Idioms of Ontology

Idioms of Ontology:
A Phenomenological Study of Whitman

By

Wojciech Majka

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

Idioms of Ontology: A Phenomenological Study of Whitman,
by Wojciech Majka

This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2013 by Wojciech Majka

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-4274-5, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4274-7

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The main aim of the study is to approach Whitman's poetry from a comparatively phenomenological perspective. *Sensu lato* the book, therefore, can be said to fall into the domain of literary theory or philosophy of literature. As it is, however, the major publications that are devoted to Whitman do not focus on a theoretical but a historical reading of the poet's literary output. In itself, the historical approach to literature (much as it is an apposite and justified method of interpretation) can be hermeneutically superficial, since it's understanding stops at the level of post-unconcealment where the world and the self are present to each other, yet little is said about their mode of being, i.e. the kind of existents that they are. Therefore, phenomenological interpretation allows us to move beyond historical convention and find the ontological idiom which makes that very convention possible in the first place.

Poetry as the song of being brackets the historical vantage point by investigating not what life was like in the past but "how it was," i.e. it does not examine the (meta)physical structures of being but how physicality and spirituality contribute to the overall value of being. What this means is that it is not only that being is structured around the quest for *eudaimonia* (happiness); it is also based on the pursuit of *aletheia* (truth) which – in the Heideggerian sense – is to be found in the way in which individual essents are attuned to the dominating ontological idiom. In other words, existence – in order to be meaningful – must have value in itself and the Whitmanesque self is a form of being that furnishes existence with value, since it is an existent that is characterized by the fact that it always has a certain attitude to being. This means, therefore, that being is not a metaphysical concept but an existential phenomenon which is brought about by the unconcealment of the ontological idiom.

Without a doubt Whitman is one of the most philosophical poets. His writings are overflowing with conceptions that range from the Presocratics to Hegel. Nevertheless, the philosophical aspect of the his work has been neglected by criticism with scholars satisfying themselves with making loose allusions to the transcendentalist ideas that are said to respire in his writings. Therefore, our attention has been drawn to the connection of

poetry with philosophy, since Emanuel Levinas once stated that, "the whole of philosophy is only a meditation of Shakespeare."[1]

Eo ipso the philosophical aspect of Whitman's work has been overshadowed by the theme of the Manifest Destiny that serves as the kernel of the developing American self. On the other hand, Whitman's poetry is also very frequently reduced to the level of concealed homosexuality. Thus there is no doubt that the poet was homosexual (though he denied it on a few occasions), nevertheless, by no means can the meaning of his literary output be fully reduced to the level of repressed *concupiscentia*.

Phenomenologically speaking Whitman adopts an existentialist approach to selfhood. The poetic self appears as the product of merging which is warranted by sex that is represented by the Freudian life drive that pushes being onwards, i.e. ahead of rationality and cognition. However, sex points to the fluidity of selfhood, since during the sexual act the ego is extinguished and instead the pleasure principle comes to the fore, which means that the reality principle is a slave of the passions that exist in the unconscious. Therefore, sexuality – strictly connected with fecundity in Levinas – appears as both a creative as well as a destructive process, since the sexual act calls for the extinguishment of the ego for another self to come into being.

Whitman's understanding of selfhood – that is examined here mainly from the Heideggerian perspective – can be reduced to the belief that just as the self stands out (pre-thematically) from the everyday world, so the subject stands out from the self's conscious dealings with that world. In other words, Heidegger's and Whitman's ecstatic being is the result of the self's orientation to the world which presupposes that there is more to the experience of selfhood than being a subject in the classical sense, i.e. a detached existent whose attribute is *ratio* that allows the subject to find a dwelling in the world. To stand the argument on its head rationality is possible and makes sense only on the basis of the self's existential (not transcendental) nature which unfolds in interpersonalized existence – being-in-the-world in the Merleau-Pontyian sense. This existence, however, is in no way represented in consciousness, but instead it is the background of all conscious and, therefore, subjective endeavour. Interestingly, for Whitman consciousness is not only an attribute of human subjectivity but of the natural self which can be understood here as the incarnation of the Emersonian Oversoul that participates in the essence of all essents.

---

[1] Emanuel Levinas, "Time and the Other," in: *The Levinas Reader*. Seán Hand (ed.), (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), p. 41.

Whitman's poetry does not simply register certain emotions or thoughts but by stressing them it draws our attention to their idiom; in other words, it puts them in the foreground of perception. Subsequently, Whitman prioritizes the being of existence over that of consciousness. His poetics pulls existents out of ordinariness that is associated with impersonally functionalized being through the medium of the ontological idiom that paradigmatizes existence, since Whitman writes that:

> Every existence has its idiom, every thing has an idiom and tongue, he resolves all tongues into his own and bestows it upon men, and any man translates, and any man translates himself also, one part does not counteract another part, he is the joiner, he sees how they join.[2]

Therefore, the idiom is a phenomenon that comes to fruition in the self that in itself interprets the vocabularies of being. In other words, the idiom is not a phenomenon that is imposed on the self. In a Levinasian sense, the self listens to the "saying" of *physis*, but it is only the "said" that establishes the tone of the idiom as the context of the self's understanding. Nevertheless, this only leads us to the conviction that being is not an existent but a mode through which existents are unconcealed.

The notion of selfhood that is developed in Whitman is inscribed into the idea of the ontological idiom which – with the exception of selfhood itself – is the other crucial term that is investigated in the present study. Therefore, the ontological idiom serves here as an umbrella term that allows us to reconcile Whitman's poetry with the phenomenological views developed in the writings of Martin Heidegger as well as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emanuel Levinas.

One of the most important terms that is attributed to Heidegger is *Geworfenheit* which basically refers to the historical self's thrownness into the existential environment. Availing ourselves of this very idea the project throws the Whitmanesque self not into the historical context but the ontological one that is the effect of the essencing of the idiom of being. Thus much as the study is profiled phenomenologically, it also possesses a comparative understructure, i.e. we see the evolution of selfhood developing on two levels. First, on the basis of the phenomenologies that emanate from the works of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas. Second, on the foundation of Whitman's poetry whose thematics is profoundly phenomenological and silhouetted against the notion of the

[2] Walt Whitman, "Song of the Answer," in: *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Prose Works*, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1982), p. 315.

ontological idiom. In this way the book endeavours to reconcile the literary and phenomenological perspective on selfhood. *Idem per idem*, the ontological idiom is to be understood as the paradigmatized unconcealment of being, none the less, it is more of an emotional orientation to existence than a rational one, i.e. an orientation that treats reality as a stable and unchanging phenomenon. Therefore, all that the self has to do in this context is discover the idiomatic world which is already there outside the self's subjective grasp.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO METHODOLOGY, TERMINOLOGY AND POETICS

On account of the fact that the whole book possesses a strictly theoretical character, the chapter, first of all, presents the connections between literature and literary theory - philosophy of literature - taking into account literature's appeal to morality, the psychology behind the reading process and the question of the intentional fallacy. Additionally, this part of the chapter thinks of literature in terms of a description of the lived experience which is after all what the phenomenological perspective presupposes. In other words, the phenomenological method is based on the rejection of the dualistic understanding of experience that in itself is reducible to the subject-object dichotomy where knowledge and understanding is linked to the idea of finding the link between the *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. Most of all, however, the chapter introduces phenomenology as a theoretical method applicable to the study of literature basing on the views of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger and Emanuel Levinas. Finally, the last part of the chapter focuses on a general overview of the major themes that are specific to Whitman's work.

Restoring the Links between Literature and Philosophy

Writing about Whitman's poetry from a phenomenological perspective obliges us to ask ourselves whether literary theory/ philosophy is a form of literature, or whether it is some kind of a superior medium of expression. The slash between literary theory and philosophy is intentional, since according to Martha C. Nussbaum it is not absolutely clear what the difference is between two. As it is, both make use of the phenomenological method and ask similar questions, i.e. concerning the nature of reality, the meaning of language, the relation between subjectivity and objectivity, the

role of intentionality, relativism, hermeneutics etc…[1] Historically speaking one is obliged to concede, however, that literature is a much older genre than philosophy which is believed to be based on introspection and critical thinking, whereas literature on saving the self to the world, i.e. turning the self into a public existent and, therefore, transforming the concealed and unrepresented flow of vitality into an unconcealed idiom of being. Richard Shusterman believes that:

> We cannot exclude philosophy from literature by reducing literature to fictional discourse, since so much literature is non-fictional and aims at truth. Philosophy, moreover, displays a variety of recognized literary genres: essays, dialogues, poems, meditations, treatises, speeches, confessions, memoirs, letters, discourses, journals, commentaries, investigations, sermons, notes, lectures, fragments, aphorisms, inquiries, outlines, sketches – and the list could be doubled and will grow with the arrival of new literary genres, such as the blog, which has already been enlisted into philosophical use.[2]

Much as philosophy focuses on the idea of the thinking self and of the so called truth of being, literature concerns itself with doubting that very thinking and truth. Through the process of literary unconcealment, literature transforms the natural earth into the phenomenological world which in itself is the interpersonal sphere of experience that the self belongs to.

Generally speaking the difference between literature and philosophy is epistemological and not ontological, i.e. whilst literature presents experience as lived, philosophy discloses it as it should be lived, and how the lived experience deviated from the philosophical ideals. In other words, both literature and philosophy express the appropriation of the ontological idiom. Moreover, ever since the first cosmological questions appeared in the Presocratic minds, philosophy was believed to be based on an objective description of the world of existence. Therefore, philosophy, as the love of wisdom, served as a new epistemological idiom that allowed the human self to enjoy – with all the consequences that such thinking involved – a detached position with reference to the being of the natural world, since the self was principally understood as an existent that much more than being a participant of being had also the potential to observe it

---

[1] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Perceptive Equilibrium: Literary Theory and Ethical Theory," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature.* Garry L. Hagberg and Walter Jost (eds.), (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 242.

[2] Richard Shusterman, "Philosophy as Literature and More than Literature," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*…, p. 7.

from some kind of an external, objective point of view. In itself the philosophical perspective was the effect of a new ontological idiom that transformed the ancient world of myth into a one of *nomos*. The mythical idiom, however, did not disappear all together but came to take on a different form. Thus instead of serving as the ontological idiom and, therefore, the context of being, it now came to express itself as a detachment from the dominating existential paradigm that reason brought with itself. This is, perhaps, why Ludwig Wittgenstein treats philosophy as a variation of poetry when he states that, "I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: philosophy ought really to be written only as a poetic composition…"[3] Of course, when thinking about the differences between literature and philosophy the first observation that comes to mind is that literature is fiction in the sense that it is not about the 'real' world and 'real' experiences within that world. Nevertheless, in spite of the fictional and, therefore, unreal status of literature Daniel Brudney notes that, "[f]or millennia, philosophers have quoted literature. Seemingly, they have believed that poets, novelists, etc. have been onto something, that in some way their texts are authoritative."[4] In other words, whilst no one here is doubting the fictional status of literature, it cannot honestly be said that literature is not real and, therefore, that it is useless, or what is more, that it is the product of "lyric poets" who as Plato maintains "are not in their right mind."[5] One of the greatest puzzles that literature brings with itself is the question of how ideas that are fictional manage to appeal to the self's emotions. This is a very problematic question, since it signals that what we in usual circumstances call imaginary creations are emotionally just as real to the self as anything else that involves the self in the so called "real life," otherwise we would have to assume that feelings and emotions are by definition fictive, useless and dangerous, which is a perspective that emanates from Platonism. Additionally, this is also the approach that dominates in the Western intellectual tradition that perhaps does not literally treat emotional life as a complete fiction, but it definitely regards it as a distortion of the "correct" rational idiom from whose perspective literature is a valueless distraction if it does not have a moral or didactic character.

---

[3] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value.* trans., Peter Winch, G.H. Von Wrightt (ed.), (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 24e.

[4] Daniel Brudney, "Styles of Self-Absorption," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*...,p. 303.

[5] Plato, "Ion," in: *Critical Theory since Plato*. Hazard Adams (ed.), (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanivich, Inc. 1971), p. 14.

According to Jenefer Robinson, the emotions invested in an emotional understanding of a work of art differ in no way from the ones that are invested in real life.[6] At the same time, what must be noted is that works of art teach the self how and what to feel in a certain situation. They prepare it for its existential possibilities by projecting possible worlds and experiences. This means that works of art carry worlds within themselves, and they unconceal the different ways in which life can matter to the self. Roger Scrutton observes:

> In responding to literature we are responding sympathetically to an imagined situation, and we do this by 'imitating' or, more properly, rehearsing the motives that would lead us to sympathize towards the real-life version of the characters and feelings described. In rehearsing these motives we are 'learning to feel,' and the true work of art is the one that teaches us what to feel, so that we know what to feel towards situations of the kind that it portrays.[7]

From this perspective the engagement in fiction is the side effect of make-believe experiences. Thus during the reading process, for example, the reader lets herself/himself be guided by the text just as a child by the rules of a game that it is involved in. Both impose a fictional structure on experience.

Nevertheless, the value of the emotional life of the self (and, therefore, literature) was profoundly depreciated by Plato who criticized fiction (poetry and tragedy) for political reasons, since he believed that it poses a threat to the existential wariness of the *polis* by pulling the citizens away from practical, social concerns and focusing their attention on fictions generated by poetry and tragedy. This stems from the fact that Plato believed that there is a strict harmony between the soul of the individual and the State which is why he held that individuals should if not suppress, then overcome their emotional life and devote themselves to rational comportment (the foundation of the *polis* based society, since the only way to control society is through the systematization of behaviour and the creation of habit). Plato, as is widely known, criticized poetry for its imitative quality and, therefore, its inferiority to ideas; tragedy, moreover, was said to involve "personation,"[8] as Anthony J. Cascardi observes,

---

[6] Jenefer Robinson, "Emotions and the Understanding of Narrative," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*..., p. 80.

[7] Roger Scrutton, "Feeling Fictions," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature...,* p. 100.

[8] Anthony, J. Cascardi, "Tragedy and Philosophy," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*..., p. 162.

where the opinions expressed by the characters did not in fact belong to them but to others. Plato also criticized tragedy for showing the gods as irrational, chaotic beings whose impulsive ways turn the self's existence into a caprice of fate rather than the law of divine reason. Moreover, he also maintained that tragedy makes the self vulnerable, since it feels pity for the tragic fate of characters. Aristotle, on the other hand, believed that tragedy simply imitates actions that are grave and complete and through pity and fear it brings about the sense of *catharsis*,[9] i.e. a purification of emotions. Thus Aristotle clearly assigns an ethical role to poetry which leads Jonathan Lear to aver that "[e]thical melodies"[10] that Aristotle speaks of are experiences that ethisize the self's character. This means that the self should be trained to feel pleasure from doing noble deeds and pain from ignoble ones. Moreover, all human action according to Aristotle is determined by happiness which he believes is "final and self-sufficient [and] the end at which all actions aim"[11] (moreover, he considers "the good life or doing well to be the same thing as being happy"[12]). The human self, however, is not limited to the rational component that is universal and runs in the species but to *hexis* (orientation), i.e. the unique characteristics that people possess that include rationality but are not limited to its influence. Richard Eldridge announces that, "[n]o actual human life is one perpetual rational progress, smooth and bright."[13] In other words, every self possesses an innate character and, therefore, represents a given psychological type in the Jungian sense. Eldridge believes that poetry accentuates an individual self's character in concrete situations and Arthur C. Danto has a similar opinion (not only in terms of poetry but literature as such). He believes that instead of seeing literature as expressing universal themes about possible worlds – like philosophy – or regarding it as the expression of particular ones connected with a specific historical period – like science from the Kuhnian point of view - the aim of literature is to be about the reader and the reading process:

> literature is not universal in the sense of being about every possible world insofar as possible, as philosophy in its non-literary dimension aspires to

[9] Aristotle, "Poetics," in: *Philosophy of Literature*. Eileen John and Dominic McIver Lopes (eds.), (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), p. 18.
[10] Jonathan Lear, "Catharsis," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*…, p. 194.
[11] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean* Ethics. trans., Harris Rackham, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1996), p. 12.
[12] Ibid., p. 5.
[13] Richard Eldridge, "Truth in Poetry: Particulars and Universals," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*…, p. 387.

> be, nor about what may happen to be the case in just this particular world, as history, taken in this respect as exemplificatory science, aspires to be, but rather about each reader who experiences it.[14]

This is an interesting departure from the Aristotelian conception that art expresses meanings that are universal. Poetry, therefore, in itself unconceals the consequences of the individual's pursuit of *eudaimonia*, and how this pursuit affects one's life, i.e. family (Antigone), friendship (Achilles and Patroclus), power (Creon), social status (Oedipus). Nevertheless, although it appears as a romantic promotion of individualism, the perspective that poetry unconceals subjectivity (and not the universal self) has its drawbacks. It implies that if individualism is prioritized, then the bonds that exist between people are artificial and directed towards achieving certain existential goals in which case the relations that exist between human beings can be said to be instrumental, which is what Immanuel Kant warned us against claiming that we should treat the other not as a means but as an end.[15] Brudney, on the other hand, following Simone Weil thinks that lack of morality is caused by an existential attitude inspired by "vocabulary of inattention,"[16] i.e. an orientation where the self does not pay attention to the other but becomes absorbed in its own existential bias.

Philosophy differs from poetry in terms of the kind of enunciation that is involved. Tragedy, for example, used emotional language that appealed to the emotions of the audience creating a sense of pity that was said to bring about *catharsis*. Dialectics, on the other hand, was based on free speech that allowed the speaker to adopt a critical position toward an issue and, therefore, it promoted a rational approach to selfhood and being. This led to the condition in which philosophy in itself was considered to be the antidote to poetry, since philosophy was understood as the systematic study of being the mastering of which was to allow the self to overcome fate which stood behind tragedy as we find, for example, in *Oedipus Rex*. Much as Plato worried over the fact that poetry was mimetic and, therefore, metafictive – a fiction of a fiction (physical reality) – Aristotle stated that fiction does not pose a danger to the self's ethical education, since we know right from the start that the situations unconcealed in poetry are fictive. Of course, this claim presupposes a mature audience

[14] Arthur C. Danto, "Philosophy and/as/of Literature," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature…*,p. 63.
[15] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Allen W. Wood (ed.), (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 45.
[16] Daniel Brudney, "Styles of Self-Absorption," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature…*,p. 300.

that does not perceive poetry through uncritical identification. As Lear proclaims, "[p]oetry, for Aristotle, is a type of making, and the activity of any making occurs in the person or thing toward which the making is directed."[17] The stereotypical interpretation here is that the poet creates by "making" that is related to imitation. Nevertheless, according to Gregory Currie imitation also applies to the reader, since in the reading process the reader finds herself/himself imitating somebody else's state of mind through empathy which Currie does not think is the same as sympathy, for while exercising the former the reader still keeps her/his distance from the character or narrator.[18] Thus through empathy we "feel with" the character and narrator, but we do not lose our perspective and sense of existence by adopting theirs.

Generally speaking narration happens through imitation, since the author is always speaking from the other's point of view, which is why Currie limits what he calls the narrative "point of view"[19] to imitation. This standpoint refers to the self's renderings of the world that are always perceptive in the sense that the self always attends the world from its own spatial and temporal position. Nevertheless, the self's vision of the world is not only limited to the formal aspects of space and time but to orientation in the sense that the appearance of a situation depends on the self's emotional disposition and the prevailing ontological idiom. In the narrative process, the author creates orientative aspects of the narrative process that in itself is an illustration of a certain point of view that in itself is the reflection of the self's (the writer's and reader's) historical contextualization that Edmund Husserl, for example, speaks of.[20]

From the Freudian perspective the origins of fiction are to be found in childhood, in the various games that children involve themselves in. The game aspect of existence does not, however, disappear from experience all together as the self matures. Freud maintained that what all children have in common is the playing of the game of being a grown up.[21] Adults, on the other hand, involve themselves in fiction to escape from the difficulties

---

[17] Jonathan Lear, "Catharsis," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature…,* p. 205.
[18] Gregory Currie, "Narration, Imitation and Point of View," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature…,*p. 342.
[19] Ibid., p. 331.
[20] Steven Crowell, "Husserlian Phenomenology," in: *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism.* Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (eds.), (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 27.
[21] Sigmund Freund, "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," in: *Philosophy of Literature*…, p. 37.

of existence. Fiction allows for the possibility of unreal situations – that can be repeated in the imagination – which in themselves can prepare the self for the real experience of being. Roger Scruton makes a very interesting observation on the nature of imagination which according to traditional views is the source of fiction:

> Imagination is the capacity, which all rational beings exhibit to some degree, to entertain thoughts without affirming or asserting them, and to create an order among those thoughts which makes each in some way answerable or appropriate to the other. It is a cognitive capacity which, unlike belief or desire, is directly subject to the will.[22]

Just as Freud maintained that fiction is necessary for the child in her/his game of being a grown up, imagination here is also a mechanism that allows the self to engage in realities without, however, believing in them. What we learn from Scruton, however, is that imagination and belief are two different orientations to experience. The former being based on the will is a subjectively oriented active process (whether in the conscious or – as in Freud – the unconscious way), whereas a belief is the passive foundation of an assertion that makes it cohere with being-in-the-world. Thus what Scruton tells us is that works of fiction automatically signal themselves as such and, therefore, what the self develops is fictive emotional responses that stand in opposition to the "real" ones that are directed at being-in-the-world. The self responds to being-in-the-world, since it believes it to be true; in other words, the self does not react to experiences in an instinctive way but to the reality that it believes in. Subsequently, Mitchell Green holds that fiction can be a valuable source of knowledge about the world. However, instead of fiction he specifically prefers to use the term literary fiction, since as he claims, it is more problematic than it actually appears to be able to distinguish between works that are fictional and those that are non-fictional. Literary fiction, Green sustains, provides us with "(a) propositional knowledge – knowledge that such and such is the case; (b) phenomenal knowledge – knowledge of what an experience is like, or how an emotion or mood feels; (c) knowledge how to do something, where the doing in question may include not only bodily actions, but those involving the use of the imagination."[23] The knowledge, therefore, that the self obtains from literary fiction is about its phenomenological being-in-the-world.

---

[22] Roger Scruton, "Feeling Fictions," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*…,p. 96

[23] Mitchell Green, "How and What We can Learn from Fiction," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*…,p. 352.

The question of the relation of fiction to non-fiction is strictly related to the old philosophical debate over the nature of truth and falsehood. Peter Lamarque like Mitchell Green also believes that treating all literature as fiction is an overgeneralization. He maintains that literature has some important truths to convey about the self's being-in-the-world:

> Fiction is an apt vehicle for teaching truths, as in parables, or moral tales told to children, or philosophers' thought experiments… works of fiction are usually set in the real world, often referring to real places, events, or famous people, and drawing on familiar facts about how humans behave, what clothes they wear, the sorts of things they say. It is no wonder that readers can learn from novels out of this background: about history, geography, etiquette, customs, modes of speech.[24]

Lamarque following others believes that poetry is a unification of pleasure and truth, or as Horace puts it in *Ars Poetics*, usefulness (*utile*) and sweetness (*dulce*).[25] Nevertheless, as it was stated before the debate over the value of poetry goes as far back as Plato and Aristotle where the former reduced poetry to a dangerous mimetic illusion – the effect of toxic inspiration – and the latter stated that through that very mimetism the self learns about reality, since all experience is in point of fact based on repetition and memorization, which in turn had Hume believing that all knowledge is habitual and probabilistic.[26] Following Aristotle's line of reason it was Wordsworth who claimed that the role of poetry is to convey "the great and universal passions of men"[27] and, therefore, universal (not particular) truths. Lamarque, however, looks at literary truth from various levels. He refers to the understanding developed by I.A. Richards in *Principles of Literary Criticism* in which Richards claims that truth depends on acceptability and sincerity, i.e. the work of art must be convincing, honest and, therefore, plausible;[28] which is an attitude that comes close to the one that we find in Tolstoy. Poetical truth in itself is the equivalent of the Heideggerian *aletheia*; thus it is not empirical or conceptual, but it derives from the unconcealment of existential

[24] Peter Lamerque, "Literature and Truth," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*…,p. 369.
[25] Ibid., p. 368.
[26] David Hume, "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding," in: *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill*. Edwin A. Burtt (ed.), (New York: Random House, Inc, 1939), p. 619.
[27] William Wordworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads," in: *Critical Theory since Plato…,* p. 440.
[28] Peter Lamarque, "Literature and Truth," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature…,* p. 371.

possibilities. In this way its nature is different from the kind of truth that science and history work with which is principally restricted to the understanding of truth as correspondence or coherence.

Literature and Morality

One of the general stereotypes is that the difference between philosophy and literature is that the latter is based on emotions, whereas the former on reason. Of course, this automatically leads us to the supposition that philosophy offers an objective study of reality, whilst literature a subjective one. Philosophy supposedly allows us to discover the objective level of being, an assumption which in itself is a mistake, since from a phenomenological point of view, the objective is nothing more than the less subjective which is expressed in the ontological idiom. Therefore, if philosophy had absorbed itself in an emotional evaluation of being, it would lose the status of philosophy and become literature which instead of responding to the question of "what is?" would answer to the one of "how something is?"

One way of answering the question is to state that just as a work of art acquires meaning when it is sided with other works, the same holds true for human life which gains its meaning not only through anxiety caused by finitude *à la* Heidegger but through the way in which the self composes itself in its being-in-the-world. Nussbaum states that, "[literature] speaks about us, about our lives and choices and emotions, about our social existence and the totality of our connections."[29] This we can take to mean that literature is more profound than history, since it does not only record narratives but study the patterns that create history and being-in-the-world. It, therefore, plays a similar role to phenomenology whose goal is to describe the self's lived experience. Thus the thing that differentiates poetry from philosophy is that the latter is based on a methodological examination of being, whereas the former studies ultimate reality but unsystematically and "un-methodologically." Roger A. Shiner – following McTaggart – believes that literature and philosophy should not be treated as opposites but complements whose merging offers a more complete vision of reality. He thinks that, "philosophy is defined by method, not by aim: change the method and you change philosophy."[30] Intentionality based not on reason but emotion, which is characteristic of the

[29] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Literary Theory and Ethical Theory," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature…*,p. 244

[30] Roger A. Shiner, "Philosophy and Literature: Friends of the Earth," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature…*,p. 23.

phenomenological approach, is an example of such a methodological change. Richard Rorty, on the other hand, believes that philosophy is a form of writing that is based on tradition. This is what Shiner calls the "Rortification of philosophy,"[31] a perspective which partly figures in Whitman's work, since much as the poet wanted to create the new American idiom, he did not seek to destroy the old literary tradition but simply use it as an inspiration for the making of a new poetic idiom. This is why Whitman, perhaps, thought that literature "is to be the medicine and lever, and (with Art) the chief influence in modern civilization."[32] Philosophy, on the other hand, as a methodological science ever since the time of Kant's Copernican Revolution endeavours to describe experience in a true and objective way. It cannot, however, be argued that philosophy in its original sense was pre-literary, since it was not written but communicated orally such as in the case of Socrates. Bearing that in mind, we can refer to the words of Richard Shusterman who claims that:

> To award philosophy the privilege of defining literature, but at the same time to acknowledge that literature is itself the broader genus needed for defining philosophy as one of its species, suggests a disconcerting circularity. Even if circularity can be avoided, moreover, philosophy seems compelled to cede to literature the status of generic primacy, in which philosophy is a subsumed species. Such concession is something that philosophers are rarely happy to give, since philosophy first emerged as a major force in ancient Greece through its struggle to assert its superiority to poetry and rhetoric not only in providing truth for the conduct of life but also…for the realization of the highest kind of beauty and happiness.[33]

In light of the above literature has a moral value, since it allows the reader to imaginatively engage in experiences that s/he might one day encounter herself/himself. Thus the reading process allows the reader to literally live through the "not" experienced pieces of life. Philosophy cannot do this, since it supposedly offers not a subjective but an objective form of knowledge. It, therefore, does not speak of life as lived experience but of life as it should or should not be lived; thus its perspective is strictly theoretical. Additionally, this means that moral judgments cannot be made from the philosophical – deontological – perspective that speaks of the

[31] Ibid., p. 24.
[32] Walt Whitman, "November Boughs," in: *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Prose Works*, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1982), p. 1195.
[33] Richard Shusterman, "Philosophy as Literature and More Than Literature," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature…,* p. 7.

application of universal rules, duties to behaviour. Morality unlike ethics does not stem from the application of universal laws to the being of selfhood but from the self's reaction to being-in-the-world. Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen state that, "a significant proportion of moral choices does not consist in the application of general rules, but in the exercise of moral judgment in given circumstances. Many moral judgments cannot… be made if one adopts the 'view from nowhere' because they need to take into account the individual, subjective perspective on a situation."[34] Literature, therefore, as we can see focuses its attention on moral life, nevertheless, this does not mean, as Eileen John claims, that all literature is to be limited to the moral perspective.[35] She thinks that literature as such sprang into being from the need for the classification of human experience and moral categorization happens to be just one particular idiom among many others. Morality allows the self to evaluate experience and in this way it lets it bracket everyday existence and adopt an abeyant approach to being in the Whitmanesque sense. Morality in literature involves the "double (or multiple) take,"[36] which means that it presents a certain moral situation within a certain existential context that gave birth to it. This means that it is more difficult to evaluate a character's actions as good or bad and the character herself/himself may appear to be a victim of forces beyond her/his control. In this way the reader has to decide for herself/himself and evaluate the moral situation. One need only think of tragic characters like Oedipus, Sisyphus, Milton's Satan, Edmund (*King Lear*), Faust, Raskolnikov, etc.

Literature: or the Philosophy of/as Lived Experience

For some the superiority of philosophy demonstrates itself in the fact that philosophy was at base "a way of life rather than a form of language."[37] This is best illustrated by Socrates who educated not by writing but by creating exemplary models of life. As it is, Whitman sometimes comes close to Socrates, since his poetry cultivates the beginnings of a new way of life – the American way. Roy Harvey Pearce observes that:

---

[34] Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 387.
[35] Eileen John, "Literature and the Idea of Morality," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature…,* p. 286.
[36] Ibid., p. 290.
[37] Richard Shusterman, "Philosophy as Literature and More than Literature," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature…,*p. 8.

> Whitman's problem, the poet's problem, was to show that integral to the poet's vocation was his life cycle; that the poet, having discovered his gifts, might now use them to discover the relevance of his life, his lived life, his Erlebnis, his career, to the lives of his fellows.[38]

Like philosophy for Socrates, poetry for Whitman is a way of life. Socrates criticized professional philosophers like the Sophists for whom philosophy was not so much a lifelong calling as a respectable and profitable profession. We find a very similar attitude in Whitman, since as Ed Folsom observes, in his notes that would eventually come to form *Leaves of Grass* Whitman made the following remark: "do not descend among the professors and capitalists."[39] Nevertheless, one might say that such was the feeling of the time, since Emerson also depreciated the value of formal studies in the address that would later come to be known as *The American Scholar* (as a consequence, it would take twenty years for Emerson to be invited back to Harvard). Thoreau adopted a similar attitude by saying that, "[t]here are now professors of philosophy, but there are no philosophers…To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically."[40] Thoreau's words, therefore, signal very clearly that human thinking had diverted from the self's practical existence and experience of life. The difference between theory and practice thus emerges on the horizon of the assumption that the latter was connected with a way of living, whereas writing was a way of recording, i.e. a means of the preservation of the lived experience which came to be understood through the idea of representation and, therefore, detachment from the lived reality.

For the Platonic Socrates, for example, writing is a form of entertainment that does not take responsibility for itself, moreover, it is disconnected from the world of life whose essence dwells in taking responsibility thus caring for one's own existence as well as the existence of others (what the Greeks called *epimelia*). For Socrates, for example, real words are not put on paper, but they are inscribed in the soul. Mark

---

[38] Roy Harvey Pearce, "Whitman Justified: the Poet in 1860," in: *Walt Whitman*. Harold Bloom (ed.)…, p. 74.
[39] Mark Zwonitzer (dir.), *Walt Whitman American Experience.* (Boston: WGBH Educational Foundation and Patrick Long Productions, 2008).
[40] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p. 13.

Bauerlein, on the other hand, in *Whitman and the Language of the Self* affirms that:

> Writing stabilizes and spatializes an unstable, temporal subject. It consolidates desire or intention into a stasis, preservable and lifeless, severed from the identity that tried to replicate itself, to create a form in its own imageless image. Writing aggravates the differentiation, the figural death, which takes place when expression (understood as an attempt at self-recognition through objectification) divides the self living temporally, changing from moment to moment. But speech is as evanescent as the shifting psyche it socializes; it vanishes as it is uttered, just as desires and thoughts vanish in a succession of sensations. Because spoken words dissolve as they are realized, they can never cause self-estrangement. There is less opportunity for self-confrontation in speech than there is in print; speech appears indistinguishable from the self it presents. However, while unrecorded speech avoids an alienating embodiment of self by remaining proximate to an ephemeral desire, it also prevents the reification of a redeeming Other.[41]

What we learn from Bauerlein is that writing as a medium does much more than simply allow the self to preserve experience; it also creates a sense of externalized otherness that is allegedly detached from the speaking self that appears as an ephemeral being whose continuity is made possible by representation that writing in turn engenders. Without representation the speaking self dissolves in its experience and the point of subjective existence is, as we find in Levinas, "not to dissolve into the anonymity of the there is."[42]

The medium that stands behind representation and writing is what the Greeks called *logos* which here does not only refer to cosmic reason like we find in Heraclitus; rather, it stands for the idea of the word that refers to the expressive potential of language that transmits thought. If we generally think that philosophy should unconceal the truth about reality and the lived experience, then unconcealment must acquire a medium, in other words, it must come to possess a language, which means that it has to turn literary. Truth, therefore, only makes sense if it can be shared and language is the medium that allows for such sharing, which means that language is the embodiment of philosophical life. For example, Roger A. Shiner thinks that:

---

[41] Mark Bauerlein, "Whitman's Language of the Self," *Walt Whitman's Song of Myself...,* p. 94.

[42] Emanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans., Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 268.

> Both poetry and philosophy have the capacity to perform an ontological function, to reveal the profoundest things. To be a philosopher, then, as to be a poet, is to be called to live a certain kind of life in the world, a life of assisting one's fellow human beings to full citizenship.[43]

The role of philosophy is, however, not only to record knowledge and enhance its sharing but also, as Socrates maintains, to help the self to get to know and care for itself. The essence of life is, therefore, self-examination as it is reflected in the Delphic inscription of knowing oneself – *nosce te ipsum*.[44] Knowing oneself was, however, restricted to the phenomenological idea that the self should know its place in the world, and that it should acknowledge its inferiority to the gods. Knowing oneself, therefore, consisted in the idea of achieving a sceptical attitude to one's own being and not approaching existence from a hubristic perspective; this is why *hubris* in the Greek sense always led to tragedy. Nevertheless, acquiring the knowledge of one's self through self-analysis and doubt is dangerous and intimidating. However, anxiety which is the effect of the introspective pursuit of the true self, connects the self with the sphere of the divine. Martha C. Nussbaum shares this thinking, since she states that, "loneliness is the condition of luminous perception; and [the]fear of intimacy is at the same time a fear for [one's] moral being."[45] In this context we can also refer to M. Jimmie Killingsworth who points to the foreboding side of Whitman that criticism frequently overlooks focusing on the idea of the Manifest Destiny resonating in his poetry:

> …the hopeful side of Whitman's vision is balanced (and to some extent stimulated) by a strong sense of dread and anxiety, largely stemming from an ominous fear that political conflicts were on the verge of tearing the nation apart… What began as a decade of positive, creative energy ended in depression arising from political disillusionment, masculine self doubt, and the fear of failure reflected in the elegiac tone of the poems published in 1860, such as 'As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life,' 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,' 'and many of the 'Calamus' poems.[46]

---

[43] Roger A. Shiner, "Friends of the Earth," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*…,p. 33

[44] Richard Shusterman, "Philosophy as Literature and More than Literature," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*…,p. 10

[45] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Literary Theory and Ethical Theory," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*…,p. 260.

[46] M. Jimmie Killingsworth. *The Cambridge Introduction to Walt Whitman.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 25.

In a philosophical sense the self's "sense of dread and anxiety" is the effect of introspection that allows the self to go behind the defence mechanisms that Freud speaks of which try to protect consciousness from its truths which, at the same time, happen to be its demons. That is why it is important for the self to share itself with the other, since sharing expresses that which is repressed. Sharing in itself, however, is based on communicativeness which is the product of literariness that allows for the clear communication of thought. Richard Shusterman, for example, holds that, "[b]ecause words do not simply clothe thoughts but rather shape them, it follows that greater literary skill in formulating the letters should also enhance the revelatory insights of the self-analysis."[47] For Brudney, on the other hand, literariness is a part of the existential experience of being, and in itself it entails the ability of a self to clearly and meaningfully articulate itself (this is a thought that Descartes would definitely approve of). Brudney is, therefore, referring to a (Husserlian) cognitive model of selfhood which is a type of selfhood that he understands through the idea of self-absorption that generally speaking refers to the way in which the self becomes an obsession for itself and the way in which it secludes itself from others through jealousy, prejudice, hatred, alienation etc.[48] Self absorption thus marks the failure of the self to overcome itself by being-with-others; instead of scattering itself in being-in-the-world and practicing its existence, the self puts itself in opposition to being-in-the-world which is, one could say, the authentic or non-conformist approach to existence in which the self may experience a higher level of self-awareness at the cost of happiness that can be obtained only if the self dissolves in being-in-the-world. This is why R.W.B. Lewis states that Whitman should not be simply looked upon as the poet of democracy but of suffering, which is a theme that is developed in the *Calamus* cluster. Lewis declares that:

> At his best, Whitman was not really the bard of the democratic society at all; nor was he the prophet of the country's and the world's glorious future. He was, perhaps, the poet of an aesthetic and moral democracy. But he was above all the poet of the self and of the self's swaying motion – outward into a teeming world where objects were 'strung like beads of glory' on his sight; backward into private communion with the 'real Me.' He was the poet of the self's motion downward into the abysses of darkness and guilt and pain and isolation, and upward to the creative act in

[47] Richard Shusterman, "Philosophy as Literature and More than Literature," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature…*,pp. 13-14.
[48] Daniel Brudney, "Styles of Self-Absorption," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature…*,p. 300.

> which darkness was transmuted into beauty. When the self became lost to the world, Whitman was lost for poetry.[49]

Poets and philosophers like Goethe and Nietzsche (whose philosophy grows out of Schopenhauerian pessimism) warned us about the dangers connected with introspection. Goethe, for example, for whom knowing oneself was a way of dying to the world, believed that introspection may detune the self; in other words, being absorbed in its inner life the self may lose its place in the world that in this sense is understood as the phenomenological *Lebenswelt*. In quite a similar vein, Nietzsche held that the secret of being does not dwell in introspection but in the self's potential for metamorphosis.

The self, therefore, transforms itself by being-with-others by means of which it gets rid of the introspective distance to the world; instead of introspection the self should transform itself through worldly practices that allow it to find itself in its existential projects (like Heidegger's *Dasein*). Thus if the meaning of life dwells in changing one's self rather than in being what one is from the beginning, then literature has a great potential to offer, since it can transform the self psychologically in the sense that every reading experience leaves a trace of the artistic impression in the reader. In this case the good reader does not have a single self but a variety of selves to choose from when dealing with existential possibilities. This is perhaps why Whitman, as Gay Wilson Allen maintains, "commented that even light reading could fertilize the mind."[50] In addition to reading the self can also transform itself through writing. In other words, it does not have to take the risk of living out its beliefs, i.e. it can articulate them in the idiom of the imagination. In this way literature both unconceals as well as conceals selfhood, as the self is always oriented to the world through a particular mood that allows it to "[respond] to the world according to a pattern."[51] Knowing oneself is, therefore, an experience that can be called literary, since to know itself the self must learn how to represent itself to itself in its I-hood. Gary L. Hagberg, therefore, believes that the self's fixity has basically a linguistic foundation where the pronoun "I" must have the same referent.[52] This is, however, connected with the

---

[49] R.W.B. Lewis, "Always Going out and Coming," in: *Walt Whitman*. Harold Bloom (ed.), (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985), p. 125.

[50] Gay Wilson Allen, *The Solitary Reaper*. (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 126.

[51] Daniel Brudney, "Styles of Self-Absorption," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*...,p. 317.

[52] Gary L. Hagberg, "Literature and the Constitution of Personhood," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*...,p. 122.

phenomenological understanding of the "I." The scandal of the "I" is that it characterizes all human experience in the sense that each self sees itself as an "I." For Kant, on the other hand, the scandal was that human thinking did not manage to convincingly prove the existence of the external world. Knowing oneself, therefore, means coming to terms with the fact that we are not the only beings for whom being was created. The artificiality of the "I' is evident if we take into account that every self (in fact every animate being) understands itself as an "I," which means that the "I" is nothing more than the representation of forces beyond the intellect's control. In other words, the "I" is not the starting point of being but its finality, i.e. it is the condition that separates the idea of being from non-being, which would explain why every animate being tries to fight off the prospect of its finitude.

As it was mentioned above, the self comes to represent itself through language, a phenomenon which in itself is already a literary experience. Representation is crucial to the formation of identity through habituation, since without representing itself the self would not really know itself as an autologous being; in other words, it would not really know whether it is alive or dead. The ontological condition that we are talking about here can be compared to the state of sleep where being proceeds without representation. The representative aspect of the literary experience, therefore, makes it possible for the self's feelings and thoughts to be more clearly expressed. Paradoxically, if philosophy is about achieving a clear understanding of the world, then philosophical clarity is possible only on the foundation of literariness through which the concealed becomes unconcealed. Literariness, therefore, disciplines unconcealment, and it turns it into (an) idiom, as without it being would not be able to express itself. Thus instead of acquiring the form of the idiom, it would remain the *il y a* (there is) in the Levinasian sense, i.e. an anonymous ontological condition (the womb of being).

Interpretation and the Reading Process

The basic difference between literature, music and the plastic arts is that literature is supposedly less sensitized; in other words, literary imagism takes place not in the senses (like in the case of music and the plastic arts) but in the mind. Of course, when reading we are faced with physical signs but their cynosural assemblage is a phenomenon that happens in the imagination. What makes the novel, for example, different from other works of art is that it is not a performing work; it is limited to the reader's imagination and subjectivity that Levinas considered to be

"the temple or the theatre of transcendence."[53] Whitman's intellectual guru, on the other hand, Emerson maintained that, "works of art should not be detached, but extempore performances."[54] Additionally, Peter Kivy reminds us that classical poetry was at base a performing art (ever since the Homeric epics).[55] F.O. Matthiesen in discussing Whitman's poetry also points to its performative aspects which he – following Aristotle – sees as originating from the ritual of dance:

> If poetry's origin is to be found in the dance, in the rise and fall of 'consenting feet' (in Gummere's phrase), the phases of its progression may be thought of in the following closely connected order: first, movement; then sound (or melody); then, sense (or words).[56]

Until the High Middle Ages reading was usually practiced out loud, since until then texts were composed in the form of *scriptura continua,*[57] i.e. they did not include spaces between words. Thus to a certain extent even reading in this context was more or less a performing art, since it appealed to the sense of hearing and this is why Kivy suggests that we should treat silent readings as impoverished yet still "self-directed performances."[58] The performance can be compared to a musician or actor practicing their part before the public performance. Kivy refers to these private rehearsals through the notion of the "inner Ion,"[59] i.e. the reciting persona of the text which stands in figuratively for the ego of the writer. Kivy's thinking presupposes the existence of a private language of the self. However, there is no such thing as a strictly private language that we could think to emerge in a soliloquy, since the self in its speaking literally imagines the addressee and the context it is responding to in its imaginative needs, in other words, linguistic interaction is always dialogical. Kivy reminds us that philosophers like Daniel Dennet hold that the inner colloquy happens

---

[53] Emanuel Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in: *The Levinas Reader*. Seán Hand (ed.), (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), p. 185.
[54] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Beauty," in: *Emerson's Literary Criticism*. Eric W. Carlson (ed.), (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 22.
[55] Peter Kivy, "The Experience of Reading," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*..., p. 108.
[56] F.O. Mattheissen, *American Renaissance*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 564.
[57] Peter Kivy, "The Experience of Reading," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*...,p. 108.
[58] Ibid., p. 109.
[59] Ibid., p. 117.

in a certain tone of voice stressing even further the performative aspect of the reading process.[60]

The self, therefore, creates itself in dialogical exchange and from this perspective it is a linguistic construction. Nevertheless, in opposition to such a view the existence of an inner language was anticipated by Plato, since as Kivy reminds us, in the *Sophist* Plato maintains that thought and speech are the same in the sense that thought is speech that has not yet been pronounced.[61] This observation is, however, contradictory, since in *Phaedrus* Plato obviously differentiates between thought and speech by stressing that speech is the reproduction of the contents that has been inscribed in the soul.[62]

The problematic relation between writing and speech is also preserved in Whitman's poetry. Matthiessen notes that Whitman "believed that you could realize the full beauty of a word only on those rare occasions when you heard it pronounced with modulation and timbre, and that such power of speech was the subtlest property of organic well-being, dependent alike on the flexible structure of the throat and chest, and on 'a developed harmonious soul.'"[63]Although modern philosophers think the dependency relation between thought and speech a myth, Gary L. Hagberg states that, "thought is in fact possible once speech is place."[64] This brings Hagberg close to the Heideggerian and Merleau-Pontyian understanding that it is language and not the self that speaks. Moreover, the assumption of thought anticipating speech automatically suggests that the self pre-exists performative experience and external descriptions.

Nevertheless, as we find in Plato, Ion does not only recite the *Illiad* to the public, but he also interprets the words of the poet. Of course, this does not have to happen at the time of the performance but perhaps before or after it. What is implied here, however, is that theory is a part of the performing aspect of the text, since it creates a certain interpretative foundation for the reading of a work, and it emerges in the gaps of the text. The theoretical appraisal of the text is what Kivy figuratively refers to as "the 'other' Ion."[65]

---

[60] Ibid., p. 111.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Plato, "Phaedrus," in: *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Vincent B. Leitch, (ed.), (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), p. 82.
[63] F.O. Mattheissen, *American Renaissance*…, p. 554.
[64] Gary L. Hagberg, "Literature and the Constitution of Personhood," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*…, p. 122.
[65] Peter Kivy, "The Experience of Reading," in: *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature…,* p. 117