiotic connection when it memorizes and reproduces a signifier and signified. In other words, the mechanical memorizing subject understands that in reproductive memory, it was the object which was connecting signified and signifier and not anything outside of the subject itself.

Hence the subject now conceives of the name itself as what is of sole importance, not any concept the name signifies. The subject fills itself with names that signify arbitrarily, for the only meaning the names now have for the subject is that they are the content of the subject's mind. Whereas name-retaining and reproductive memory represent names as signifiers of a signified, the mechanical memory represents itself as a mere container for names that signify only arbitrarily. Hence the mechanical memorizing subject memorizes mere names and orders and relates the names in its mind in any way it chooses. For Hegel, the subject understands its "power over the various names" just by being able to order and rearrange the names it has memorized according to its own subjective whim.

These three forms of memory conclude Hegel's section on representation and transition immediately into his concept of thinking. In the next section, I will explain what de Man concludes from Hegel's

concept of memory and how his conclusion prevents Hegel from distinguishing between poetry and prose.

2.2   De Man's Objection: Mechanical Memory and Thought

De Man's main interest in this part of Hegel's system is the section on mechanical memory and its relationship to Hegel's concept of the sign. De Man claims that for Hegel mechanical memory is important because it shows how the subject displays its independence from signs. The imaginative subject, which appears immediately prior to the memorizing subject conceptually, understands a sign as determined by the connection between signifier and signified that is "of course initially something received, something immediate or given."[63] For instance, the connection between the signifier "tree" and the signified concept of a tree was *given* to me by my experiences in the world (seeing trees), so when I qua imaginative subject see the word "tree," I form a mental image of a certain kind of plant. When the reproductive memorizing subject sees a word, it recalls the concept that the word signifies. The mechanical memorizing subject, on the other hand, separates the signifier from the signified such that the subject memorizes only a mere name that arbitrarily signifies whatever concept the subject chooses. Because the subject recognizes that it is what is reproducing the signified concept when it sees a word and hence is not tied to any particular association between a signifier and signified, the subject sees itself as a mere container of names that it has complete subjective control over. This idea of mechanically memorizing names leads directly to Hegel's conception of thinking—for "it is in names that we *think*."[64]

The conceptual problem with this memorizing subject is that it cannot understand why it assigns any meaning at all to the names it contains. In a sense, the mechanically memorizing subject recognizes something the imaginative subject does not—namely, that the association of the image or sound of a word to a concept is completely subjective. The imaginative subject takes it as given that a particular linguistic sign signifies a particular concept (mentally pictured as an image), but the mechanically memorizing subject recognizes that the association between the image or sound of a word and a signified concept is determined by the subject and not by the word or concept.

De Man claims the deficiency of the imaginative subject in still conceiving of the connection between linguistic sign and concept (qua mental image of the concept) as given is critically important for seeing the conceptual limitations of the poetic imagination. For de Man, the poetic imagination assumes a given connection between linguistic signs and signified concepts and employs those signs in order to convey a particular content. Yet the wit and cleverness of the poet in recalling figures in order to compose poetry is merely a process in which the poet employs words and figures learned purely mechanically that have no objective connection to the concepts they signify. In other words, the poet does not recognize that the connection between the linguistic sign and concept is one the poet subjectively creates, for only the mechanically memorizing subject sees that the subject is what connects signifier and signified, not any objective semiotic relationship between the two. Here, the problem for poetry is that the linguistic form of poetry is not necessarily connected with its content, the content of the idea. The poet assumes a given connection between the linguistic sign and the content or concept it signifies, but the memorizing subject recognizes that the poet is mistaken. The poet believes there is an objective connection between the linguistic sign and the concept—for the imagination, a particular mental image of the concept—but the connection is merely a subjective choice made by the poet. Hence the relationship between poetic form and content seems merely contingent upon the poet's subjective connection between words and concepts, since each word qua signifier signifies a particular content or concept only according to the subject's choice.

Moreover, de Man claims the activity of the mechanically memorizing subject—separating signifier from signified and memorizing mere names—prevents the subject itself from ever developing beyond the concept of a memorizing subject, and so he claims Hegel's dialectic can never progress beyond the section on memory to "thinking." For de Man, "thought [in general] is entirely dependent on a mental faculty that is mechanical through and through, as remote as can be from the sounds and the images of the imagination or from the dark mine of recollection, which lies beyond the reach of words and thought."[65] This claim about the dependency of thought in general on mechanical memorization is similar to his claim about the poetic imagination's deficiency. As I mentioned previously, mechanical memory conceives of

itself as a mere "container" of names that signify only arbitrarily. The subject's mind "contains" names that do not have any meaning apart from their representation by the subject. In other words, the names the subject has memorized only have meaning for the subject in their arbitrary relation to the other names it has memorized. Yet because the names have no meaning other than the meaning arbitrarily assigned to them by the subject, the problem for the subject is that it cannot understand what it is qua memorizing subject on the basis of the names it contains. Since the names have no objective meaning for the subject, it cannot understand what it means to be a container for these names. The arbitrarily-signifying names themselves can provide no understanding of what the subject is as a container of names. The memorizing subject cannot understand what it is as a subject; hence de Man concludes that the subject can never conceptually progress beyond mechanical memory. Once a subject recognizes its inability to understand what it is based on its internal content (i.e. names) and how it gives meaning to names that signify only arbitrarily, it concedes that all it can do is subjectively and arbitrarily assign a signified to the names it contains and nothing more.

Therefore, on de Man's reading, both thought and art, philosophy and poetry, are dependent on a mechanical process of memorization that understands the relationship between the two parts of the linguistic sign (i.e. signifier and signified) as completely subjective. On this view, a poem's representation of the idea and a philosophical text's conceptual analysis are both grounded upon the author's mechanical memorization of names, whereby the names only signify concepts (and images of those concepts) in a literary text according to the whim of the poet or philosopher.

So for de Man, the kinds of content conveyed by both the poetic imagination and philosophical thought through literature are grounded in the memorization of names that do not objectively signify any concept. This shared ground of poetic and prose content on memory poses serious problems for Hegel's ability to draw an adequate distinction between poetry and philosophical prose, for not only is the ground of the conveyance of each kind of content the same, but the mechanism of memory that both are based on does not allow us to distinguish between the kinds of content conveyed by the memorizing subject. Both kinds of content are conveyed in the same arbitrary way—according to the subjective whim of the poet or

philosopher in drawing arbitrary semiotic connections between names and concepts. In the previous chapter, I explained Hegel's argument for the distinction between poetic content and philosophical prose content, where the former reveals the reasons, thoughts, and actions of particular individuals governed by certain communal norms, and the latter explicitly examines norms and concepts themselves to judge whether they are universally justifiable within the community and to understand how we could recognize those norms as being in force for members of the community. Yet the memorizing subject, in composing both poetry and philosophical prose, merely connects names and concepts arbitrarily or according to its own subjective method of ordering the names. In essence, the memorizing subject creates signs anew from its memory by designating its memorized names to be signifiers of whatever concept it chooses.

Since the linguistic signs the memorizing subject employs in literature are all of its own creation and, therefore, completely subjective, the distinction between particular content and universal content disappears. In other words, the particular content of poetry and the universal content of philosophical literature are the same kind of content—namely, whatever content the memorizing subject wishes to convey when making its memorized names into signs. For the memorizing subject, all content conveyed in literature is arbitrarily determined by the activity of the subject in creating signs for itself from the names it previously memorized. So the distinction between particular content and universal content is itself arbitrary, since the subject determines the meaning or signified concepts of the linguistic signs it employs. The inability to necessarily differentiate between particular and universal content makes the distinction between poetry and philosophical prose, itself based on such a difference of content, merely contingent on the will or practices of the individual subject. Therefore, de Man's argument seems to prevent Hegel from drawing a necessary distinction between poetry and philosophical prose. For de Man, "the relentless drive of the dialectic, in the *Aesthetics*, reveals the essentially prosaic nature of art."[66] Both poetry and philosophy, then, seem to be fundamentally prosaic in nature due to their common subjective and mechanized source. In the next section, I will respond to de Man's conclusion that he draws from Hegel's concept of memory and argue that he fundamentally misunderstands the conceptual development from

memory to thinking. In so doing, I will show how Hegel can move beyond the concept of memory in his system and how de Man's criticism actually illuminates Hegel's distinction between poetry and prose.

2.3   Responding to de Man: A Misunderstanding of "Thinking"

For de Man, Hegel's dialectic cannot progress conceptually beyond mechanical memory, and the nature of mechanical memory shows why poetry and prose cannot be distinguished on the basis of their different kinds of content. Yet de Man's argument suffers from a mistaken interpretation of the conceptual development from memory to thinking, and so he wrongly concludes that Hegel's dialectic stalls in the concept of memory. In understanding this conceptual development, we can see why the concept of thinking must follow the concept of mechanical memory and how this progression helps to clarify the distinction between poetry and philosophical prose.

For Hegel, the mechanically memorizing subject needs to designate some meaning for its determinate internal content (i.e. its list of particular names), even though the names it contains only signify arbitrarily. It does this by positing a singular "I" which gives the names their meaning; they are the determinate internal content of the subject. For Hegel, "the being as *name* needs something *else*, the *meaning* of the representing intelligence, in order to be the thing, the true objectivity."[67] In other words, for the names to have any objective meaning at all for the subject, they must implicitly refer to a singular "representing intelligence." They cannot get their meaning from anything other than the subject in which they are represented as names.

At this point in Hegel's dialectic, the subject becomes aware of itself as an "I", and this forms the transition from memory to thinking. Thinking is the activity of the subject becoming conscious of itself as a thinking subject, as the subject that recollects, imagines, memorizes, and thinks. The thinking subject takes itself as its object and therefore posits itself as an objective subject. The memorizing subject fails to recognize itself as a proper subject: "memory as such is itself the merely external mode, the one-sided moment of thinking's *existence*."[68] The activity of thinking unites the subjective and objective (preparing

a move into the section on "Objective Mind") insofar as it takes itself as its object, as that which makes memory, imagination, and representation in general possible.

Moreover, it is important that Hegel titles this section "Thinking" and not "Thought."[69] Unlike the previous section entitled "Representation," including the subsections "Recollection," "Imagination," and "Memory," the concept of thinking entails that the subject is actively engaged with its own thought and implicitly always has been when it recollects, imagines, and memorizes. In other words, the subject comes to recognize that *it* was the object actively recollecting, imagining, and memorizing even though it did not realize this fact before recognizing itself as a thinking subject. For Hegel, the subject cannot understand the acts of recollecting, imagining, and memorizing without it taking itself as its object qua thinking subject. In comprehending the concept of thinking, the subject recognizes what it is really doing when it memorizes names mechanically. Moreover, the subject could not even understand itself as memorizing or as a container for names—as arbitrarily connecting signifier and signified—without taking itself to be a thinking thing.

Importantly, "intelligence is *recognitive*;—it *cognizes* an intuition, in so far as the intuition is already its own."[70] The intelligence—at this point, the thinking subject—recognizes itself as the thinking thing, the thing that represents objects by recollecting, imagining, and memorizing. Moreover, the subject re-cognizes its thoughts in such a way that the subject's own thinking becomes its object: "the *thinking* of intelligence is *having thoughts*; they serve as the content and object of intelligence."[71] The thinking subject recognizes what it was doing all along in representation and takes that activity as its object: thinking.

This concept of thinking reveals the fundamental mistake of de Man's criticism of Hegel's dialectic at this point. It is not the case, as de Man claims, that thought is grounded upon mechanical memorization. Instead, the activity of memorization cannot be fully comprehended without appealing to the activity of thinking. The subject cannot comprehend the meaning of the names it memorizes or even the thing which is doing the memorizing without comprehending the subject as a thinking subject. In a sense, it is memory that is grounded upon thinking and made intelligible to the subject, not the other way around. Without the activity of thinking, the subject cannot even comprehend the meaning of the names

it memorizes and the ways in which it organizes them linguistically and recalls them from its memory. Importantly, the subject could not even understand itself as a mere container of words or its activity of arbitrarily connecting signifier and signified without understanding itself as a thinking subject which makes memorization possible. The subject must conceive of its own subjectivity as grounded in its activity of thought for memory and its nominal objects to have any meaning at all.

De Man's mistake is that he conceives of the conceptual development from memory to thinking as one where the latter is grounded upon the former. Yet in truth, this dialectical development is such that thinking is what makes memory comprehensible insofar as the memorizing subject cannot say what it is doing or even what it is. The memorizing subject takes its activity of thinking for granted in memorizing, and hence only the thinking subject, in taking itself as its direct object, can understand what it is such that it is even able to memorize at all. This problem with the memorizing subject explains de Man's interpretation of the Hegelian subject at this point where "I cannot say I" because "I cannot say what I think."[72] This claim is certainly true of the "subject" who merely memorizes, but not that of the thinking subject. The latter comprehends itself as its object and understands what it is and what it thinks insofar as the subject knows it has been thinking the entire time. The thinking subject comprehends what representation is, including recollection, imagination, and memory, whereas the subject who merely represents its objects and does not take itself qua thinking subject as its object cannot understand itself as that which is actively representing objects.

Hence, de Man's criticism fails to show how thought reduces to mechanical memorization; therefore, it fails to show how the subject cannot comprehend what it thinks or how it creates and manipulates linguistic signs in literature. Yet this criticism does provide insight into the content-based distinction between poetry and philosophical prose.

In general, a mistake some philosophers make in understanding Hegel's system is to map one section or dialectical transition onto another somewhere else in the system. In other words, certain readers interpret one dialectical move as the same as another in a different part of Hegel's system.[73] This technique often leads to a misunderstanding of different dialectical moves made at different points in Hegel's

system. De Man comes dangerously close to committing such a mistake by nearly conflating the transition from representation to thinking in "Subjective Mind," to the transitions between art, religion, and philosophy in "Absolute Mind." Nevertheless, these sections do bear strikingly resemblances to each other, such that art and religion are representational in nature and philosophy takes itself as its object in conceptual thought.

As I showed earlier, the representing subject in "Subjective Mind" does not take itself as its object, and so it cannot comprehend what it is or what it is doing. The thinking subject overcomes this failure by taking itself and its own thoughts as its objects. For Hegel, this unites the subject and object into an identity; in his terms, the subject becomes universal.

Art suffers from a similar problem as that of the representing subject because it seeks to embody the idea—i.e. the unity of concept and its actualization, together the ground of our norms—in singular, sensuous objects. The poetic imagination conveys the content of the idea in singular, literary works. The poet thinks of the idea in terms of an image and not as a concept universally actualized in the community, and hence the poet's creation never fully captures the nature of the idea. Because poetry's representational structure, and more specifically its imaginative structure, always implies a distinction between the subject, in this case the poet, and its object, the idea, a poem can only embody a singular instance of the idea in literary form. The structure of representation in general always separates and distinguishes subject and object, as symbol and symbolized, image and represented object. This structure accounts for Hegel's initial description of art in the *Philosophy of Mind*: "in this ideal—the concrete shape born of subjective mind—natural immediacy is only a *sign* of the Idea, it is so transfigured by the informing mind for the expression of the Idea, that nothing else is shown in the shape;—the shape of *beauty*."[74] In manipulating natural objects (e.g., stones, paint, sounds) to represent the idea, art makes the sign, in which nature signifies the idea, into a symbol, in which an artwork symbolizes the idea. Yet art still maintains a distinction between the idea and its sensuous embodiment in an artwork. A poem symbolizes the idea in linguistic form but cannot capture the true nature of the absolute idea—i.e. conceptual thought taking itself as its object.

In philosophy, this inherent defect of art is overcome by conceptual thought thinking about itself: "this cognition is thus the *recognition* of this content and its form, and *liberation* from the one-sidedness of the forms and the elevation of them into the absolute form."[75] Similar to the conceptual development from representation to thinking in "Subjective Mind," conceptual thought recognizes what the subject was doing all along in art and religion, namely thinking about concepts. Art can understand the idea qua the unity of concept and its actualization only implicitly because the form it possesses, a singular, sensuous object, cannot capture the nature of the idea as absolute—i.e. as conceptual thought taking itself as its object. The structure of representation at work in art, including poetry, precludes the possibility that art can represent the true nature of the idea. Philosophy recognizes this limitation of art, but art itself cannot.

3 Conclusion

In conclusion, I have shown that the distinction between the content of poetry and philosophical prose is critically important to an understanding of both. The inherent structure of poetry in conveying its particular content as a singular representation of the idea prevents it from succeeding at capturing the true nature of its represented object. Philosophical prose takes conceptual thought to be both what it is and what its object is, hence uniting subject and object, form and content, in a way art cannot. This kind of prose just is the true actualization of the concept; it is conceptual thought thinking about and actualizing itself. The material and semantic linguistic forms of poetry and philosophical prose—i.e. the former's use of figurative and musical language—cannot explain their true difference. Their linguistic forms are necessary to the way in which both convey their respective contents, but such forms are insufficient to ground an objective distinction between the two. Poetry and prose can only be objectively distinguished by their different kinds of content, where the former represents a singular manifestation of the idea and the latter conveys a universal content that thinks about itself and its conceptual nature. Implicit in poetry is the poet thinking about thought, but only in philosophy does the subject come to recognize that the object of thought (and poetry, implicitly) has always been conceptual thought itself. For us, in recognizing

Hegel's distinction between poetry and philosophical prose, we can understand their respective roles for bringing our communal norms before our eyes and allowing us to understand those norms and judge whether they are justifiable within our community.

4   REFERENCES

1   Hegel, G. W. F. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, translated by T. M. Knox, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1975), p. 971. Hegel's *Aesthetics* will henceforth be abbreviated *A*.

2   Holderlin, Friedrich. Excerpted from "As On a Holiday," translated by James Mitchell (2007).

> "...
> Des gemeinsamen Geistes Gedanken sind,
> Still endend in der Seele des Dichters,
>
> Daß schnellbetroffen sie, Unendlichem
> Bekannt seit langer Zeit, von Erinnerung
> Erbebt, und ihr, von heilgem Strahl entzündet,
> Die Frucht in Liebe geboren, der Götter und Menschen Werk
> Der Gesang, damit er beiden zeuge, glückt."

3   *A*, p. 89.

4   Depending on how we approach language, we can understand the same idea (e.g., rhyme) both as being a form of something and as having a content. And in fact, for Hegel, this must be the case for every distinction we make between something's form and content. In the case of rhyme, it structures a poem formally by relating two similar sounds, and the content of a rhyme is just the sounds of the syllables or words that are related (a rhyme's content is also conceived of more abstractly in terms of rhyme schemes as, e.g., in a limerick, the rhyme scheme is AABBA). More abstractly, when we treat linguistic forms in general as our subject matter, we understand them as having a content that can be understood. As in the case of rhyme, metaphor has a particular content (even while it is formal with respect to poetry and prose)—namely, its content is the particular conceptual relation between two words or ideas.

5   Cf. *A*, pp. 996-999, where Hegel discusses the creative activity of poetry with respect to its form and content.

6   Cf. A, pp. 1000-1007, where Hegel discusses poetic expression and how poetry's content is particularly suited to the way or form in which its content is expressed.

7   Cf. Elena Semino and Gerard Steen, "Metaphor in Literature," *Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, edited by R. W. Gibbs Jr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 242: "Amongst other things, [Goatly (1997)] has found that modern lyric poetry has a larger percentage of active and extended metaphors than other genres, both literary (e.g. modern novels) and non-literary (e.g. conversation and news reports). This provides some statistical support for Lodge's (1977) claims that literary language is more metaphorical than non-literary language, and that poetry is more metaphorical than prose fiction."

8   Cf. Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by Elizabeth Haldane, Digireads.com Publishing, p. 54: "And although it may be the case that one idea gives birth to another idea, that cannot continue to be so indefinitely […]."

9   Cf. Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, excerpted from *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. (1978), p. 320: "The form of wood, for instance, is altered, by making a table out of it. Yet, for all of that, the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood. But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than "table-turning" ever was."

10 Cf. *A*, Part II, Section I, Chapter III, Part B entitled "Comparisons Which Start From the Meaning." Here, Hegel gives his longest examination of riddle, allegory, metaphor, image, and simile. In "Hegel on the Sublime," Paul de Man criticizes Hegel's conflation of these terms and also his general notion of the "sublime." In fact, his criticism attempts to level, in a particular way, Hegel's *Aesthetics* as a whole.

11 *The Iliad*, Book 6, Lines 146-150.

12 Cf. *A*, pp. 1003-1004, for Hegel's discussion of the decorative and necessary uses of poetry.

13 Cf. *A*, Part II, Section I, Chapter II entitled "Symbolism of the Sublime."

14 Cf. A, pp. 366-368, 371-373, where Hegel discusses the necessary use of figure in Indian poetry to symbolize the divine.

15 *A*, p. 367. Hegel's example from Indian poetry is the following: "Among the stars I am the shining sun, amongst the lunary signs the moon, amongst the sacred books the books of hymns, amongst the senses the

inward, Meru amongst the hills, amongst the letters I am the vowel A, amongst seasons of the year the blossoming spring." Hegel uses a very similar example in the *Philosophy of Mind*, Remark to §573 that addresses the charge of pantheism in philosophy.

16 Ibid., p. 304.

17 Cf. *A*, p. 396. Hegel states, "But […] both sides being mutually indifferent to one another, the connection into which both are brought is not one in which they belong to one another with absolute necessity. Therefore their bearing on one another, not lying objectively in the nature of the case, is something manufactured subjectively which no longer conceals this subjective character but makes it recognizable through the manner of the representation. […] Therefore, as it turns out, what especially appears in these forms is the subjective art of the poet as maker, and in complete works of art, especially in this aspect, what belongs to the meaning and its necessary configuration can be distinguished from what the poet has added as decoration and adornment."

18 See note 8.

19 *A*, p. 1005.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., p. 1011.

25 Ibid., pp. 1015, 1027.

26 Ibid., p. 1011.

27 Ibid, p. 899.

28 Ibid., p. 304. People like Jacques Derrida have jumped on this definition of the "sign" and its relationship to the "symbol" both in Hegel and elsewhere. Derrida thinks this distinction poses a serious threat to Hegel's entire philosophy of language and the communication of stable concepts through language. I cannot address this complicated issue here, but see Derrida's "The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel's Semiology" for the critique.

29 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, translated by Wade Baskin, edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, McGraw-Hill (1966), p. 67.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., p. 88.

32 Ibid., p. 899.

33 Excerpt from Emily Dickinson, *Complete Poems*, Nature VI (1924).

34 Hegel's necessity claim for poetry's use of meter and rhyme may look rather odd here. For Hegel, there is no such thing as "free verse" poetry, and those Romantic poets who do not employ meter and rhyme in their poetry (like early Goethe and Schiller) are mistaken in Hegel's eyes for believing that "natural language" can do what musical language can in poetry. Cf. *A*, p. 1171: "But with its superfluity of purely objective descriptions this sort of natural language may, on the other hand, readily lapse into dryness and prose, because the characters do not unfold the substance of their heart and their action but express only what they feel directly in their own living individuality without having any deeper consciousness of themselves or their circumstances. The more natural the individuals remain in their expressions, the more prosaic these expressions are." In essence, poets who use natural language misunderstand the proper content of poetry and conflate it with prosaic content.

35 Cf. *A*, p. 900.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., pp. 903, 900.

40 For a more in depth look at Hegel's position on music in general (not with respect to poetry) with how it relates to his views of subjectivity, see Richard Eldridge's "Hegel on Music" in *Hegel and the Arts* (2007). This collection is particularly good for certain areas of Hegel's philosophy of art (e.g. the symbolic, classical, romantic distinction; art's relationship with religion; even Hegel's views of architecture, sculpture, and painting) but not for discussions on Hegel's view of poetry in relation to art in general and other forms of linguistic expression. The same can be said for the collection, *Hegel and Aesthetics* (2000), save Stephen C. Law's "Hegel and the Spirit of Comedy" which focuses less on poetry and more on the historical situation and metaphysical underpinnings (though without explaining much of the latter) of Hegel's view of comedy.

41 *A*, p. 89. Hegel also discusses what he calls "ordinary thinking" in contrast to scientific thought,

conceptual/speculative thought, and the poetic imagination. Cf. *A*, p. 975 for his discussion on that distinction. Hegel spends very little time on the topic of "ordinary thinking" and it seems cursory and uninformative at best.

42 Ibid., pp. 974, 975. Knox sometimes translates the thought of the understanding as "scientific thought" (p. 973) which confuses things insofar as "wissenschaftlich" means conceptual or speculative for Hegel and not "scientific" as we conceive of the term. Hence, I will treat the thought of the understanding (Verstand) as that indicative of the natural and physical sciences, so as not to confuse Hegel's distinctive terms.

43 Ibid., p. 981.

44 Timothy Ferriss, *The 4-Hour Body*, New York: Crown Archetype (2010), pp. 71-72.

45 *A*, p. 983.

46 See Note 11.

47 *A*, p. 983.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., pp. 979, 981.

50 See Note 30. Hegel thinks drama is a genre of poetry, not prose; prosaic drama is lacking something important (perhaps also necessary)—figurative and musical language—to convey its proper dramatic content.

51 Allen Speight addresses the issue of Hegel's use of *Antigone* with respect to his philosophy of action in *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency* (2001), Chapter 2, Section 2. Though his interest is primarily in the *Phenomenology*, it provides a good way of understanding what Hegel's interest is with respect to *Antigone* and action taken in "Ethical Life." Hence, Speight is far less concerned about the nature of the dramatic poem itself qua work of art.

52 Hegel, G. W. F. *Logic: Part One of the Encyclopedia of The Philosophical Sciences*, translated by William Wallace, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1975), §213.

53 *A*, p. 976.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., p. 977.

57 This idea is fundamental to understanding Hegel's overall project. The idea of thought taking itself as its own object characterizes conceptual thought, and the maintaining of an identity and difference simultaneously (as that which characterizes, for instance, self-consciousness) is a constant theme throughout Hegel's system. He develops this idea preliminarily and as a blueprint for its importance in his philosophy in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §61, which contains his conception of the "speculative proposition." This proposition is also important for Hegel's conception of language in general, and many commentators on Hegel have emphasized its importance in this respect. Cf. *Hegel and Language*, edited by Jere O'Neill Surber, for a recent collection on issues concerning the speculative proposition.

58 See note 3.

59 De Man includes Theodor W. Adorno and Hans-Georg Gadamer in this group. Cf. Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*," Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1996), p. 94.

60 Ibid., p. 92.

61 Hegel, G. W. F. *Philosophy of Mind: Part Three of the Encyclopedia of The Philosophical Sciences*, translated by William Wallace and A. V. Miller, revised by M. J. Inwood, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2007), §461 Zusatz.

62 Ibid., §462 Zusatz.

63 Ibid., §458.

64 Ibid., §462.

65 "Sign and Symbol," p. 102.

66 Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, "Hegel on the Sublime," Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1996), p. 118.

67 *Philosophy of Mind*, §464.

68 Ibid., §464 Remark.

69 This section is entitled "Das Denken," not "Gedanken." De Man often slips into using "thought" as what comes after the section on memory instead of "thinking."

70 *Philosophy of Mind*, §465.

71 Ibid.

72 "Sign and Symbol," p. 98.

73 A similar (though not quite identical) mistake is common in approaches to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where

readers understand one section of the *Phenomenology* as paradigmatic of all the dialectical moves in the book such that it allows them to comprehend the entire book mostly by understanding a single transition. Cf. Alexandre Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* as an example of how the dialectic of the mastery and servitude section of the *Phenomenology* is understood in this way.

74 *Philosophy of Mind*, §556.

75 Ibid., §573.