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POETS AND TRANSLATORS AT THE END OF A WORLD

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Dissertation Abstract

When human worlds end, how may we respond? My dissertation argues that, since the 18th century, poetic genius often provided the paradigm. Instead, I argue, translation ought to be our model.

The first chapter sets out the problem: world-loss brings about conceptual loss. Concepts become impossible to instantiate when the ensemble of practices (or, the human worlds) that sustain them are lost. I call "radical conceptual loss" the loss of the very capacity to process loss, including conceptual loss. Psychoanalytically speaking, it is the capacity to mourn. Modernization, it has been argued, entails such radical conceptual loss, resulting in distinctly modern melancholia, an incapacity to mourn world-loss at the scale at which it confronts us. Nevertheless, the promise of human agency, even over world-loss, is constitutive of modernization experiences, too. The challenge is to think adequate forms of such agency. Because world-loss gives rise to historical consciousness, I argue that agency in response to world-loss most generally needs to be theorized under the heading of "historical agency," and I provide a pragmatist account of such agency. The question becomes: are there particular models of historical agency available today that allow us to think what it would mean to mourn world-loss?

German historical thought has shaped how we approach this question since the late 18th century, and often for the worse, I argue. My second chapter shows that, after the French Revolution, the concept of (primarily poetic) genius migrated from the field of aesthetics into philosophy of history as that field was coming into its own. I locate this shift in Immanuel Kant's writings of the 1790s. After 1789, Kant emphasized the possibility of human agency in history, in an emphatic sense of free moral agency that becomes historically efficacious in genius-like acts of revolutionary foundings. This *poetic paradigm*, I suggest, remained foundational for many later attempts to theorize historical agency since. Yet it obscures the need for collectively mourning instances of world-loss, as it only ever presents the past as either material to be used or as predecessors to be overcome.

Goethe's *Faust* hints at an alternative model: translation, rather than poetic genius. In line with my pragmatist understanding of concepts as practice-bound, I turn to historical translation practices and reconstruct practice-immanent translation concepts operative around 1800, the same historical period that also saw the birth of the poetic paradigm, from a corpus of over three-hundred German translator's prefaces. The first corpus of its kind, it represents sixteen source languages, and a broad range of text genres, from 1750-1830. I find that translators' social class reliably tracks distinct strands of translational practice, each with its own understanding of translation. Those self-understandings are relayed explicitly in the prefaces' contents and implicitly in historically developing, genre-conventions of the preface form. Methodically layering computational, sociological, historical, formal-literary, and hermeneutic approaches, I reconstruct the most promising of these practice-immanent (self-)understandings of translation, in dialogue also with canonical translation theories of that age.

I then integrate this thick concept of translation into pragmatist philosophy of history. *Translatio* had already been the conceptual backbone of Latinate historical thought until the 16th century. It fell out of usage then, for reasons articulated by Kant's erstwhile student Johann Gottfried Herder. My concept of literary translation allows us to meet Herder's challenges and re-actualize the salvageable core of *translatio* under late modern conditions. I call it *translational action*: a distinct type of intervention in concept-enabling practices, restoring to them the practical intelligibility they had lost. Such crisis-responses count as historical actions precisely when they shape the meaning of historical crises by allowing us to mourn, structurally and creatively, what was lost in them. This, I argue, makes translational action preferable to the poetic paradigm. Expanding neo-Hegelian recognition theory in a diachronic direction, I argue that because successful mourning enables free recognitive relations with the collectively internalized past, iterated translational action is emancipatory in the sense of contributing to historical freedom, re-conceived to include freedom both from *and* with the past.

But is successful translational mourning ever an option for us late moderns, if modernization has disrupted our very capacity for mourning generally? My final chapter turns to Rainer Maria Rilke's late *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*, as an extended case study of a translational action, performed on the very concept of mourning in the medium of poetry. The two cycles jointly enable (again) forms of mourning that traditional elegiac poetry had sustained. Elegiac form had become derelict in German around 1900, and then World War One gave rise to an acutely felt need for collective mourning. In response to the war and surrounding crises, which Rilke understood as culminations of ongoing modernization processes, he performed a translational work on poetic form, restoring intelligibility to the concept of mourning this form carried. My reading both contrasts with and to an extent synthesizes earlier philosophical strands of Rilke interpretation (such as Martin Heidegger's) with more recent literary and philological scholarship.

To my parents,

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Chapter One.

World-Loss, Mourning, and Historical Agency

This dissertation proposes translation as a model for responding to the end of a human world. Not the end of *the* world that is, but of human worlds, in the plural, as we make and unmake them. Such making and unmaking is the matter of history. What agency we have in this process, I will argue, has to be theorized as historical agency. The question concerning historical agency was much debated in the late 18th century, when modern philosophy of history first came into its own. As a matter of practical philosophy, it has since been mostly forgotten. For a while now we have known that human historical agency is even wider in scope than originally thought, reaching deep into natural history but, at the same time, also highly precarious, even self-undermining in its consequences. In light of all this, I propose we re-open the question: who acts in history, and what would it mean to do this well?

My primary goal is to put these questions back on the agenda of a contemporary philosophy of history. To this end, I look at the dominant answer given, which emerged when a late 18th century concept of poetic genius migrated from aesthetics into philosophy of history after the French Revolution. Few believe in either aesthetic or historical genius anymore, yet it tacitly structures our thinking on these matters even today. I propose an alternative to this poetic paradigm of human historical agency. It is grounded in historical translation practices, and I call it *translational action*. For centuries, an older concept of *translatio* had been the backbone of Latinate Western historical thought, until it was lost with the onset of modernity. This dissertation offers a re-statement of the salvageable core of this pre-modern idea for present times. Its appeal today, I argue, lies in that translational action allows us to think of creatively mourning the loss of a world as itself emancipatory: as realizing a revised, yet still distinctly modern form of historical freedom.

1. Three Examples of World-Loss

A brief look at three very different examples brings my central concerns into view. Note that none offers a case of translation in the literal sense. By the end of this book, I hope to have convinced the reader that, nevertheless, each example illustrates aspects of a genuinely translational response to historical crises, in a conceptually precise sense of translation that is well grounded, we shall see, in historical practices of translation in the narrow, textual sense.

Consider first the Apsáalooke nation. In the 1850s, they were forced to give up their nomadic way of life on the Great Plains and settle on a reservation. As Jonathan Lear has shown, many concepts fundamental to the old way of life became unintelligible.[1] Courage, for example, was primarily understood through practices like buffalo hunting and inter-tribal warfare. When these became impossible, the question arose: what could courage even mean in such a world? At the heart of the concept lay the protection of Apsáalooke boundaries. A traditional symbol for boundary protection was the chickadee, which also signified to them the capacity for learning and adaptation. Collectively interpreting dream visions of chickadee, the Apsáalooke arrived at a concept of chickadee-courage. It allowed them to see adaptation as itself a form of protecting boundaries, thus also a form of courage. It gave them a standard for transforming other concepts and practices, too. Trade-offs that sacrificed the letter of the old to retain its spirit became conceivable as themselves courageous learning processes. Such processes, I will argue, can be fruitfully analyzed as translations. As an indicator, and no more, consider that their actions were beset by all the tensions and difficulties that haunt literary translation: questions of fidelity and (self-)betrayal, ethical integrity and cultural hybridity, historical rupture and continuities, loss and compromise. Their traditional enemies, like the Sioux, challenged them: had the thin line between courageous adaptation and selling out to the colonizer been crossed?

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[1] My reading of this example throughout builds on Lear (2006; 2007; 2017). Kretz (2018) explores it in detail, and we return to it also in the fourth chapter.

My second example is Chen Kaige's celebrated 1993 film *Farewell My Concubine* (霸王別姬): a single artwork, rather than a collective and extended course of action, again in a context of modernization, but on the vaster scale of a highly differentiated society. The film narrates the decline of traditional Beijing opera. Rooted in Qing Dynasty China (1636-1912), the world of this art form, with its distinctive aesthetics, hierarchies, pedagogies, forms of gender expression, and embodied, artistic knowledge, still flourishes during the fledgling Chinese Republic (1912-1949). Shaken by Japanese imperialism, civil war, and the communist revolution in turn, the Cultural Revolution, finally, seems to spell the end of Beijing opera. But the film overlays the story of its two protagonists, opera actors who specialize in one opera in particular, the titular *Farewell My Concubine*, with the plot of that same opera—a synecdoche of the form as a whole—such that, in the end, it *is* the opera *Farewell My Concubine* that is being told, by the film that shares its name, in that film's telling of how there can no longer be such operas. The film takes the place of the play; Beijing opera, as a form, is translated in(to) the medium of film.

The conclusion is not triumphant. The old art form was built on pedagogies of oppression and systemic sexual violence. Some things are better lost, Chen suggest—just not by way of cultural revolution, which reproduces the violence that had previously been sublimated into art. The film remains deeply ambivalent about these mechanisms of sublimation. Can art be celebrated without condoning substrates of structural violence in the societies from which it grows? The film wagers that we could genuinely resolve these ambivalences only by first learning to hold them in intentional, artistic irresolution. Only then can we truthfully bury what was bad about the old and give an afterlife to what was good. Yet, his film also has to face its own ethical-political dilemmas, introducing foreign forms (Hollywood) and foreign financing (Hong Kong, Taiwan) in a complex geopolitical constellation.[2]

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[2] Lau (1995, 19–21).

One final example, which the last chapter will discuss at length, from the West and in response to World War One and surrounding crises of modernization, within a single medium rather than between several: the late lyric poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke. Often considered a poet of the private and the timeless, his letters reveal that he thought existential questions of love and death were reconfigured by the historical crises of modernity as these culminated in the War.

What great disorientation will prevail afterwards, when all the concepts (*Begriffe*) taken in good faith have been taken from the pedestals on which they had been placed, and the confused survivors will have to reconnect again with the abandoned laws of our innermost being.[3] (To Ellen Delp, Munich, Oct 10, 1915)

The "laws of our innermost being," in Rilke, refers to matters of love and death. These two are connected in the phenomenon of mourning. Since elegiac poetry is mourning poetry, it makes sense that Rilke came to think of his late *opus magnum*, the *Duino Elegies* as a response to the crises of modernity and the war. The war had left society with a tremendous task of mourning for which, Rilke thought, it was ill-prepared. A century of modernization had hollowed out religious and aesthetic forms of mourning, including elegiac form. By 1900, German elegy, as a genre, had fallen into a moribund state. Rilke's *Duino Elegies* reanimate the form, restoring vibrancy to the concept of mourning carried by the form. But they do so without denying the prior loss of the form. Thoroughly modernist, they exhibit the form's brokenness, even as they weld its shards into the integrity of a cycle. The cycle-structure is borrowed from the sonnet form; Rilke finished the Elegies simultaneously with

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[3] „Was wird das für eine Ratlosigkeit geben hernach, wenn all die gläubig hingenommenen Begriffe von den Sockeln, auf denen man sie aufgestellt hat, abgenommen sein werden, und die verwirrt Überlebenden an die verlassenen Gesetze des innersten Daseins sich wieder werden anschließen wollen." All citations from Rilke's letters are taken from Rilke (1935; 1937). Unless indicated otherwise, translations from the German are my own throughout.

the *Sonnets to Orpheus* in February 1922. Though not commonly read together, I will show that the two cycles formally interlock and together perform a single work of translation in response to historical crisis: the *Elegies'* poetics exemplarily perform a work of mourning; the *Sonnets* initiating into a form of life that is ever ready to mourn anew, self-consciously within and against continued crises of modernity.

To summarize the similarities that matter to me here: in all three cases we see varying degrees of what I want to call world-loss leading to conceptual loss. In response, we see someone perform work on (social, aesthetic, religious, etc.) forms internal to the practices that sustained the concepts lost. This work measures the distance to traditional forms, trades the letter for the spirit and integrates elements foreign to the forms. But it strives to do so with integrity, to enable again the concepts (of courage, of beauty, of mourning, and so on) carried by these forms. Just what integrity means here, and how it could be achieved, then invites all the ontological, ethical, and political questions that (literary) translation invites, too.

All this suggests translation as a handy metaphor. But the term can be made conceptually precise, and precision is needed, if we are to distinguish translational responses from subtly, but decisively different alternatives. The next chapter will look at what I take to be the most influential such alternative, which looks to an 18ᵗʰ century concept of poetic genius as its model, rather than translation. First the problem needs to be clarified. The remainder of this chapter elaborates on what exactly is meant by world-loss, conceptual loss, and when and why these constitute a problem. Secondly, I argue that responses to this problem have to be theorized under the heading of historical agency and I explain what I mean by that. I conclude with a chapter overview and a brief explanation of why this inquiry has to work with literary, philosophical, and historical sources through a plurality of methods and hermeneutics.

2. World-loss as the Cause of Conceptual-Loss

Most basically, losing a concept means no longer having it; "having a concept" I take to mean: being able to deploy the concept in one's reasoning and thereby to orient oneself in being.[4] We deploy concepts in our theoretical reasoning, when we attempt to know realities, and in our practical reasoning, when we attempt to change them. Such deployment is an indispensable part of us coming to know and interact with ourselves, others, and the world around us.[5] Not all concept-deployment is conscious. Often, we will act and think out of habit, under concepts that are dispositionally available to us. This means that, when prompted, we can provide explanations and justifications that will feature the requisite concepts. Where we do not have the relevant concepts ourselves, we will be able to point to others who do, for example, if some technical expertise is needed. Collectively, for the most part, we have a sufficient stock of concepts in play to orient ourselves in every-day life, however unequally distributed conceptual resources might also be.[6]

To lose a concept is then to no longer be able to deploy it in one's reasoning.[7] In the case of theoretical reasoning, that means we will no longer be able to explain (causally) or understand (interpretively) something as an instance of concept X. In the case of practical reasoning, it means we will no longer be able to do some action, or take up some practical identity, and achieve the goods

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[4] I start with "having a concept" rather than the more basic question "what is a concept?" Because I agree with Joel Isaac that "there simply is no consensus" on what concepts are, but fortunately our inquiry is also not dependent on any particular metaphysics of concepts (2025, 26).

[5] There has been much debate about the scope and possibility of non-conceptually navigating the world (for example, the Dreyfus-McDowell debate recorded in Schear 2013). A lot hinges on how wide a concept of concepts one has. But even if we were to grant that some forms of somatic or artistic knowledge, say, are thoroughly non-conceptual, there is little reason to think that those modes of orienting ourselves in being could not also be lost, just like concepts could, with the practices that sustain them, or that they alone could reliably compensate for conceptual loss. Even if it were a theoretical possibility, non-conceptual world-access by itself is no practical solution.

[6] This issue has received a lot of attention in social epistemology following the groundbreaking work of Miranda Fricker (2009).

[7] My discussion of conceptual loss throughout this section is deeply indebted to the works of Cora Diamond (1988; 2008), Jonathan Lear (2006; 2017), Alasdair MacIntyre (1977; [1981] 2007), and Bernard Williams (2011).

these aim at realizing. To know, do or be anything determinate at all is to know, do or be the thing in question under the relevant concept. Where the concept, for whatever reason (about which more in a minute), has become unavailable to our reasoning or, as we might also say, has become unintelligible, a possibility is lost, at least for us, for here and now: the possibility to know, do, or be someone or something under the concept in question. Conceptual loss is a form of (epistemic, practical, ontological) incapacitation.

A distinction between theoretical and practical intelligibility is important here.[8] Practical intelligibility means that one can employ a concept in one's own practical and theoretical reasoning competently and *as* one's own, in earnest. A concept is merely theoretically intelligible to me when I can understand, more or less well, how it could be practically intelligible to others, without it being practically intelligible to me.[9] Practical intelligibility comes in degrees. We might have mastered a concept only imperfectly, applying it unreliably, jokingly, with hesitation, irony, or in the manner of play—with less than full, straight-faced and competent ownership, in short. This will often occur when we are still in the process of acquiring the concept or, inversely, of losing it. But it remains useful to distinguish even limited practical intelligibility from merely theoretical intelligibility. From a historian's or anthropologist's point of view, concepts can be theoretically intelligible long after the people to whom they were practically intelligible are gone.[10] The concern of my inquiry is with conceptual loss

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[8] I believe this distinction corresponds, at the more fine-grained level of individual concepts, to a distinction Bernard Williams made at the higher level of entire ways of life, between those that are a "real" option for people, and those that are merely a "notional" option (2011, 178f).

[9] Presumably, some concepts can be both practically and theoretically intelligible at the same time. Scholars, too, after all have to live both and during the reflection, as Bernard Williams once remarked (2011, 130). Nonetheless, theoretical reflection will often entail some distance to practical deployment and might arise from some disturbance in the concept's practical intelligibility. I suspect some of the practically most intelligible concepts will be those we employ with such ingrained habituation that they are hardly salient as targets for theoretical inquiry.

[10] Davidson (1973) and others have made a compelling case that in-principle theoretical unintelligibility is just another word for meaninglessness. Archaic civilizations, extinct languages and the like, where we can do no more than discern traces of purposeful activity without being able to reconstruct its meaning anymore, present practical difficulties, not theoretical objections.

as the loss of practical intelligibility only. Unless stated otherwise, conceptual loss will refer to that.[11]

Secondly, it is worth distinguishing loss in practical intelligibility from loss in what I would like to call a concept's vibrancy. This distinction tracks the difference between the questions "why would I apply this concept?" and "how could I possibly apply it?" Some concepts might be perfectly intelligible, even as we find ourselves unmotivated to apply them. Practical identities provide good examples, such as being a teacher, a citizen, a parent, a Christian, a Marxist, or the like. Much of what we do, we do as someone who took up one or another practical identity. As a rule, we have concepts of the identities we inhabit. These concepts, and the possibilities they open up, might feel vibrant to us—not just intelligible, but appealing and alive. When they lose this vibrancy, we find ourselves without a good answer to the question: why should I understand myself through this concept? This question might indicate that the concept has become unintelligible, but it might also indicate that, for one reason or another, it has simply become unappealing, while in principle remaining perfectly and transparently applicable.

Concepts and worlds. When does conceptual loss become a problem? Many instances are benign, primarily when we cease to deploy concepts for good reasons. Children stop invoking Santa Claus in explanations of the origins of Christmas gifts, and chemists stopped invoking phlogiston in explanations of combustibility. General culture, in the former case, and the science of chemistry, in the latter, had alternative concepts ready such that child and chemist are not left disoriented. But even where no immediate alternative is ready at hand, we might experience such conceptual loss as not much of a loss at all. Having no fitting concept can be preferable to having ill-fitting concepts.

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[11] Note that this distinction between theoretical and practical intelligibility is orthogonal to that between theoretical and practical reasoning. The concepts of theoretical reasoning can be practically intelligible or not. For example, the concept of oxygen is practically intelligible to chemists. They deploy it competently and in earnest in their scientific (that is, theoretical) reasoning. The theoretical concept of phlogiston is no longer practically intelligible to them in this way. It cannot feature in respectable scientific inquiry anymore. It is very much theoretically intelligible to the historian of chemistry, however, how the concept was practically intelligible to chemists before Lavoisier.

Nonetheless, we are justified in talking of loss here, as shown by its irreversibility. Child and chemist have not simply chosen to momentarily put aside those concepts. Convinced of their inadequacy, they cannot pick them up again.

The problematic conceptual loss that concerns me here occurs not because we are convinced by reasons to give up a concept, but find ourselves compelled to do so, causally, and by a specific kind of cause, moreover, which I want to call world-loss. As with concepts so with worlds, my focus is on what it means to lose them, rather than what they are in themselves. No iron law dictates the order of inquiry here (although, I do suspect that our attempts to articulate concepts of concept and world would benefit from understanding how these can be lost). In general terms, we can think of worlds as ensembles of intersubjectively constituted human practices that provide the contexts in which concepts are intelligible.[12] The main thought to hold onto here is that worlds, as practical contexts, are distinct from concepts' theoretical contexts. Concepts often need other concepts to be intelligible, as contrastive pairs or umbrella terms, for example. Since sometime between Herder and Hegel, Western philosophy began to think of concepts as depending for their practical intelligibility also on certain kinds of practical contexts. Although themselves conceptually articulable, these are something else than yet more concepts.

It is neither necessary nor possible here to offer a comprehensive theory of the many ways in which concepts depend on such practical contexts.[13] I would merely like to note that such dependence does *not* imply a straightforward reduction of the conceptual to the non-conceptual, nor amount to crude relativism, as the possibility is very much left open that concepts will retain their practical

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[12] Here I am indebted to pragmatist readings of Arendt's and Heidegger's notions of world as offered, for example, by Rahel Jaeggi (1997) and Florian Klinger (2014).

[13] I seems to me that we can neither be purely empiricist about the conceptual, insofar as our inquiry will always have to retain a hermeneutic element, but neither ought we mystify conceptual change by being completely non-empirical, *contra* Martin Heidegger, nor should we be reductionists who identifying a world with any of its component parts, as Carl Schmitt, for example, identifies it with the political. I hope to defend these convictions at greater length in future work.

intelligibility in contexts other than the those in which they first emerged, perhaps at the price of undergoing some transformations. Theoretical intelligibility even of distant contexts' concepts is always a possibility, at least *prima facie*.[14] But no matter how far they are able to travel, concepts of the kind that we are concerned with will always depend for their intelligibility on some practical context. For the purposes of our inquiry, I want to hold on to three notable aspects of conceptual loss as caused by world-loss. They will help us better understand when and why it is a problem.

Aspects of world-loss. First, conceptual loss precipitated by world-loss is not temporary, unlike the suspension of concept-deployment that occurs in certain aesthetic, religious, or psychedelic experiences, in travel and ethnographic fieldwork, in dreams and some forms of mental pathology. However valuable some of these experiences also are, we do not aim to make a home in such states. Rather, these happen against a background of relative normalcy in which we ordinarily dwell. The presence of this background makes our incapacity to deploy concepts in such states somewhat foreseeable and controllable. By contrast, I am interested in cases in which the 'normal' background is precisely revealed to be contingent.

Secondly, conceptual loss as precipitated by world-loss can show varying degrees of what I want to call fundamentality and comprehensiveness. Concepts come in clusters and nested orders, like the practices and worlds that sustain them and often in isomorphic parallel. For example, combustibility research is a part of chemistry is a part of empirical natural science which is part of the world of academia, and modern societies entail many overlapping and nested worlds. The loss of the concept of phlogiston might endanger one research program in chemistry and leave our larger understanding of chemistry intact. But if a theocratic counter-revolution, say, of Orwellian efficacy were to cause the higher-level practice of modern science to disappear, this would render the entire concept of chemistry practically unintelligible and, it stands to reason, the concepts carried by its sub-branches with it. If

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[14] This point has rightly been stressed by Benjamin Straumann (2019).

some world or practice is lost, then it is likely that the concepts embedded in their lower-level parts, too, are put under pressure. This is the dimension of fundamentality.

Then there is the question of comprehensiveness. A phlogiston expert might have been many things besides: a hobby cellist, a family member, a socialite, a religious believer, and so on. In highly differentiated forms of life, such practical identities will be anchored in domains that retain degrees of relative autonomy vis-à-vis each other. Often the loss of practices and attendant concepts in one domain can be compensated, to an extent, by those of another. By contrast, cases like that of the Apsáalooke show that central concepts in a number of spheres can sometimes simultaneously loose their practical intelligibility, especially when the spheres themselves are closely integrated.[15]

Thirdly, conceptual loss is intersubjective. The practices and worlds which sustain concepts are shared by a plurality of individuals, human and other; so will be their loss. It might be shared unevenly. One reason already mentioned is the relative autonomy of several domains or practices within a world relative to each other. The loss might then at first appear to be merely subjective, limited to a few individuals or groups. Two other factors ought to be at least briefly mentioned here, although I cannot discuss them in detail and abstraction here. The first is power. When worlds and practices are deliberately eroded or outright destroyed by those who stand to gain from it, these forces might also wield their influence to mask the loss they caused. This introduces all the problems associated with ideology and its critique.[16]

A second factor is the temporal differentiation of a form of life's inhabitants. World-loss can happen very fast, or slowly, even spanning generations. In many cases, slow processes of erosion and

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[15] I distinguish fundamentality and comprehensiveness for analytic purposes, but in practice they will often go together. If something disrupts a form of life in such a way as to impact the intelligibility of its most fundamental concepts, that will likely have both its cause in a number of lower-level disturbances in various parts of that form of life and itself become the cause of further such disturbances in areas previously untouched.

[16] Rahel Jaeggi and Robin Celikates (2017, ch. 8) provide an overview.

faster periods of acute crisis go hand in hand (much like bankruptcy, according to Hemingway, happens: "Two ways. Gradually, then suddenly"). Cross-generational conceptual loss poses particular problems related to collective memory, for example how younger generations experience or inherit a loss, when they are socialized into a world that does not have a particular concept anymore, but by people who were themselves socialized into a world that still did.

To summarize, the conceptual loss that we will be concerned with, is the loss in practical intelligibility of concepts with which we orient ourselves in being in our reasoning. This includes theoretical and practical reasoning. The loss we concern ourselves with is caused by the loss of the practical contexts that enable this intelligibility, human practices differentially clustered into worlds, which leads, ultimately, to a lasting incapacitation, the impossibility of certain ways of knowing, doing, and being that is intersubjectively shared, albeit unevenly along axes of power and time.

3. Radical Conceptual Loss

Still, we might ask, just when is such loss a problem, structurally? Each of us might find some loss or other problematic for personal reasons, being invested in this role or that ideal. But even widely shared, quantitatively extreme loss—the comprehensive loss of many of our most fundamental concepts— over a short span of time, and even without immediate compensation, cannot unqualifiedly be called an evil, and might even be a good. The worlds, practices, and concepts of the antebellum South or Nazi Germany provide handy examples. And how sure do we feel about the goodness of our contemporary world with all the injustices and sufferings it inflicts on masses of human and non-human life?

The goodness or badness of worlds as a whole is difficult to assess objectively. This is partly because our position as judges will always be partial, as inhabitants of certain worlds and not others, and certain social positions within the worlds we inhabit. But difficulties also arise from the fact that

the standards of any judgment are at least genetically linked to some world, like all concepts. Worlds, we might say, are grounds of value. Only by being socialized into worlds, their practices and concepts, can we come to see anything as valuable at all—including values that transcend those worlds, on the basis of which we might judge them—and most goods we can only hope to realize with others with whom we share in a world and its practices.[17] As mentioned, this is not to imply some crude form of reductionism or relativism, but simply to point out that without inhabiting some world our capacity to value at all is severely put in question.

We get a better handle on the question when world-loss and attendant conceptual loss are a problem if we do not ask, adjectivally, about the goodness or badness of a loss, but, adverbially, about what it means to lose well or badly. However we stand vis-à-vis the loss of some world, practices, or concepts, I want to argue, if they are being lost, we ought to care about losing them well. To this conclusion, I would like to propose the following argument. First, world-loss is the kind of loss that calls for a work of mourning. Losing a world well requires mourning it well. Second, the concept of mourning, and with it the possibility to mourn, can itself be lost. Let us call this possibility *radical conceptual loss*: loss of the very capacity to process loss, including conceptual loss. Third, radical conceptual loss leads to structural problems with subject-formation, with the possibility of becoming an agent. This ought to concern us prior to, and independently of, any question about the goodness or badness of subsequent acts.

De-cathexis. Why does world-loss necessarily call for a work of mourning? My answer here is informed by psychoanalysis.[18] Worlds are grounds of value as well as of subject-formation. On an

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[17] MacIntyre (2016, 168-176).

[18] See especially Freud ([1917] 1946; [1923] 1940), as well as Butler (2004), Klein ([1940] 1994), Lear (2014; 2022), Loewald (1989). In the fifth chapter, we will look at Rainer Maria Rilke's poetics of mourning. As we shall see, like Freud's theory, they respond to World War One and related crises of modernity. The two men knew, respected, and influenced each other—most obviously in the direction from Freud to Rilke, via the mediation of Lou Andreas-Salomé, but possibly also in the other direction, cf. Freud ([1916] 1946), and the commentaries in Unwerth (2005), Kristiansen (2013).

analytic picture, subject-formation consists in life-long processes of affective attachment and detachment. From childhood on, we attach to formative alterities: toys, parents, siblings, and later on friends, teachers, partners, but also roles, practices, ideals, institutions, and even entire worlds. Worlds are themselves objects of our attachment, they also contain objects of attachment, and some attachments will necessarily be shared between the inhabitants of a world *qua* inhabitants of that world, however unevenly or asymmetrically. Power is relevant here again. For example, oppressors might be positively-libidinally invested in practices or concepts in which the oppressed are negatively-aggressively invested in. Given that all of us occupy complex identities where various planes of power intersect, much of our worlds will be ambivalently cathected.[19]

My point is that attachment as such is not optional. Learning to engage in a practice or inhabit a world is learning to care, one way or another. Thus, the loss of worlds, practices, and concepts that we experience as ours, in the sense of: those with which our sense of self and value is tightly interwoven, is not something one can be indifferent to. The interweaving need not be inextricable, but it will be of the kind that requires, precisely, extrication. The psychoanalytic term for that work is mourning. Of course, some worlds, practices, and concepts we might value only instrumentally. Properly speaking, their loss is merely a lack that could be met with a functional equivalent. But necessarily we will also value some worlds, practices, and concepts non-instrumentally. This does not make them irreplaceable. It just means that the process of replacing them is fundamentally different from merely finding functional equivalents.

Still, we might ask, how bad can it be if we do not mourn? Are there not worlds that are so bad that they do not deserve to be mourned much? To answer this objection, I need to unpack the technical, psychoanalytic sense of mourning further, as a working-through of affective attachments, which is slightly different from its colloquial use. I restate this concept of mourning here in the

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[19] A classical statement of the idea is Crenshaw (1989).

framework of a pragmatist, intersubjectivist account of the self, according to which we are constituted in our practical identities by relations of (mis)recognition.[20]

Freud starts with the idea of libidinal energy that subjects invest in love-objects. These can be other subjects or "abstractions in their place, like the fatherland, liberty, an ideal."[21] Mourning becomes needful when "reality tests" (*Realitätsprüfungen*), as Freud calls them, reveal that the cathected object is now gone and with it the goodness, pleasure, and meaning that flew from it. We fall into a depressive state and withdraw from the world.[22] Mourning properly begins with what Freud thinks of as the "narcissistic decision" to live on: we de-cathect, so the energies bound up in the cathexis become available again. For a time, there might be a surplus of unbound libidinal energy, surfacing in episodes of mania, before they are more stably re-invested again, and we return to life.

Importantly, the valence of these affective investments can be positive-libidinal or negative-aggressive, love or hate. Often both will be involved simultaneously, when our overall stance towards the loss is ambivalent. On the psychoanalytic view, attachments of both kinds require a work of mourning, or "working-through" (*durcharbeiten*). Even if our investment in what has been lost were entirely negative, this hatred or enmity, too would call for a work of mourning. Else our hatreds and enmities (which can also be sources of pleasure and meaning, of course) would continue to determine us long after their object is gone. In any case, unmixed love or hatred, on this view, is exceedingly rare, perhaps even impossible. Ambivalence is the norm rather than the exception. This poses problems of its own, in that the pre-dominance of positive or negative affects can make it difficult to acknowledge the presence of the other type, which in turn makes it harder to work-through those attachments. We

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[20] The classical roots of such accounts are found in Fichte ([1796] 1991) and Hegel ([1807] 1970), developed in recent times by authors like Judith Butler (2009, esp. pp. 26f), Axel Honneth (1992), Richard Rorty (1989, esp. ch. 2), and Ludwig Siep (2014).

[21] Freud ([1917] 1946, 429).

[22] Cf. Klein ([1940] 1994). Freud expresses puzzlement about the fact why this experience would necessarily have to be accompanied by psychic pain ([1917] 1946, 430). It remains a puzzle to this day, I believe.

will return to this issue; the important point to note here is that healthy mourning requires working through all attachments, positive and negative.

Internalization. If mourning succeeds, the result is a kind of freedom from the past, in the form of equanimity: we are no longer determined by our attachments. But Freud soon came to realize that this exclusive focus on negative "freedom from" is a one-sided picture. Often, we do not simply substitute one love object for another without remainder. What is lost stays with us, for better or worse. Psychoanalysis theorizes this phenomenon under the concept of internalization. [23] Internalization is the name given to the psychological mechanism by which formative others retain a presence even when they are absent, momentarily or even permanently. We continue to constitute ourselves under their gaze; we continue to recognize them as constitutive recognizers of ourselves. Psychoanalytic theory has offered rich accounts of the many forms this can take. For our purposes, we retain two aspects.

First, the internalized dead retain a subject-like quality. Odd as it may sound, they remain alterities with whom one can have recognitive relationships. We still recognize them as constitutive recognizers, even though they are gone. Importantly, this is not just sheer madness or folly on our part. To the contrary, subjectivity is hardly thinkable without some form of internalization of others' recognitive demands. The fact that some internalized formative others are dead would seem to make little difference. Fantasy and projection play a role here, of course. What we think they think matters more than what they actually think or would have thought. They are who they are essentially *for us*, just as we are who we are *for* them. But that is true for the living as well. In this way, psychoanalysis gives a secular sense to the idea of ancestral being as the living presence of the dead.

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[23] Freud ([1923] 1940, 255f) is the *locus classsicus*, cf. Butler (2004, 20–21). My most important source here is Hans Loewald's work (1980a; 1980b; 1980c; 1980d).

Secondly, internalized ancestral presence can be welcome or not, supportive or threatening. Successful mourning would enable free relationships with them also in a positive sense of freedom as being with them in a self-determined manner. It would allow us to maintain and deepen relationships we value and to either abandon those we do not value, or short of that, to at least keep a handle on them. The psychoanalyst Hans Loewald suggested that we speak here of "degrees of internalization."[24] On his interpretation, the well-known structural model of the psyche Freud eventually developed (Id, Ego, Super-Ego) refers to so many ways in which formative alterity is internalized, thus enabling or preventing free recognitive relationships.[25]

Consider it this way: internalized subjects address us. For our relations with them to be free, two conditions must obtain. Their demands must be intelligible to us, and they must not be underwritten by threat. One way of understanding what it means for internalized others to be located in the Id, is to say that their demands are enigmatic. We register them as meaningful, but the meaning is not transparent. On some level, we know what they want, but we resist hearing it consciously, and thus we feel haunted by their presence. Mourning is the work by which we turn such ghosts into ancestors, to echo Hans Loewald once more.[26] But once their demands are intelligible, they can still take different forms, with different corresponding modes of address.

For example, the internalized other might speak to us from the super-ego position when we have internalized their demands as impossible and hear them in the mode of command or threat. They might be in the ego-ideal position when we hear them speak in an exhortative tone, as authorities—less than command, but more than counsel. They might live inside us as alter-egos, offering the counsel characteristic of friendship.[27] Or we might find their voices merging with ours, when they

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[24] He introduces that concept in Loewald (1980b).
[25] The re-statement in terms of recognitive relations is where I supplement the Loewaldian account.
[26] Loewald (1980e, 248–49).
[27] In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle speaks of the friend as another self (1166a).

have been fully integrated into the ego core, and we fully identify with their demands.

Now we can see why the failure to mourn, or mourning poorly, is a problem. Mourning in this technical, psychoanalytic sense refers to the whole of the process: de-cathexis of lost external presences, as well as setting up internalized presences in a healthy way, conducive to free recognitive relationships, whether that freedom is primarily negative (indifference) or positive (sustained deepening of beneficial relationships). Failures of mourning directly lead to problems with subject-formation, because we then retain attachments to alterities that are no longer present externally, but whose recognitive demands we have internalized, either as enigmatic demands or as punishingly authoritative demands, or in some other harmful way. This prevents us from becoming as rational and healthy as practical agents as we could overwise be. This is a problem not according to some controversial standard of the good, but in terms of our capacity to be free, to achieve self-determination through relations of mutual recognition.

Forms of mourning. If mourning is as ubiquitous as psychoanalysis claims, can this capacity really be lost? There are reasons to think that mourning is not an entirely natural, in the sense of inalienable, capacity. From the beginning, it is embedded in social relations. Infant mourning is held and, ideally, supported by practices of parental care which are far from historically and culturally invariant. Adult mourning is supported by social forms of friendship and kinship, as well as cultural forms drawn from religious, artistic, philosophical, or therapeutic practices, and the like. And even if individual mourning at various stages in life were, to an extent, natural and inalienable, arguably the same does not hold for cases where we need to mourn entire worlds or the practices that constitute them. There is little reason to think that our biological evolution, largely complete before the onset of human history, should have prepared us in some way for dealing with the possibility of sharing in the loss of historical worlds. An incapacity to mourn may result when either existing forms of mourning are lost, or new forms of loss arise, for which we never had adequate forms to begin with.

However, this also means that, inversely, where we do create or maintain appropriate forms of mourning, we have some agency over the mourning process. We can seek out these forms and applying them to the case at hand. If they are inadequate, we might be able to develop new ones or transform old ones to meet current needs. Of course, since mourning is constitutive of subject-formation, our agency in the process will be fraught even in the best case. Who would be acting if the subject in question is only just coming into being? A psychoanalytic way of putting this is to say that a lot of it will happen unconsciously. Nonetheless, we can learn to repeat more consciously what at first happened only unconsciously. In the process, we can remedy earlier deficiencies. Such repetition is not entirely optional. For better or worse, all mourning, on this view, repeats earlier mourning. But there is such a thing as learning to repeat better, more consciously, whether that results in us acting differently or acting similarly but now identifying with the act more than we did before.[28] This is part of the work of analysis. Other cultural forms, too, can help in the process—as long as our worlds provide any such forms; as long as we do not suffer from what I have been calling radical conceptual loss, when mourning has become practically unintelligible for lack of practices for processing loss.

It has been argued that modernity as such meant radical conceptual loss. Robert Pippin cites an impressive list of witnesses to support such a claim.

> … the experience of modernization as a kind of spiritual failure, of modernity as loss … has been quite prominent in much European high culture of the last hundred years. Faust's failed bargain (or the "failure of science" and especially scientific power and knowledge, "for life"); Hölderlin's elegiac sense of modernity's profound loss; Hegel's claim in *Glauben und Wissen* that the religion of modern times is: "God is dead;" Balzac's, Stendahl's, and Flaubert's pictures of our crummy 'new' but not at all better bourgeois world, constant prey to romantic fantasies of recovery and

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[28] On this affirmative concept of repetition see Lear (2022, 37-40, 51-58, and *passim*).

restoration; Henry James's international theme and its ever-fading (dying) Europe; Proust on the passing of the Guermantes' world for the Verdurin's; Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor speculations; Joyce's and Eliot's ironic use of ancient myth; Rilke's elegiac metaphysics of absence; Husserl on the 'crisis' of the European sciences; Heidegger on the forgetting of Being; the nightmare worlds of Beckett and Kafka, dominated, if that is the right word, by mere pretensions to presence and authority; … and on and on. Everywhere the figures and images are of death and loss, and the language of mourning, or even… of melancholia, of a depressive's attachment to a loss that has not been worked through, perhaps cannot be; for which there is no "mourning work" (*Trauerarbeit*).[29]

The final line indicates the radical conceptual loss: that there cannot be a work of mourning. The remainder of his essay reads Nietzsche's proclamation that "God is dead, and we have killed him" as an expression of the same melancholy. Some of these names—Goethe's Faust, Rilke, Hegel, Heidegger—we will meet again over the course of this dissertation; particularly, Rilke who, I argue, did indeed think that the moderns had lost the concept of mourning. But he also worked to make mourning practically intelligible again, successfully I believe *pace* Pippin's above suggestion.[30]

Whether we accept this picture of modernity or not, what has become clear now is, first, that responding well to world-loss and conceptual loss requires mourning this loss well. This in turn requires that we have practically intelligible concepts of mourning, supported by the relevant forms of practice. These are the concepts that this inquiry pursues.

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[29] Pippin (1999, 495–96).

[30] In future work, I would like to tie in a phenomenological analysis of the structure of modernization experiences with the foregoing analysis of the phenomena of world-loss and conceptual loss to argue that the incapacity to process loss is, indeed, a hallmark of modernization experiences everywhere, not just in the West—but equally that such experiences imply a new-found sense of human agency, too, which is more prominently emphasized by those left-liberal and Marxist voices missing from Pippin's list, who retain hope in the "unfinished project of modernity" (Habermas [1980] 2021).

Personal and structural mourning. To further narrow down the search, I now want to make a distinction between personal mourning and structural mourning. The above analysis of mourning would seem to point our inquiry in the direction of ethics, for example, thinking about mourning as an Aristotelian virtue, an excellence of character midway between the extremes of a Stoic refusal to mourn and a melancholy eagerness to dwell with loss, say. But in addition to questions about living well with the possibility of world-loss individually, we can also ask what it means for worlds as grounds of subject-formation to have processed a loss, structurally. In the next section, I argue that this ultimately places our inquiry within philosophy of history, re-conceived along pragmatist lines.

Personal mourning, when an individual mourns a cathected object, is transformative of the psychic structure of that individual, ideally in the direction of both greater differentiation and greater integration. On the psychoanalytic picture offered above, the first acts of mourning occur in early infancy, when we give up our "primary narcissism," our initial sense of oneness with the world, which leads to the first formation of an ego as separate from reality; later on, superego and Id form, and the refinement, recalibration, and enrichment of these structures continues throughout life.

In personal mourning, the self is transformed, but the world is not. As we go into mourning, we reduce the affective investment in the worlds we inhabit, and as we exit mourning, we return again to the world as we find it. Personal mourning will thus always tend towards a certain conservatism, however psychically needful it is (witness the old Wobbly slogan: "Don't mourn, organize!"). The situation is still fundamentally the same whether the loss concerns a person, a concept, a practice, or an entire world, and even if several individuals mourn a shared loss in parallel, as individuals. They might come together in mourning, as a family, community, or nation. But as long as it is about each individual's attachments, it is an individually transformative but collectively conservative process, however needful.

The situation is different when shared mourning becomes the occasion for transforming the very structures that bring individuals together *qua* members of a shared world. Then mourning can extend from working through individual subjects' psychic structures to transforming the antecedent worldly structures of subject-formation. Perhaps we find ourselves reluctant to apply the term mourning when it comes to extra-psychic transformations of the worldly grounds of collective psyche-formation. We might prefer a term like processing. Of course, we should be careful not to not apply psychoanalytic categories at that level in too crude and direct a fashion. Worlds are not super-subjects. But a structural parallel to personal mourning obtains here, because as grounds of subject-formation they structure intersubjective webs of recognitive demands and affective investments.

Being socialized into worlds and their practices, we learn to make normative assessments, to recognize something as valuable or not, and that also means to desire one way or another, to cathect in certain, shared ways and not others. The exact mechanisms are evidently extremely complex, context-bound, and leave plenty of room for individual variation. They will also almost certainly involve a measure of contradiction. Most of us inhabit multiple overlapping and nested worlds, such that the recognitive demands constitutive of these worlds and their practice, the norms and desires internal to each, can cohere to a greater or lesser extent.[31] These contradictions surface not just intersubjectively, in the form of social tensions or outright conflict, but also intra-psychically. They might, for example, lead to what Alasdair MacIntyre has called compartmentalization, where individuals live by certain norms and values in one context and an incompatible set in another context, or various forms of neuroses.[32]

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[31] Cf. Rahel Jaeggi's discussion of such "relations of fit" (*Passungsverhältnisse*, 2023, 101–8). In chapter four, I will return to the left-Hegelian project of attempting to develop from the analysis of these contradictions a normative account for what it means to positively resolve them over time.

[32] MacIntyre (1999, 321-7).

We need not be too heavily normative here. The line between, on the one hand, healthy coping and "ordinary unhappiness" (Freud) and, on the other hand, (social) pathology, can be hard to draw in the abstract. But it is also easy to see that world-loss will lead to structural problems with subject-formation, when the web of recognitive demands that would ordinarily have been internalized has been disrupted. Those socialized into the old world, before the loss in intelligibility, have internalized certain demands like "I ought to be engaged in X. – Life could only be worth living if I could think of myself as an Y," and so on. These demands might be clear in their meaning, but impossible to fulfill, in that now nothing we could do could still be recognized as engaging in practice X or instantiating concept Y. That is the analogue to the super-ego position in the individual case. There is also an analogue to the Id position, when practices or identities have been forced underground, from where they surface symptomatically. We feel their demands on some level, but cannot fully admit that we do.

Individuals might work through their attachments to these demands on their own, but unless these impossibilities are recognized and worked-through on a structural level, it stands to reason that impossible or enigmatic demands will be passed down the generations through all the usual channels of social reproduction. The task of structurally working-through the loss of subject-forming grounds of normativity and affect is what we may think of as structural mourning. Like personal mourning, there would be a negative and a positive side to it: first, some kind of disentangling of those concepts, practices, perhaps even entire worlds that have become unintelligible from the larger webs and contexts in which they were embedded, analogous to the work of de-cathexis. Secondly, for those instances where the loss has not been exclusively negatively cathected (where, consequently, a purely negative "freedom from" in the form, ultimately, of collective indifference to the concept, practice, or world in question is most desirable), setting up positive substitutions, analogously to the work of internalization, will also be needful. Evidently a lot more needs to be said about this and will be over the course of this dissertation, especially in the fourth chapter. For now, let me stress three points.

First, that such a work of structural mourning is different from just finding functional equivalents, at least as long as we take the function of concepts, practices, or worlds to be something that could be stated in purely causal terms or value-free social scientific descriptions. To the contrary, it involves the transformation of practices' normative articulations and (thus also) the structures of affect they produce, what they lead us to attach value to. Methodologically, this means that an inquiry into particular cases of structurally transformative work will always retain a hermeneutic dimension, reconstructing the norms, values, meanings at play in the case at hand.

Secondly, structural mourning lacks personal mourning's in-built conservatism, because it does not take the world for granted. Nor does it seek merely to transform individuals' minds, not even those of all individuals in parallel. Rather, it would mean to process loss at the level of those worldly structures that shape our various individual identities in the first place. Of course, these do not exist in a vacuum but either nested within other worlds or side by side, overlapping and crisscrossing in complex manners. These contexts will always impose exogenous constraints. The transformation might run into the need of fitting its solutions into such given contexts. However, the analogue here on the personal level is new psychic structures finding into an antecedent environment of other psychic structures to connect to, rather than individuals reconciling themselves to the world as is.

Finally, though different, personal and structural mourning are not entirely unrelated. It seems plausible to me that where we have robust, vibrant practices for mourning at the personal level, we will be more likely to think that analogous processes at the structural level will be at least conceivable. Mourning an entire world structurally, as opposed to personally, might strike us as implausible. But if we find that mourning a personal loss is intelligible, then mourning a single concept, or a particular practice might seem just like a small step up the scale from there. And if individual practices and concepts seem structurally mournable, the perhaps small clusters of practices and concepts, and so on. Chapter Four looks at an old concept of *translatio*, which historians used to process historical and

political crises at a historiographical and legal level in the European Middle Ages, but which was also embedded in theological frameworks that were fundamentally continuous with the lower-level religious practices that people drew on to mourn personal loss.

The question is whether we do have adequate concepts for thinking what it would mean to work through the loss of a world, personally as well as structurally? And where would we even begin to look for such concepts, to see if we have any, and if so, to assess them? In the next section of this first, introductory chapter, I suggest that agency in response to and over world-loss has to be theorized under the heading of historical agency. In the second chapter, I will look at one influential model of historical agency and argue that it obscures the need for mourning worlds. The final three chapters will propose translation as a model for personally and structurally mourning world-loss.

4. Historical Agency as the Form of Practical Responses to World-Loss

What models do we have for practical responses to world-loss and the (radical) conceptual loss it brings about? The rest of this dissertation is dedicated to that question. The search for answers will be helped if we can first determine what general form any possible answer should take. I want to conclude this opening chapter by arguing that they ought to be theorized as historical actions. Talk of historical action is likely to inspire suspicion, and for good reasons. Many who claimed such agency for themselves count among history's greatest murderers. In the next chapter, my argument will be that we have inherited one-sided, more or less Bonapartist models of what historical agency consists in. But we can make good sense of the concept of historical agency, which is also a precondition for theorizing better models. The final three chapters will be dedicated to that task.

Before I propose my own concept of historical agency, I want to note that one can take this concept, and philosophy of history generally, in two ways: as part of theoretical philosophy or as part of practical philosophy. In the first case, philosophy of history stands to the academic discipline of

history like much philosophy of science stands to natural science, as philosophical reflection on its *epistemic* foundations. Philosophy of history today is overwhelmingly understood in this way. Action and agency might still be of interest, but in a theoretical and especially an epistemological key. The question then becomes how they ought to feature in historical explanation, be it as *explanandum* or *explanans*.[33]

By contrast, in the second case, we are interested in broadly normative questions, such as: what does it mean to act well historically? The presupposition here is that we may evaluate some actions, *qua* historical actions, not merely according to moral, political, legal, aesthetic and other criteria, covered by other branches of practical philosophy. Rather, there would be distinctly historical kinds of normativity we might bring to bear on those actions. Think of categories like *progressive* or *regressive*. These would then be related to, but also different from, say, political normativity, and potentially cut across many domains—technical, moral, political, economic, etc.—insofar as these have a genuinely historical dimension.[34]

Practical philosophy of history would need not content itself with articulating abstract normative standards either. It might also propose thick concepts, models of historical agency, in both the descriptive and the prescriptive sense, combining factual claims about what historical agency looks like with evaluative claims about what it means for it to go well.[35] In the next chapter, I will argue that, contrary to received wisdom about the history of the field, this was how modern philosophy of history

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[33] Ahlskog (2023) argues that philosophy of history before the narrativist turn of the 1970s, especially Collingwood, paid great attention to action in this way, and recommends a return to this focus—but still with an understanding of philosophy of history as theoretical philosophy.

[34] Though she prefers the label of social philosophy (*Sozialphilosophie*), I believe Rahel Jaeggi's recent restatement of the concepts of progress and regress goes a long way towards delimitating this normativity as *sui generis* (Jaeggi 2023, cf. 2014).

[35] Gilbert Ryle coined the term "thick concepts." Cf. Bernard Williams (2011, 155f) and in a slightly different vein Geertz (1973). An example of a thick concept is courage, which is both a term of praise and also descriptively narrow, pertaining to a small subset of praise-worthy acts, whereas the concept of goodness, is evaluative, but descriptively thin, potentially applying to a wide range of cases.

reflected on this question in its late 18th century beginnings. As answers to a largely forgotten question, they are still with us, and often for the worse. My overall ambition in this dissertation is to reopen the question of historical agency as a practical question for a contemporary philosophy of history.

First, I want to showcase the power of a pragmatist concept of historical agency, whether one subsequently puts it to use as a concept of theoretical or practical philosophy. My proposal is that an action is historical relative to X,

> if and only if it is judged by an historian of X,
> to feature indispensably in their account of an historical crises in X,

where X is the kind of thing that can have a history. And we will say that if an action is historical, the agents who execute it are, in that instance, historical agents, and we will refer to their capacity to execute it as their historical agency.

Minimalist concept of agency. In proposing a concept of historical action, I take myself to be theoretically explicating a concept that is already operative in practice, namely the practice of history, a discipline of inquiry at home in academic and other institutions. I am not proposing the concept on independent, philosophical grounds, derived from pure reason, say, or an analysis of the human life form. Rather, I take as my premise that historical inquiry exists as an institutionalized practice and offer a description of how I take the concept of historical action to work in that context. Questions of who counts as a historian are therefore beyond the scope of my question here. The proximate answer is: whoever is recognized as a historian by other historians. Such recognition will follow relatively established, though certainly also changing and contested criteria. Those, too, could be made explicit, but for our immediate question ("what counts as a historical action?") they are not relevant.

Whatever actions as such are, my starting point is the observation that historians' writings are full of them, even essentially about them. History is made of *res gestae*, of actions, and historical writing is, precisely, *historia rerum gestarum*, an account of actions done. The sense of agency here is minimalist and of the widest scope. It might be the actions of individuals or groups; they might be complex actions that can be further analyzed into a series of more simple actions, and as such they might extend over larger or smaller amounts of time; they might relate to the crises in question as cause or effect, as reason or response, and perhaps in other ways. An action might be historical at one level and not at another. For example, an action that shows up in the histories of a region might not be salient to historians of the nation, and so on. And, of course, an historical action can have other predicates besides: political, military, artistic or other. The historical contrasts with the unhistorical, and only locally, for a given context, and not globally, for all possible contexts.

Historical agency might also be ascribed to agents of a wide variety. Traditionally, the domain of history had been marked off against that of nature. Such sharp opposition between nature and history has recently come under intense pressure, but not in the direction of a naturalization of history, understood as the attempt to explain away actions and agency in the historical realm by reference to natural-scientific methods, as chains of cause and effect only. Rather, inversely, it occurred in the direction of a historicization of nature as being not so much an unchanging background to historical change but "acted into" (Arendt) by human beings, just as non-human agents act into human history.[36] The two realms are enmeshed, but that has not meant a naturalistic reduction of agency. To the contrary, it points to the need for considering the actions of non-human agents through the methods, interpretive and other, of historians.[37]

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[36] Arendt (1961, 58–63).
[37] *Pace* Giuseppina d'Oro (2021).

None of this prevents us from having more demanding concepts of agency under the umbrella of this wide, minimalist sense. Much work in ethics and political theory, for example, relies on understanding human agency as essentially self-conscious, attributed to agents who participate in games of giving and asking for reasons, who place themselves under norms and are in normative senses responsible for their actions, at least sometimes. We will encounter such a more metaphysically loaded concept of historical agency in the next chapter, when we consider Kant's philosophy of history. We will see that the actions Kant singles out as historical actions would equally appear as such on our own more minimalist, therefore also wider definition of historical action as well.

History and crisis. To now clarify the concept of historical action we need to begin with a clearer sense of the historical. As Frank Ankersmit has recently argued, time that passed is not automatically a historical past.[38] The interest we call historical (and we stop our analysis of *that* term at: the interest extended to the past by those whom we recognize as historians), is not extended to all times passed equally. Initially, we experience our present as continuous with the time that preceded it. Only when an event happens that causes a rupture in our experience of time, punctuating the axis of time into a before and after, and marking a threshold, do we behold the time of the before, from the other side of that threshold, and at a distance now, as the historical past. Only then does time passed become an object suitable for historical interest, prompting historical writing, as the writing motivated by that interest. Ankersmit speaks here of historical experiences.

Note that the concept of historical crisis proposed here is *in no way limited to the macro-scale or the world-historical.* Historians tell histories of all kinds of things, large and small, even of single individuals or families. The concept is not limited to that upper, global end of the scale. The same logic of crises

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[38] Frank Ankersmit (2005, 9). He thinks his account opposes pragmatism, notably Rorty's metaphysical anti-realism (17-66). His reading of Rorty leans heavily on Rorty's Davidson but ignores Rorty's Orwell (64). But I think Ankersmit's phenomenology is incisive and worth retaining on its own terms. And as far as the relation between academic history philosophy of history is concerned, I believe Ankersmit would find little to disagree with here.

in practice and subsequent historical experience works at smaller levels, too. This will help dispel worries about any claim to historical action necessarily implying megalomania.

I can illustrate this claim with an example drawn from research I conducted on the history of several liberal arts universities in Germany founded in the late 1990s and early 2000s.[39] Two of these universities were founded at almost exactly the same time, but only one of them had a history. Nothing had happened to the other one since its foundation; nothing, at least, that would have entered the historical records, which, consequently, it did not have. Only its 20th anniversary provoked some minimal historical self-awareness. The other universities had all undergone several crises that entailed changes in the leadership, the educational mission, the funding structures, the name—in short, in the very identity of the place, its self-conception. A third institution we studied did not have an established account of its history, because it was going through an institutional crisis at the time of the study, and the people who might in principle have told the story felt that they could not, or ought not, yet tell its history. Finally, I would not have embarked on this research if I had not myself studied at yet a forth such university, which had just undergone such an identity crisis that sparked my interest in the phenomenon.

This example shows that the Ankersmittian dynamic of crisis and historical consciousness operates on the relatively small scale of, in this case, institutions of higher education, where we are less likely to be suspect of any and all claims to human agency. In fact, many of the institutional histories explicitly identified the agents that determined the outcomes of the crises, including university leadership and local politicians, but also the student and alumni communities, local businesses, and so on. Before elaborating further on the nature of such agency and its link to crisis, let me note two points.

First, integrating Ankersmit's concept of a historical experience with our account of conceptual loss well positions us to see why we are justified in talking about the crises that cause historical

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[39] Kontowski and Kretz (2017).

experiences as historical *crises*. The etymology of crisis points to judging and decision-making. When practices and worlds are lost in moments of historical crisis, decision making is both difficult, urgently needed, but also uniquely possible. It is difficult *because* the concepts we deploy in determinate judgements and which guide our decision-making are in the process of become unintelligible.[40] At the same time, the need to make good judgments and decisively act upon them, to prevent things from getting even worse, will be intensely felt in such moments. Finally, those are also the moments in which things will have come lose such that, however great the difficulty, it may, in fact, be possible not just to follow along a set path, but to do something novel and path-breaking.

This should not keep us, secondly, from acknowledging an important limit case suggested by Lear's analyses. An historical crisis might be so profound that it will impact our ability to tell any historical story at all. The concern here is not with total eradication that leaves no historians alive; that is clearly beyond our scope. Nor is it with ordinary cases of political censorship of history-telling, although that, too, will be a common phenomenon.[41] The limit is rather an ontological one.[42] The concepts which historians would deploy to make sense of the events and actions in question might be among the concepts that have lost their intelligibility. In such a case, we might find ourselves wanting to say, as one Apsáalooke leader did after the end of the nomadic way of life, that "after this, nothing happened."[43] At the limit, Ankersmittian historical experiences might be experiences of the end of

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[40] Arendt, if I understand her correctly, following Kant, posits reflective judgment as an ineradicable human capacity for creating new concepts in response to conceptual loss (Arendt 1989, 83-4; 2005, 103-4). As will become clear over the course of the inquiry, I think that solution does not go far enough, because, simply put, we do not just have to create new concepts but also bury the old ones.

[41] Ankersmit, citing Koselleck, argues that vanquished elites will often be in the best epistemic position to tell the history of the breakdown of the world in which they held power (141-2). But often they will also have the strongest incentive to tell self-serving, self-exonerating stories.

[42] Of course, the line between political and ontological impossibility is porous. That is the point of Rorty's reading of Orwell (1989, 169-188). At the limit, totalitarian regimes might make history-writing factually impossible, from which might then also follow the conceptual unintelligibility of notions such as freedom, agency, and history, as we understand them. But see also Arendt ([1967] 2000).

[43] Lear (2006, 1–10).

history. In the case of the Apsáalooke, later generations actually did produce historians and historical writings of what happened to them. In some sense, the biographies of the Apsáalooke leaders that Lear works with stand at the beginning of that historical tradition.[44] Nevertheless, it remains a possible limit case.

Action and crisis. In many cases, action in (response to) the crisis will be possible. According to the criteria given above they might, or might not, count as historical actions, in an emphatic sense. Those criteria now need to be explained and justified.

First, many things might be done in the context of some crisis in X that historians think it important to mention, but unless they feature indispensably in an account of an historical crises in X, in the Ankersmittian sense, we would not think of them as historical actions. If some historian thinks it worth mentioning that Caesar's cook also crossed the Rubicon, that makes the action count as an historical action only if the historian also shows how the cook's crossing is either relevant to Caesar's crossing or holds independent historical interest, being relevant either to the historical crisis in the context of which Ceasar crossed the Rubicon or to some other historical crisis. Bertolt Brecht reminds us that it may well be so relevant, if our historian is interested in "history from below," for example.[45]

Historians' criteria for what to cite will differ, depending on their interests, methodologies, theoretical commitments, and the like. The question of how many historians concur in their judgment of any particular case of ascribed historical agency is of relevance in evaluating how confident we are in the ascription. But in principle such epistemic concerns are a separate matter from the question of the ontological status of an action by ascription, for which a single historian can suffice. And whatever their interests and methods, it seems plausible historians will judge that *some* actions cannot be omitted from accounts of the crises that animate their writing, on pain of being faulty accounts: incomplete,

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[44] Frank Bird Linderman (2002; 2003).

[45] In his poem "Questions from a Worker who Reads" (*Fragen eines lesenden Arbeiters*, 1935).

misleading, or otherwise lacking with regard to the standards the practice holds itself to. This is what we mean by "feature indispensably," and it holds whether those accounts are purely causal explanations or hermeneutic efforts to understand the meaning of the crisis.

Note that the inverse direction of explanation or understanding is not relevant. Actions that can be explained or understood only with reference to historical crises are not, thereby, historical actions. An historical crisis might cause many actions that historians do not judge to be relevant for an account of that crisis. For example, a war might displace many people without any single instance of flight being, therefore, automatically, an historical action, even though the war needs to figure in accounts of the flight. On the other hand, the collective action of an entire group of people fleeing, or of some historically important individual fleeing, might well be judged to be something that needs to figure in an account of the war.

This example also brings out nicely that it is not a question of the temporal position of the action vis-à-vis the crisis. It is easier to see actions that figure as causes or reasons of the crisis, and are thus temporally prior, as historical actions, but some of the consequences of crises or the responses to it might equally be judged to be indispensable to a non-faulty account of crises, their place in the chains of historical causality or their meaning for subsequent periods. Temporally posterior actions can thus also count as historical actions.

Determinacy of historical actions. Can we expand on this formal concept of historical action in a slightly more substantive direction through our account of conceptual loss and world-loss? It seems to me that the distinction between unhistorical and historical actions tracks the distinction between actions *within* a practice or world and actions performed *upon* them.

Individual or bundled forms of practice provide the intelligibility-contexts for our concepts, including the concepts with which we make sense of the actions routinely performed in these contexts. If we think of it on the model of a path, we can think of actions within a context as following on a

beaten path. Of course, every action that travels an existing path thereby also beats it further, if ever so marginally. Then there are actions upon forms of practice or forms of life. They take these as their objects and set their inhabitants on new paths, creating rather than following set path-dependencies. Such actions will often occur in moments of crisis, when the old paths are recognized as dead-ends, such that it becomes necessary, and sometimes possible, to break new paths. Such path-breaking actions upon forms of practice might be caused by the crisis or respond to it. Their agents might think of the actions as aligned with the crisis, seeking to cause, expand, prolong, accelerate, or intensify it, or inversely, seeking to undo, limit, shorten, slow, or temper it. Either way, they would seem to retain an essential link to the crises in question, and if they are sufficiently impactful in their success or failure, historians will judge that they have to include them in their accounts.

Here the following question arises. If something only counts as anything determinate at all insofar as it is conceptually graspable, does that mean that an action can only ever break new ground locally, and be an action upon one form of practice or life while being at the same time an action within another, more encompassing form, or else be no action at all, for lack of an intelligibility-context and the concepts provided therein?

One way of resolving the apparent paradox of historical actions upon forms of life that are not, at the time of the action, encompassed by yet larger forms of life, is to consider the temporal dimension. We might want to say that, although an action might be somewhat indeterminate at the time of its execution, perhaps even to the point of it becoming questionable whether we can even speak of an action (and not just mute and confused gesticulation, say), yet later, historians can look back and provide a more conceptually determinate account of the action, thus revealing that there was an action there, conceptualizable in principle even where it had not yet been conceptualized.

Later historians can do this for objective and subjective reasons. While the dust is still settling, the meaning of the action might objectively not yet be sufficiently determined, because its outcomes are

undecided, and the meaning of an action is not independent of its outcomes. Subjectively also, the sheer passing of time means that later historians can understand the action in larger temporal contexts, against more of its intended and unintended outcomes, building on earlier attempts at interpretation, and with the dispassionate stance that close proximity to an event often prevents. On the basis of these factors, later historians can claim a certain authority over the action's contemporaries with regards to the *that* and *what* of its determination.

Nevertheless, I also agree with David Carr that typically those who undergo a historical experience already have a reliable sense that they do and some sense of what it means.[46] Our account of historical crises as causes of conceptual loss makes plausible why: the people to whom their own concepts become practically unintelligible will be, in principle, in the best epistemic position to notice that something fundamental has changed, even if they are not able to survey the change in its entirety. Of course, conceptual loss might go unnoticed for some time or be masked ideologically. But the problem of ideology extends to later historians, who will be, potentially at least, in the grip of their own ideologies.

Even where conceptual loss goes unnoticed for some time, historians have no better means at their disposal for detecting and understanding it than referring to the reports of those who suffered it: what it meant to them, who or what they thought was responsible for it, and how they tried themselves to respond. The same logic holds for historical actions. They are performed with some intent and later historians will have to reckon with that intent, even where the action far from realizes it, and even in cases where the agents were unaware, blissfully or tragically, of the historical dimension of their actions, perhaps because they were unhistorical, routinely performed actions on one level, and only light up as historically relevant on some other, lower level, or in an otherwise remote context.[47]

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[46] Carr (2023, 89).
[47] Klinger (2024) contrasts historical action with aesthetic action. I believe my usage of the term historical action is narrower than his, but otherwise compatible. For Klinger, all actions that aim at

5. Doing What we are Thinking

We now have a pragmatist concept of historical agency before us: agency that retains a link to historical crises, such that historians of any such crisis will feel compelled to include the action when accounting for the crisis. We call these crises historical, because they give rise to historical consciousness in the first place, that is, consciousness of having crossed a threshold in time such that we can then look at the time before the crisis with the interest we call historical (and what *that* means, exactly, we leave to the practice of historical inquiry). We also see now why responses to world-loss, and subsequent conceptual loss, have to be theorized under the label of historical agency: because world-loss is precisely the kind of crisis that gives rise to historical consciousness. From here on, I want to ask about historical agency in a practical spirit. What does it mean act well in the context of an historical crisis, to positively shape it, as it spells the end of a world, the historical loss of practices and concepts? And we already have a criterion for answer, namely that needful forms of historical agency would have to entail a work of mourning world-loss at a structural level.

Philosophy of history has not asked these questions in a long time. The next chapter deals with what I take to be the most historically influential answer, as it emerged during the Revolutionary Age (1789-1815). This answer takes poetic genius as the archetype of historical agency. After the French Revolution, in the wake of Robespierre and with Napoleon on the rise, the semantics of genius shifted: historical genius no longer referred to the inspired writer of history only, but also to the inspired maker of history, real or alleged. Philosophically, this shift is reflected in the latest works of Immanuel Kant. I show that, in the 1790s, Kant tacitly introduced the concept of genius—a concept that had achieved

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what he calls "settling" are historical actions: actions that are rational insofar as they have conceptual determinacy. This contrasts with aesthetic action, which is rational, too, but in presenting us with an indeterminacy (albeit a determinate one). We might think of my pragmatist concept of historical agency as being concerned with *eminently* historical actions then: those which are not just in need of historical determinacy, but salient to historians in the requisite way, as playing an important role in historical determinacy-accumulation.

a canonical philosophical statement in his aesthetics—into his philosophy of history, in *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (1792). The concept implicitly structures Kant's account of revolutionary founding of new religions, which, he thinks, can ground our hope for moral progress to accompany and, indeed, redeem, other forms of progress, like political and technological progress.

Though the notion of genius has seemingly fallen out of fashion, I shall seek to make plausible that, without much discussion, it still quietly structures our thought about historical agency. And I suggest that there is a problem with this *poetic paradigm*, as I call it, in light of what has been said in this chapter. The problem is that it structurally obscures the need for mourning in response to the loss of a world and its concepts. It is symptomatic of a particularly modern incapacity to mourn. In future work, I hope to trace the historical variety of the poetic paradigm in its historical and geographical breadth, and across a variety of discourses, more fully. In this dissertation, my goal is only to sensitize the reader to a certain structure of thought and some of its blind-spots. This will motivate the search for alternatives and provide a contrast to assess any such alternatives.

Following a hint from Goethe's *Faust*, the final three chapters develop the idea that translation is a better model, rather than poetic genius. One might expect the development of this alternative to take one of two forms, methodologically. Either it might continue in a history of philosophy vein, following the second chapter, suggesting this idea can be found in another one of the "mighty dead" already, at least inchoately: if not Kant, then perhaps Herder or Schleiermacher, Hegel, or Benjamin.[48] To anticipate, I think that my proposal bears certain affinities with both Herderian and Hegelian themes, such as an insistence on the irreducible plurality and historical vulnerability of all human forms and the importance accorded to the concept of recognition when it comes to theorizing subject-formation. But my proposal also stands in sharp contrast to other, equally important themes from their respective philosophies of history, particularly the historical developmentalism that both, in

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[48] The moniker of mighty dead I borrow from Robert Brandom (2002).

different ways, subscribe to. In the end, I have not found it possible to develop my understanding of translational responses to historical crises just by explicating the existing ideas of past philosophers. While striving to learn from them, I did not want to ventriloquize them.

Another, purely philosophical route would have been to try and derive the translational model from some ahistorical grounds, from our natural species-form or the laws of pure reason. To put all my cards on the table, my stance towards this possibility is shaped by a post-Rortyan pragmatism. Richard Rorty thought it was important to fight the belief in such a possibility, and to the end of his life he wrote with that goal.[49] By contrast, I think the more thorough absorption of Rorty's critique would lead one to become, effectively, agnostic towards this possibility. Perhaps normativity can be grounded in such invariants "beyond the reach of time and chance," perhaps it cannot.[50]

Rather than letting myself be drawn into metaphysical quarrels, my project departs from more modest premises: our concrete, historically contingent worlds and all within them matter. How we respond to their loss matters and invites serious theoretical reflection, and the possibility, however large or small we judge it, that there could be ahistorical realities to ground our most central concepts in should give us no false comfort that we could simply fall back on these in the case of world-loss. All I ask of late-modern believers of any kind—in God, Nature, Reason, or the like—is that they acknowledge that collective crises of religious or secular faith are a real and consequential possibility.[51]

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[49] Albeit in a very self-aware, or perhaps self-ironic, manner (Rorty 1991, 100).

[50] Rorty (1989, xv). I hope this point will not be mistaken for the Rawlsian-Habermassian position in liberal political theory that philosophy must proceed from a point of view that is neutral vis-à-vis substantive conceptions of the good. That view always perilously close to identifying the point of view of philosophy with that of the (supposedly ethically neutral, liberal) state. As should be obvious, I hope, there is no pretense here to write from a point of view of pure detachment. To the contrary, the whole project is carried by an attachment to attachment, the idea that our particular attachments matter.

[51] The fate of neo-Kantianism after World War One provides a vivid example. It is not just that those who held on to their faith in reason, like Ernst Cassirer, began to appear antiquated to the young, who flocked instead to Heidegger's lectures. Stalwart neo-Kantians themselves lost all faith in reason, like Paul Natorp in his final years (1924, 25, 52–56). Can it surprise that today longstanding neo-Idealists find themselves under Heidegger's spell again?

One way of putting this is that our access to any putative transhistorical realities is mediated by historical realities, and the latter are not negligible.

In line with these pragmatist convictions, and for lack of some singular 'mighty dead' to guide us, I seek to ground my translational proposal not in any ahistorical reality, but in concrete historical translation practice. The practice of textual translation between natural languages in the Germanophone world, 1750-1830—the same, formative period of Western modernity that also saw the emergence of the poetic paradigm—holds implicit conceptual resources. In the third chapter, I show how these can be made theoretically explicit by studying translator's prefaces and related paratexts as sites where translators' (self-)understandings become manifest. Reading a newly assembled corpus of over three-hundred such prefaces at close, medium, and long distances, through novel combinations of both qualitative (hermeneutic, historical) and quantitative (sociological, computational) methods, I retrieve the most sophisticated and promising translation concepts then operative in the practice.

On their basis, the fourth chapter proposes translational action as a form of historical action. This re-actualizes an old concept of *translatio*, which had been central to Western historical, political, legal, and theological thought, roughly for as long as Latin was the *lingua franca* of intellectual life. One of the concept's sharpest critics around 1800 was Johann Gottfried Herder, Kant's former student. I first take stock of the history of *translatio* and Herder's critique. Then I propose translational action as a form of historical action that re-actualizes the old *translatio* concept for our times. Meeting Herder's critique and even Herderian in spirit, translational action stands liberated from the older concept's entanglements in pre-modern metaphysical, legal, historiographical, and political frameworks.

Translational action, as I understand it, operates on concepts, rather than texts. It does so either directly, as these concepts have been made theoretically explicit, or indirectly, working on the practices in which the concepts in question are embedded. This is to take translation in an expanded, but

nevertheless conceptually precise, non-metaphorical sense. This degree of precision allows us to differentiate it from the poetic paradigm. Drawing on psychoanalysis, I show that translational action, unlike the poetic paradigm, allows us to think of creative ways of mourning world-loss structurally. In this way, it constitutively aims at the realization of distinct forms of historical freedom: freedom both from *and* with the past. Therein lies its appeal under conditions of late, Anthropocenic modernity, when the threat of unprecedented loss of worlds looms large.

But a problem arises here, too. If the appeal of translational action as a form of historical action depends on its capacity to entail a work of mourning, but modernity is characterized by distinctive incapacities to mourn, then the future possibility of any translational action depends, among other things, on our capacity to make concepts of mourning practically intelligible to us (again) and give life to practices that sustain such concepts. The fifth and final chapter is thus an extended case study of Rilke's translation of the concept of mourning via his work on the poetics of elegy in the aftermath of World War One. It is no haphazardly chosen, merely illustrative example. To the contrary, insofar as mourning is part of successful translational action *qua* response to historical crises, Rilke's translation of the concept of mourning, in the medium of poetry, I will argue, is a translation towards the continued possibility of translational action as such.

The best proof of possibility is actuality. Rilke provides one example of successful translational action. I will also argue that the movement executed across the final three chapters, too, is an instance of translational action, namely of the very concept of translation, from translational discourse around 1800 into contemporary, pragmatist philosophy of history. By the fourth chapter, we will be able to step back to see how the dissertation makes good on this claim, which can, for now, only be a promise: to show the viability of what I am theorizing by performing it or, to invert a well-known phrase of Hannah Arendt, "doing what we are thinking."

Chapter Two.

Kant on Genius as the Form of Historical Agency

The previous chapter has argued that responses to world-loss and conceptual loss, insofar as they are brought about by *historical* crises, have to be theorized under the heading of *historical* agency. I provided a pragmatist account of what historical agency could mean: agency that shapes historical crises in such a way as to compel historians, as the relevant expert community, to reference it in their accounts of these crises—crises, which we call historical because they motivate historical writing in the first place.

This chapter turns to the moment when such historical agency was first theorized in the context of a modern, secular philosophy of history. I argue that, in the wake of the 1789 French Revolution, Immanuel Kant tacitly modeled historical agency on the concept of genius. In aesthetics, this concept had risen to prominence beginning in the 1760s, and Kant himself had given a definite philosophical statement of it in his third *Critique* (1790).[52] But it was only in his *Religion with the Bounds of Mere Reason* (1793), that Kant established what I want to call the poetic paradigm of human historical agency, which holds up genius, especially poetic genius, as the form of historically efficacious, crisis-inducing agency.

Contrary to appearances, the poetic paradigm's conceptual architectonic still structures how we think about historical agency today. I bring this structure into view so that we may better assess its blind spots. In the final section, I argue that the poetic paradigm is symptomatic of a modern incapacity to mourn and structurally obscures the very need to mourn world-loss. This will give us reason to search for alternative forms of historical agency in subsequent chapters and shape the direction of that search.

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[52] For the history of the concept of genius see Schmidt (1985). Kant's take on it is to be found in §§43-50 of the third *Critique*. (I cite Kant's texts from the *Akademieausgabe*, the first time by volume and page, and subsequently by page, except for the third *Critique*, which I cite by paragraph.)

1. The Possibility of Historical Agency in Kant

To see where Kant leaves room for human historical agency in a robust sense, we first need to bring the outlines of his philosophy of history as a whole into view, beginning with the fact that history, for Kant, is teleological, in a Critically-qualified sense.[53] In our reflective judgments of history, he argues, we may let our inquiry be guided by (that is, make regulative use of) the idea that history is progressing towards various ends, to answer needs of both theoretical and practical reason.[54] What are these ends? I propose that Kant distinguishes as least four different historical ends and, correspondingly, four different kinds of historical progress. Although he nowhere explicitly contrasts them like this, his thinking rigorously observes the relevant distinctions:

(1) Civilizational progress, from unhappiness to happiness,

(2) Political progress, from lawlessness to a legal order,

(3) Moral progress, from moral evil to moral goodness,

(4) Religious progress, from irrational to rational religion.[55]

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[53] The consensus in the literature is now that, although Kant only clarified the status of teleological judgments within a critical framework in his third *Critique* (with application to the philosophy of history in §§83-4 in particular), a charitable reading will take his claims about teleological progress already from the *Idea* (1784) onwards as reflective judgments, not as a regress to dogmatic metaphysics; and I concur. Cf. Allison (2009), Honneth (2004), Kleingeld (1995), Yovel (1980).

[54] On the notion of a need of reason (*Vernunftbedürfnis*) and its role in Kant's philosophy of history see Kleingeld (1995, 90–110) and Honneth (2004, 11–15). – That some interests in history arise from needs of practical reason by itself does not yet mean that the philosophy of history is a branch of practical philosophy, in the sense of: being in the business of theorizing (thin) normative or (thick) normative-descriptive concepts of historical agency. Kant is primarily interested in defending the legitimacy of assuming, for practical purposes only, a moral author of the world (*Welturheber*), so that we may have hope that the highest good (*summum bonum*), as the final purpose of history that we know ourselves duty-bound to promote, is indeed realizable in this world—the happiness of all (*Glück*) and the moral worthiness of such happiness (*Glückswürdigkeit*) simultaneously maximized and in perfect proportion. Cf. third *Critique*, §86-7.

[55] The literature is almost impossible to survey, but, as an indication, see the essays collected in these five volumes: Mihaylova & Ezekiel (2023), Wilford & Stoner (2021), Ottfried Höffe (2011), Amelié Oksenberg Rorty & James Schmidt (2009), Pauline Kleingeld & D. Colclasure (2006). Some scholarship shows awareness of some of these differences, for example Allison (2009), Boehm (2013), Fisher (2021), Honneth (2004), Kleingeld (1995), Pollmann (2011), Wood (1999), Yovel (1980), with very different degrees of sharpness and consistency. A lot of the scholarship runs several or all of

My claim is that, as far as (1) and (2) are concerned, nature, according to Kant, has put in place mechanisms to ensure that, over time, humanity would realize all the progress we are capable of in those regards, while there could not possibly be for Kant any such guarantee concerning (3) and (4).[56] It is with regards to the latter that Kant leaves room for human agency in a robust sense of free, moral agency.

Natural progress. The picture regarding the first two kinds of progress is present already from Kant's first essay in the philosophy of history, his 1784 *Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent.*[57] The anthropological fact of human "unsocial sociability" ensures, Kant thinks, that we will always both live in society with others, but also compete with others for honor, power, and wealth.[58] Such competition drives civilizational progress: all the technological, economic, cultural, etc. advancements that increase human happiness on earth.[59]

Civilizational progress necessitates political progress, from lawless states of nature to ever more just legal orders, as absent some legal order the antagonism will prove (self-)destructive. Being

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these together, which causes a great deal of confusion, including such respectable readers of Kant as Arendt (1989), Hösle (2000), Mensch (2005), Natorp (1924).

[56] Kant, *Idea*, AA 8:20-22. I have benefitted a lot from, and find myself in great sympathy towards, Allan Wood (1999) reconstruction of Kant's philosophy of history. He groups the first two kinds of progress together as the "epoch of nature" and the latter two, though he distinguishes them less sharply, as the "epoch of freedom" (296). That gets at something true, I think, but the formulation can also be misleading, because it suggests that these two epochs are arranged in strict, chronological sequentiality. Chronologically, and even logically, I believe, as will become clear, they run rather in parallel.

[57] In the Fourth Proposition of the *Idea*, as Kant introduces the idea of the natural mechanism, he also expresses hopes that humanity will become a "moral whole" (*moralisches Ganzes*, 21). Yet when he talks about the mechanism itself, he does qualify antagonism as the means of progress "so fern dieser doch am Ende die Ursache einer gesetzmäßigen Ordnung [der Gesellschaft] wird" (20). That crucial qualification is textual evidence that antagonism is the causal means (*Ursache*) only for the (inevitable) achievement of civilizational and political progress, not moral progress.

[58] Kant, *Idea*, 21. Kant often mentions our desires for honor, power, and wealth (*Ehrsucht, Herrschsucht, Habsucht*) together as a trio elsewhere too, for example in his *Anthropology,* AA 7:271-4, Kant, *Pedagogy*, AA 9:492. Cf. Wood (1999, 259–64).

[59] Kant, *Idea*, 20-22. It is a familiar 18th century thought, versions of which we know also from Mandeville and Smith.

endowed with rationality (*Verstand*), we realize this, exit the state of nature, and institute legal orders.[60] Eventually, Kant thinks, we will realize that a republican constitution allows for the greatest liberty to compete for each that is compatible with a like liberty for all[61], and also repeat this Hobbesian logic at the international level, establishing not a super-state this time, but a world-federation of autonomous republics, putting an end to wars of aggression and, *a fortiori*, to all interstate war.[62] Then the basis will be laid for achieving all the civilizational progress we are capable of, through legally regulated, just and peaceful competition.

Insofar as there is human agency here it is not properly historical, and insofar as it is historical, it is not proper agency, but rather instrumentality. Any human contribution to civilizational or political progress may be describable in vocabularies of both natural causality and free agency, but *qua* historical actions, they make no real difference to outcomes. Even the most autonomous, moral actions that contribute to civilizational or political progress—as when a king freely decides, out of moral insight, to abolish monarchy in favor of a republican constitution, say—merely hasten or delay the inevitable. Kant repeatedly illustrates this with a quote from Seneca: "fate leads the willing and the unwilling it drags along" (*fata volentem ducunt, nolentem trahunt*).[63] Kant is not exactly indifferent as to which it will be. But insofar as the first two kinds of progress, all human agency appears, rather, as instrumentality, more or less well suited to the "cunning of nature."[64]

Need for actual moral progress. Political and civilizational progress are not enough for Kant. Imagine, for a moment, the best case Kant thinks mere *Verstand* will lead us to realize: a maximally

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[60] As he famously remarks, even a "people of devils, if they were but rational ones" (*wenn sie nur Verstand haben*) can solve this problem. Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, AA 8:336.

[61] Kant, *Idea*, 22.

[62] Kant, *Idea*, 23. If there are no wars of aggression there will, by definition, be no wars of self-defense either.

[63] Kant, *Theory and Practice*, AA 7:313, *Perpetual Peace*, 365.

[64] That shorthand for Kant's view was likely coined by Eric Weil and popularized by Yirmiyahu Yovel. See Allison, 27.

just and sustainable society across all its sub-spheres (politics, economics, culture, etc.), in which we achieve all the civilizational and political progress we are capable of in both a non-self-destructive manner and in such a way that no one is treated as a mere means to it in the process. Its laws would be so just, so well enforced, and so comprehensive, that as far as both outward appearance and material consequence are concerned, there would be no gap left between lawful conduct (action in conformity with duty, *pflichtgemäß*) and moral conduct (action from moral duty, *aus Pflicht*). Innerly, of course, the gap could still be total, however: the maximally just society might simply be a society of extremely well-policed devils, who would instrumentalize each other the minute they could get away with it.

We might think such a state would already be a tremendous improvement over current circumstances, and that neither Kant, nor anyone else, could ask for more. It is true that, in the *Idea*, although he does mention "moralization" as a historical goal, Kant then goes on to detail only the mechanisms nature put in place to achieve civilizational and political progress. A few years later, in the third *Critique*, however, he is very explicit that the highest good, as he then calls it, as the final end of history, includes both happiness *and* morality, maximized and in just proportion.[65] The prospect of humanity ending up as a race of happy (*glücklich*) devils without being morally worthy of such happiness (*glückswürdig*) holds great moral horror for him, and such horror, he believes, would be shared among all reasonable (*vernünftige*) beings. Beings endowed with reason simply cannot opt out from the demands of morality.

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[65] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §87. It seems possible that the shortcoming is not merely quantitative either, as in: we have two potentials, one for happiness and one for morality, and we just happened to realize only one. It might be that, more profoundly, moral progress is the condition for civilizational progress to even count as genuinely human progress, as opposed to animal or devilish progress. Moral progress would then be seen as transforming civilizational progress from an increase in mere animal satisfaction into an increase in genuinely human, because merited, happiness. From a moral point of view, only that happiness would be true, human happiness which we are also worthy of enjoying. Happiness without moral worthiness were merely animal satisfaction and, from the objective, moral point of view, such animal happiness would be no genuine happiness for humans at all, but a form of human corruption. The textual evidence, as far as I can see, is ambiguous on this.

Kant thus needs it to be possible for us to believe in at least as much moral progress as is necessary for us, collectively, to be also worthy of the increase in happiness we achieve. He needs actual moral progress, in the sense of more individuals becoming (more) moral.[66] Merely potential moral progress, as in us coming to know the moral law (better), or the moral law itself improving would not suffice (even if these were not ruled out on independent grounds: for the Kantian moral law is historically invariant, the same for reasonable beings of all times and places, and as soon as we are reasonable enough to be under the moral law, whenever that may be, phylogenetically and ontogenetically, we are also able to know its demands). If we had no hope for actual moral progress, history would turn into a farce and, Kant says, we would rightly complain to nature why it gave us reason in the first place.[67] The textual evidence suggests that he did believe in such moral progress.[68] But can he consistently conceive of moral progress, as a possibility, or even make plausible its actuality, as has often been doubted?[69]

Two difficulties with moral progress. Arguments for actual moral progress might easily be too weak or too strong. Consider Kant's claim that we may, for practical purposes, assume the existence of a moral author of the world (*moralischer Welturheber*), God, to support a belief that, though the arc of the moral universe is long, it bends towards the highest good. First introduced as a postulate of pure practical reason in the second *Critique* (1788), Kant goes to great lengths to bolster this line of argument in the final paragraphs of the third *Critique* (1790).[70] This strategy might be too weak, because such practical faith in the goodness of the world, at least overall and in the long-term, will always find

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[66] I put the second "more" above in parenthesis, because noumenally, for Kant, one either is moral or not, in that one either has made the moral law one's most basic maxim or not, while phenomenally, in the realm of appearances, we might be either more or less virtuous by degrees. Cf. Timmermann (2021).

[67] Kant, *Idea*, 18-19.

[68] Cf. Kant, *Theory and Practice,* 308-11, *End of all Things*, AA 7:332, *Anthropology,* 329, 331-3

[69] Cf. Kleingeld (1999) responding to older criticisms by Emil Fackenheim and Michael Despland.

[70] Kant, *Judgment,* §86-91.

itself challenged by the empirical reality of badness, even overwhelming badness, in the three forms

of moral evil, physical suffering, and injustice (the disproportion of evil and suffering).[71]

But if one were to strengthen the grounds of this practical faith, the argument immediately risks

become too strong, in two different ways. First, it threatens to do away with our autonomy, which is

at the heart of Kantian morals. From a Kantian point of view, this just gets morality wrong. Secondly,

it threatens to result in a theodicy, a perverse rationalization of evil, which means that the error would

also itself be morally pernicious.

There cannot be, for Kant, anything like a mechanism guaranteeing moral progress. We would not

be moral if someone else made us moral; we can only become moral autonomously by giving ourselves

the moral law out of sheer respect for that law. A natural inclination towards morality, or a legal or

other compulsion to being moral, much like supernatural interventions to make us more, on a Kantian

picture, are absurdities.[72] Even if it were possible to straighten the "crooked timber" of humanity, we

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[71] I note in passing that, as far as the last point is concerned, the problem for Kant is less that the good go unrewarded, but that the wicked go unpunished. "Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping?" (*Hamlet*, 2.2).

[72] The issue of divine assistance (grace), in particular, has received a lot of attention. When it comes to *adopting* the moral law, for the first time, as our basic maxim, I believe Kant is ultra-Pelagian. The concluding pages of the *Religion* sum up again as the key take-away from the book what Kant insists on throughout: that no one can be responsible for that choice but ourselves. In the first step, this is salvation by our own works alone (we might call it anthropic monergism). The problem is that, after adopting the moral law, whenever we do our duty, we only fulfill the bare minimum required. Some sins of the old Adam, so to speak, are paid off in that, going forward, we experience sufferings and temptations as punishments, where before, when we lived in vice, we saw them merely as misfortunes. But given the finitude of our lives, we might not live long enough to pay of the old guilt (or debt, *Schuld*—famously, those are the same term in German). This is where grace comes in: for practical purposes, we may hope that God is a moral Newtonian who sums up our infinitesimal progress towards net-virtue into a positive integer. Stephen Palmquist (2010) wants to see even this stripped-down, accounting-trick notion of grace as still compatible with the Christian doctrine of vicarious atonement. Granted, Kant, being no theologian, would not go so far as to positively rule out that Christ's sacrifice has some soteriological role to play, albeit mysterious to us, in canceling the remaining *Schuld*. It seems to me that this belief would sit oddly, to say the least, with the Arianism Kant also advocates—for practical purposes, of course, not as Christological doctrine—when he argues that, as moral agents, we should see in Christ only the human exemplar, not a divine being. But I am no theologian either.

just would not be moral in the same sense anymore.[73] We are only moral when in spite of our natural propensity towards evil (self-love), we at some point freely chose to adopt the moral law as our most basic maxim (*Grundmaxime*).[74] That always has to mean that we could also have chosen not to adopt it.

Worse yet, if we believe too firmly in the actuality of moral progress, we might fall into the error of a philosophical theodicy, a perverse rationalization of evil, suffering, and injustice as actually good itself, as a necessary means to the good, or perhaps just as a price to pay for a larger good. Such a belief might instill moral laziness, a passive acquiescence in the face of evil. Kant, ever attuned to the moral-practical consequences of theorizing, is firmly opposed to such results, and his 1791 essay on the *Miscarriage of all Philosophical Attempts at a Theodicy* follows directly on the heels of the third *Critique*[75], which, in its final paragraphs, comes close to offering such a theodicy (or could easily be misread as doing so).

Moral-historical progress. The problem of moral progress was clearly on Kant's mind in the early 1790s. In his *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (first edition 1793), I believe he articulates a solution, by means of first introducing the final type from our initial list of four above, namely religious progress (4).[76]

Kant distinguishes religion from faith. True religion, for him, is essentially the same as morality, historically invariant and singular. Faiths, on the other hand, are religion plus some other historically variant part (theological doctrine, social forms, ritual practices, religious norms in addition to the moral law, etc.). Faiths, even in their most stripped-down form of pure, rational religion for Kant need to be institutionalized in the form of what he calls an "ethical commonwealth." The reason for this is the

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[73] Kant, *Idea*, 23.
[74] Kant, *Religion*, AA6:28-39.
[75] Kant, *Theodicy*, AA 7:253-72.
[76] My sense is that Kant did not so much change his mind as gradually clarify latent implications of his earlier thought, but it hardly matters for our purposes here which of these is the case.

double-edged nature of our unsocial sociability, the natural drive towards competition for honor, wealth, and power. While serving as the engine behind civilizational progress and, indirectly, political progress (insofar as political progress is necessitated by civilizational progress), it is equally a source of moral corruption.[77] This point had been forcefully impressed upon Kant by his reading of Rousseau. Unlike Rousseau, however, Kant thinks that the answer is not less society but better social forms, which counteract the tendency towards vice.[78] Those are the "ethical commonwealths," constituted under unenforceable laws of virtue (*Tugendgesetze*), in contradistinction to political commonwealths constituted under enforceable positive law.

Kant seems to equate ethical commonwealths with churches, which is understandable in the context of his age.[79] Functionally, they are institutions of moral schooling, in the realm of what today we would call civil society. It has been argued that certain kinds of social movements, for example, could fulfill similar functions.[80] For our purposes the salient point about churches is this: while they give institutional embodiment to religion (that is, morality), they have, Kant thinks, always accrued non-morally relevant accoutrements in the process, misleading us into thinking that besides a moral life (*guter Lebenswandel*), other things are religiously required, too. For Kant, this is doubly harmful. It misdirects our efforts at moral self-perfection by making us focus on ritual observances, rather than being a morally good person. It also leads to intolerance or sanctimoniousness towards others, when we see them follow different observances than those we think, mistakenly, are essential.

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[77] This is a great instance for seeing why it is necessary to distinguish sharply between the first two kinds of progress and the latter two. Else, it looks like Kant is simply vacillating on whether competitiveness and society generally are a force for good or not.

[78] The Rousseauian background to these issues has helpfully been foregrounded by Wood (1999).

[79] Mandatory schooling existed only on paper in 18th cent. German-speaking countries. Until well into the 19th century, large swaths of the population, especially from rural areas and lower classes, would spend no or very little time in school. On the other hand, regardless of class or age, almost everyone in this society would regularly go to church. Herrlitz et al. (2008, 50-1).

[80] Ewa Wyrębska (2021, 1050–54).

From this it is clear what religious progress, for Kant, must look like: step by step shedding the outer husk of faith, purifying the teaching, such that ultimately nothing will be taught to be religiously required except the rational core of true religion, which is the moral law.[81] This will allow religion to shed all particularity and become truly universal. But since churches are, functionally, institutions of moral education we can also think of this progress as moral-historical progress. Conceiving of moral progress in history in this way addresses the tension outlined above. It goes beyond any argument that nature bends towards morality in the long run. That argument always risks doing away with our autonomy, as well as being either too weak, merely a pious hope, or too strong, in the form of a theodicy-style rationalization of evil. Rather, it presents us with a this-worldly institutional form that promotes moral progress, which will be as powerful and as weak as we can make it.

Such promotion is less than a fail-safe mechanism, and it has to be, because, for Kant, no one can make us moral. But while others' actions may never be a sufficient condition for us becoming moral, they can for Kant still be in some sense a sufficient condition. One is not born autonomous and moral but educated towards it.[82] Some human education is necessary to be receptive to morality at all; no education, on the other hand, is sufficient to guarantee that we become moral. That leaves ample room for the thought that certain times and places make it easier than others to be moral, for example by providing better institutions of moral education.

Agency in moral-historical progress. To summarize, there is, for Kant, naturally guaranteed progress (we may presume, with the usual Critical-qualifications: as a regulative idea guiding reflective judgment), as far as the advancement towards happiness and lawfulness is concerned. But the same

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[81] I said earlier that moral progress could not consists in moral learning, where that means: coming to know the moral law better. We now can qualify this claim slightly. There can be no additive learning here, I think, but a subtractive one. Older civilizations, for Kant, knew the moral law–just not in its purity, but mingled up with other demands. Moral learning over history consists in letting go of those other parts, not in acquiring knowledge of new parts of the moral law.

[82] In his *Lectures on Pedagogy*, he goes so far as to say that humans are nothing but what education made of them (699).

mechanism that guarantees this progress, namely our social antagonism, is also morally corrosive even when it is legally kept in check. Being endowed with reason, however, humanity's ultimate historical task is to establish the most perfect moral order we are capable of in this world, that is, to realize the highest good, not just the most perfect legal-political order. And while there can be no natural mechanism to advance this goal, there can be an institutional form dedicated to its promotion. Kant calls it an ethical commonwealth and—understandably in the context of his age—he is thinking of churches here, considered functionally as institutions of moral education. Historical progress in these institutions can thus aptly be called moral-historical progress.

What remains to be seen now is that the human agency involved in moral-historical progress is agency in a robust sense of the word. My contention is that it is not just as strong a sense of agency as moral agency, but that it is, indeed, the *same* agency that is involved in individuals becoming moral and in individuals bringing about moral-historical progress. This is so, because the act of one individual becoming moral, when performed in the right circumstances, can be exemplary to others in just such a way as to spark what Kant calls a "public revolution in religion," namely the establishment of a new and better church.[83] The difference here is merely one of degree, namely in the scope of the reception of the act by others, not a qualitative difference. Here is how Kant links the agency involved in individuals personally becoming moral and in individuals establishing new and better forms of religion. In the next section, I will examine the form of this agency in more detail.

We find in ourselves, Kant says, the idea of a morally perfect human being. He also calls it the moral archetype (*Urbild*).[84] One way of thinking about what it means to become moral is to become

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[83] Kant, *Religion,* 81. I note here already one more divergence from Allan Wood's account and Henry Allison's, who follows him on this point. They seem to think that moral-historical progress is gradual (Wood, 316-20; Allison, 44-5). If I am right, it consists, rather, in a series of revolutionary changes, albeit not, of course, in the political realm directly, but in the realm of religion. The penultimate section will argue that these are not entirely separate either.

[84] Kant, *Religion*, 61.

such as to always act as the moral *Urbild* would act, the perfect moral exemplar who always followed the moral law perfectly. When we turn to historical moral exemplars, such as the founders of historical churches, whose teachings are preserved by these churches—Kant is thinking of Christ, of course—we should see in them nothing but the same moral archetype that we find also in ourselves.[85] From a moral point of view, the *Urbild* is one and the same whether we find it inside us or see it as instantiated in a historical figure.[86] Of course, that historical figure would not have actually been a perfectly moral human being. But qua church-founding exemplar, Kant says, we should not see in them anything else. Apocryphal accounts of less-than-perfect moral behavior would be just as irrelevant, Kant thinks, as claims to the founder's divinity.[87] None of that ought to enter into the substance of that church's moral teaching. Insofar as it does, future revolutions in religion will be required to correct it. In a moment, we will look at the form of these revolutionary acts on the part of moral exemplars in further detail. For now, we just need to note that it is the same kind of act—the act of instantiating the moral *Urbild* in an exemplary way, potentially at least—that is at issue in cases of individuals becoming moral and the founding of new and better churches. Thus, insofar as the latter is agency of a genuinely historical kind the former can also count as such, under the right circumstances; and historical agency, in a robust sense, is a human possibility for Kant.

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[85] Kant, *Religion,* 63-4.

[86] "Allein in der Erscheinung des Gottmenschen ist nicht das, was von ihm in die Sinne fällt, oder durch Erfahrung erkannt werden kann, sondern das in unsrer Vernunft liegende Urbild, welches wir dem letztem unterlegen (weil, so viel sich an seinem Beispiel wahrnehmen läßt, er jenem gemäß befunden wird), eigentlich das Objekt des seligmachenden Glaubens" (*Religion*, 119).

[87] Kant, *Religion*, 64.

2. The Poetic Paradigm.

I now want to claim that genius names the conceptual form under which robust human historical agency falls for Kant. The last section argued humans have genuine historical agency for Kant when they become moral exemplars in such a way as to spark a "public revolution in religion," that leads to the establishment of a new and better church, which means progress in our institutions of moral education. And I argued that the act of becoming exemplary in this way is qualitatively identical with the act of just anyone becoming moral. Both are acts of creation also—of a new moral self and, where the circumstances are right, of an institution dedicated to preserving and amplifying its exemplarity.

The task is now to show how the concept of genius fits that act. But here, two difficulties confront us. First, Kant nowhere mentions the term in his philosophy of history, and, secondly, when he does give a canonical philosophical statement of the concept, in the context of his aesthetics, he expressly limits it to the realm of fine arts. Nevertheless, as the next section will show, there is a concept of genius—historical genius, let us call it—operative in his philosophy of history. This section first lays out the concept in the abstract. I take it to furnish the model for a wide range of subsequent philosophies history. Once we have that model before us, I will briefly consider its relation to aesthetic genius and consider two objections one might raise to its applicability to the moral(-historical) realm.

The poetic paradigm. Here then is the model or picture of historical agency, which Kant originated and which, in Wittgenstein's phrase, still holds critics and defenders alike captive. I call it the *poetic paradigm* of human historical agency. I do so because it models historical agency on (aesthetic) genius; because, for Kant and others, such genius found its purest form in realm of poetry; and, finally, because it connects etymologically to *poiesis*, making.[88] Though I cannot show this here in detail, I believe it presents a lowest common denominator to many subsequent philosophies of history, across

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[88] "Unter allen behauptet die Dichtkunst (die fast gänzlich dem Genie ihren Ursprung verdankt, und am wenigsten durch Vorschrift, oder durch Beispiele geleitet sein will) den obersten Rang," *Judgment*, §53.

the political spectrum (and will offer some suggestions to that effect in Section Four). I first state the model on its own terms, in the abstract. Then I return to the question of its roots in Kantian aesthetic genius.

Most basically, on the poetic paradigm, an historical act is a making, which implies an agent, the maker, and something made. It is very important to me to stress that I am not here proposing a metaphysics of agency or things. For the moment, I am not engaging in Kant exegesis. Rather, I state this particular model of historical agency on the basis of the general, pragmatist concept of historical agency developed in the last chapter. There we said that historical actions are actions of certain kinds (retaining an essential link to historical crises, and so on) relative to X, where X is the kind of thing that can be said to have a history. The agents in question can be individual humans or revolutionary groups, for example; the objects made can be churches, states, nations, forms of life, etc.—anything and anyone that may, on our pragmatist conception, be said to have a history or act in history.

I now propose five conditions, each necessary and jointly sufficient, that need to hold for the relevant agents and objects, on some philosophy of history, for that philosophy of history to qualify as an instance of the poetic paradigm. Two of them concern the objects in question, three the agents. Let us call them object-side and agent-side conditions, respectively. At the end of this section, I will suggest that aesthetic and historical genius in Kant share the agent-side conditions but differ on the object-side conditions. Here are the five conditions:

O1: that the new and the old stand in an agonistic relation,

O2: that the new is valorized over the old,

A1: that temporally prior success-conditions are successfully engaged (the "Tradition"),

A2: that temporally simultaneous success-conditions are present ("Sources of Inspiration"),

A3: that one is successfully-engaged by temporally posterior success-conditions (the "Reception").

(O1) On the poetic paradigm of human historical agency, an historical action is a creative act that punctures the temporal axis such as to separate a time before the act from a time after. In the time after, the objects newly created by this act exist in an agonistic rivalry with a certain class of past objects, which we can call their predecessor-objects. Agonistic success consists in compelling later generations to henceforth describe and value predecessor-objects *as* predecessor-objects of the newly created objects. For example, a genial poet writes poems after which some previous poets' work will be read as predecessors to the newly created poems. [89] (O2) On the poetic paradigm, sympathy will furthermore lie with the new in this generational rivalry. The new is in some sense valorized over the old. The reasons for this can vary widely, of course: the new might be seen as actually better, or, more modestly, as simply novel, exciting, fresh, and so on.

Next, on the agent-side, we have to see this creative act as incompletely dependent on three types of success-conditions: (A1) the temporally prior ones. Let us group these under the label "Tradition." On the poetic paradigm, creation does not happen *ex nihilo*, but works with preexisting, preformed objects. For instance, a poet might use a whole tradition of existing linguistic and poetic forms in their creation. (A2) Secondly, there are the temporally simultaneous success conditions. On the poetic paradigm, creation also does not happen at will, but certain unpredictable and unenforceable sources of inspiration need to be present. These can be conceptualized as themselves agentive (Gods, muses, lovers) or objective (a natural landscape, another artwork), as external to the poet-maker or as internal (in their unconscious, say). But something beyond the maker's conscious control enters into the determination of at least the *when* of creation and perhaps also its *what*. Phenomenologically, the hallmark of these sources of inspiration is that their presence needs to be awaited and prepared for. (A3) Finally, there are temporally posterior success conditions: what separates a genius from a mere

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[89] A famous statement of the idea is Borges' argument that Kafka created his own predecessors ([1951] 1999, 363-5).

eccentric is the uptake. The proof lies in the reception. This might be the reception of critics or of future makers. In either case, it is essential that these later generations will be compelled to think of their own creations in their own time as successor-objects, and their makers as successors to the earlier makers. (What we call canonization, and which can be told as triumph—recognition at long last!—or tragedy: yesterday's avant-garde is today's mainstream is tomorrow's cliché.)

Importantly, note that the creation is incompletely dependent on the three kinds of agent-side success conditions. This incompleteness takes a different form in each case. In the case of "Tradition" the incompleteness of the dependence takes the form of a *phenomenal prospective irrationality.* The new creation cannot prospectively be derived from existing materials, all the formed matter that the act reworks. Nothing in that matter allows one to predict when or what the act will be like. This prospective irrationality is phenomenal because the point here is not about the sudden inapplicability of the principle of sufficient reason. Of course, the act has its (temporally-prior) causes in whatever preceded it. It concerns merely the first-person perspective of the makers. In the case of "Inspiration" the incompleteness of the dependence takes the form of the *ineliminability of the human share.* Although the poets might need Gods or muses, these also need the humans to speak through. Even where the poet is conceived as mere vessel, the Gods, so to speak, do not just pick any vessel, but those who have awaited and prepared the inspiration. Waiting and preparation are the minimal forms that our agency takes in the build-up to the act; that much human doing is ineliminable. Finally, in the case of "Reception" the incompleteness takes the form of *preliminarity.* Some recognition on the part of posterity is essential for genial creation to count as such, but no verdict is without appeal before yet later generations. What is now celebrated as genius, might later appear to have been merely a fad, and vice versa.

To summarize, the exercise of an agency whereby an agent makes an object is to count as an instance of the poetic paradigm if and only if the success of the exercise is conceptualized to be

incompletely dependent on, first, the successful agonistic engagement of predecessor-objects and predecessor-agents, which together make up the Tradition responded to; secondly, the successful agonistic engagement by successor-agents and their successor-objects, which together make up the Reception of the act; thirdly, the presence, which can be prepared for but not enforced by the agent, of themselves either agentive or objective sources of inspiration.

I note in passing what I hope will be clear already: that we have every reason to expect historical action as the poetic paradigm theorizes it to show up also as historical action on our pragmatist conception. On the poetic paradigm, historical action necessarily causes a historical crisis—a split of the time-axis into Before and After. Causes of crises are almost by definition relevant to accounts of such crises, such that historians can reasonably be expected to be interested in these actions in their accounts of the crisis. And that, we said, is at the core of what defines historical action.

The aesthetic and the historical. The next section shows how *becoming moral,* in an historically-efficacious, exemplary way in Kant presents an instance of the poetic paradigm. First, I want to address how the poetic paradigm of historical agency relates to Kant's more narrowly circumscribed, but also more explicit and highly influential concept of aesthetic genius. My suggestion is that the three agent-side conditions are met as far as aesthetic genius is concerned, but that the two object-side conditions are not. This is because Kant, unlike many others after him, from Schiller to Rorty, did not historize the realm of the aesthetic.[90]

Genius, for Kant, needs to go through schooling and work with existing materials: he gives "correctness and richness of language, as well as prosody and meter" as examples for the case of poetry.[91] This is what I have been referring to as Tradition, or temporally prior success-conditions

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[90] For a contemporary account of the aesthetic, which similarly emphasizes the distinctness of the aesthetic and the historical (though not their absolute separation), building on closely related Kantian insights into the centrality of conceptual indeterminacy for the aesthetic, see Klinger 2024.

[91] "Sprachrichtigkeit und der Sprachreichtum, imgleichen die Prosodie und das Silbenmaß," §43.

(A1). These need to be engaged in an unpredictable way, hence the works of genius appear, from the point of view of tradition, as irrational, as a "talent … to produce that for which no rule can be given … thus, originality has to be its primary quality."[92]

Yet, as Kant also hastens to add, there's need for what I have been calling "Reception," or the successful engagement by temporally posterior success-conditions, because there can also be "original nonsense" (A3). Genius has to be taken up as exemplary, worthy of imitation by other artists, and worthy of admiration by the public of good taste. "Taste is the discipline of genius, clips its wings and makes it refined, mannered or moral (*gesittet*), thus capable of a lasting and equally universal applause, the succession (*Nachfolge*) of others…"[93]

As far as Inspiration (A2) is concerned, Kant notes that, just as a genius cannot instruct others how to produce works, they also "do not have it in their power to think up something like it [their works of art] at will or according to a plan." Genius is a gift of nature (*Naturgabe*) and, since nature is also an artwork for Kant when considered as God's creation, the work of genius can at least indirectly be traced back to God—without making the work of a genius any less her work (229). His discussion of the etymology of genius is further evidence that Kant is attuned to the moment of inspiration.[94]

While the creative act captured by the concept of aesthetic genius has temporal dimensions, it lacks historical dimensions. If there is a history of art for Kant, it is a different concept of history than that which pertains to civilizational, political, or moral-historical (religious) history, because it lacks

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[92] "ein Talent … dasjenige, wozu sich keine bestimmte Regel geben last, hervorzubringen … folglich, dass Originalität seine erste Eigenschaft sein müsse," §46. – "Das Genie kann nur reichen Stoff zu Produkten der schönen Kunst hergeben; die Verarbeitung desselben und die Form erfordert ein durch die Schule gebildetes Talent," §47.

[93] "Der Geschmack ist … die Disziplin (oder Zucht) des Genies, beschneidet diesem sehr die Flügel und macht es gesittet oder geschliffen; zugleich … eines dauernden zugleich auch allgemeinen Beifalls, der Nachfolge anderer … fähig," §50.

[94] "das Wort Genie von genius, dem eigentümlichen einem Menschen bei der Geburt mitgegebenen, schützenden und leitenden Geist, von dessen Eingebungen jene originalen Ideen herrühren, abgeleitet ist," §46.

progress (even in a Critically-qualified sense). Kant seems to believe that "a limit (*Grenze*) has been set for art, beyond which it cannot go, and which presumably has already been reached for a long time."[95] Schiller, Hegel, and others will soon after present very different pictures. But for Kant, the thought seems to be rather of the new geniuses reaching the same absolute level of greatness in different ways—a greatness, which had, moreover, vanished from the world after the last genius died and had not been reached since by non-geniuses, who merely imitate the geniuses.[96] Hence, O1 and O2 not quite in place. Aesthetic genius, for Kant, does not replace other aesthetic geniuses; at most, it replaces the non-genius-like work that came before.

Nonetheless, I believe this overlap between Kantian aesthetic genius and the notion of historical genius makes plausible the idea that in Kant an originally aesthetic concept migrated into the philosophy of history. In the next section, we will see the concept of historical genius *is* indeed doing important work in his philosophy of history. But let me point out here already that Kant did not always abide by his own restriction of the concept of genius to the aesthetic realm. A few years prior to the third *Critique* (1790), the term genius appears in his essay *What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?* (1786). It is no smoking gun for us, first, because the *Critique* is chronologically later and philosophically more substantive, thus it has the better claim to being seen as Kant's considered view; secondly, because the 1786 essay speaks to questions of political philosophy and, thus, of political progress only, not moral-historical progress.

It shows, however, that Kant has his ear on the pulse of his time. Prior to the 1789 Revolution, historical genius referred exclusively to the inspired historian, not the inspired maker of history, and for a long time after that usage remained very common. Kant himself uses the term in a similar way, in his reviews of Herder, also from the mid-1780s.[97] During the Revolutionary Age, an expanded usage

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[95] Kant, *Judgment*, §47.

[96] "jedem von der Hand der Natur unmittelbar erteilt..., mit ihm also stirbt," §47.

[97] Not entirely without irony, of course. Kant, *Review*, AA 7:45, 55.

became more widespread, covering also political and military leaders.[98] I now want to claim that this shift is philosophically and critically reflected in Kant's *Religion* (1793). The book tacitly suggests genius as the concept of historical agency, reflecting the semantic shifts of its time, but it does so critically, because Kant looks not to the genius of statesmen, like Cesar, Alexander, or Napoleon, but of religious founders, paradigmatically Christ.

3. Moral Revolutions, Public and Private

It is worth addressing two concerns one might have about the applicability of (quasi-)aesthetic concepts to the moral(-historial) realm at the outset. First, that genius creates novel and varied norms, which contradicts the eternity and singularity of the moral law. Second, that genius is rare and elitist, but Kantian morality is democratic, egalitarian, universalist.

To the first point, the question here is about *becoming* moral, not about what it means to *be* moral. Regarding that question, the eternity or transience, singularity or plurality of the norms in question is a moot point. We ask: what is the conceptual form of the act of adopting the moral norm? This question is independent of the question what the norm itself looks like. Colloquial associations of genius with infinitely varied individual expressivity are *not* even made essential parts of the concept of aesthetic genius for Kant. Genius describes a type of revolutionary, creative act. As such, I argue, it applies to moral selves just as it applies to artworks. None of this touches on the historical invariance and singularity of the moral law.[99]

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[98] In the first Appendix, I offer evidence for this claim.

[99] Omri Boehm (2013) is one of only two scholars, as far as I am aware, who have suggested the importance of genius to Kant's practical philosophy, and the only one to have argued a case for it. But he seems to think that the Enlightenment injunction to think for ourselves requires originality of content. Hence, the ominous suggestion on his part that Kant's call "dare to know," *sapere aude*—namely: the moral law—be replaced with the Heideggerian injunction to think poetically, originally, genius-like (172-3, and 177, footnote 32). I think Kant could not follow Boehm here. For Kant, to think for oneself means to give oneself the moral law: the very same moral law as anyone else is under, because one sees for oneself that one is duty-bound to make it one's fundamental maxim

To the second point, Kantian morality is democratic, egalitarian, and universalist in that every sound-minded adult at least can be expected to understand and follow it. Genius, by contrast, is rare and exclusive. But the point here, again, is not about what it means to be moral or to know morality, but what it means to *become* moral. It is perfectly compatible with Kantian morals, and Kant himself seems to have thought as much, that someone becoming genuinely moral is a rare event, even though all of us ought to be moral. Most of us will only ever become law-abiding. Yet more rare, of course, is the case of someone's moral example sparking the founding of a new and better church.

Let us now see whether the five conditions outlined in the model above apply to successful acts of becoming (more) moral, both in the private and the public, church-founding case. First, we can note that in each case something new is created: a new, (more) moral self, and a new church, respectively. Kant thinks that in both cases, where the act is successful, the new is to be preferred over the old (O2). The creation of the new is also agonistic, resulting from an active struggle to overcome the old. Here is how Kant describes it on the individual level:

> But that someone should become not just a law-abiding but a morally good human being, that is, virtuous according to the intelligible character (*virtus noumenon*), ... that cannot be brought about through gradual reform, ... but has to be done through a revolution in the disposition of man; and he can become a New Man only through a kind of rebirth, that is like a new Creation (John 3:5 compared with Gen 1:2) and a change of the heart.[100]

(*Grundmaxime*), not because authorities demand it. Genius, I will argue, captures the form of the revolution of the heart by which one makes the moral law one's fundamental maxim, but it does not require originality of content. Boehm distinguish between the "epoch of nature" and "epoch of freedom," but inconsistently. This makes it hard to see where exactly, in Kant's system, he sees the concept of genius doing work—but also seems of a piece with his amoralism. The other scholar is Karl Ameriks (2021, 148), who has suggested the proximity between genius and church-founder in passing, and points to the right place, architectonically.

[100] Kant, *Religion,* 47. „Daß aber jemand nicht bloß ein gesetzlich, sondern ein moralisch guter … Mensch, d. i. tugendhaft nach dem intelligiblen Charakter (virtus noumenon), werde, … das kann nicht durch allmähliche Reform, so lange die Grundlage der Maximen unlauter bleibt, sondern muß

The act of becoming moral punctures time and brings about a new man (*neuer Mensch*). Kant compares it to a new creation (*Schöpfung*) and rebirth (*Wiedergeburt*). So, we have an act that brings about something new, the New Man, in relation to which the Old Man, is the relevant predecessor-object: the object for which comparison is in point. These two stand in an agonistic relation. Noumenally, or from God's point of view, the agonism achieves a true revolutionary break; phenomenally, it appears as merely the beginning of a life-long series of reforms on the way to becoming virtuous.

The agonism is no mere rhetorical flourish. It is an indispensable element of Kant's moral accounting. The old self lived in evil. If we now become good in adopting the moral law as our highest maxim, and henceforth always do our duty, we are thereby merely fulfilling the bare minimum morality requires. We do not accumulate a moral surplus on our account to pay off the old self's moral debts (or guilt, *Schuld*). How can we hope that our lives overall could count as moral lives then? Kant's answer: the revolution in our hearts (*Herzensgrund*; he also calls it *Gesinnung* and the whole transformation *Sinneswandel*) is a killing off of the old self, its capital punishment, noumenally instantaneous and phenomenally extended in time. Adopting the moral law as our foundational maxim, we start out on a long journey and, for the rest of our lives, see obstacles, temptations, and sufferings on our way of becoming ever more virtuous as punishments now for the sins of our old selves.

> The exodus from the corrupted disposition into the good one (as the "dying to the old human, the crucifixion of the flesh") is in itself already a sacrifice and the beginning of a long series of sufferings in life, which the new human being ... takes on themselves, but which more properly another one deserves, namely the old one (for, morally, they are another one), as punishment.[101]

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durch eine Revolution in der Gesinnung im Menschen … bewirkt werden; und er kann ein neuer Mensch, nur durch eine Art von Wiedergeburt, gleich als durch eine neue Schöpfung (Ev.Joh. III, 5; verglichen mit 1.Mose I, 2), und Änderung des Herzens werden."

[101] Kant, *Religion,* 74. „Der Ausgang aus der verderbten Gesinnung in die gute ist (als das Absterben am alten Menschen, Kreuzigung des Fleisches) an sich schon Aufopferung und Antretung einer langen

The same holds on the collective level, except that here the revolution is not a private revolution in our hearts only. Nor is it a political revolution for Kant, on the level of the state. It is a "public revolution in religion" that is needed, on that intermediate level between private moral life and political institutional life, which I earlier referred to as the realm of civil society and the institutions that populate this realm, which Kant calls churches.[102] The same rules of moral accounting apply here, too. This is where Kant's anti-Semitism is on full display: all that is still bad and corrupt about Christianity, Kant contends, results from it still including elements of historically accidental outer form (rituals, symbols, etc.) that mislead believers into thinking anything besides a moral life is religiously required. Which is to say: all the ways in which Christianity, as Kant portrays it, has not yet achieved sufficient purity and universality, or: has not yet rigorously broken with its Jewish predecessor-church.[103] Thus, we have the creation of a new self (morally, not physically), which stands in continued agonistic relation with the old self, and which is clearly to be valorized higher than the old self, on the personal level; and the creation of a new church which stands in an agonistic relation to its predecessor-church and, for Kant, is clearly to be valorized over it, wherefore I consider conditions O1 and O2 met.

On the personal level, the creation of the new self is not creation *ex nihilo*, but a reworking of the moral character of the old self. It is a rebirth rather than simply a birth, working with existing materials. There is nothing in the material of this old, corrupt self that would allow one prospectively to deduce whether and when the moral revolution of the heart will occur. This is the phenomenal prospective irrationality to which I referred earlier as the form which the incompleteness of our dependency on temporally prior success-conditions takes for A1. Therefore, we can consider A1 as fulfilled, on the personal level.[104] It also holds for the collective level, when a new church is established. Kant insists

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Reihe von Übeln des Lebens, die der neue Mensch … übernimmt; die aber doch eigentlich einem andern, nämlich dem alten (denn dieser ist moralisch ein anderer), als Strafe gebührten."
[102] Kant, *Religion,* 81.
[103] Kant, *Religion,* 125f.
[104] The qualifier phenomenal is interesting here. Kant strongly dislikes the idea of predestination, that

that, for purposes of the introduction (*Introduktion*) of a new church it is necessary to use existing outer forms, narratives, symbols, etc. to habituate a people to take on the new, more moral faith. He talks about the Mosaic law, for example, as a *Vorbildung*, a pre-formation for the Christian faith: already formed material that the founders of the new faith could work with (832). There is nothing in the old materials, however, which would allow one to deduce the form of new church from or predict when it would be established.

There is also an incomplete dependence on temporally posterior conditions here, which I labeled "Reception" above. In the field of aesthetics, that includes the reception both by critics and later artists. We find equivalents for each in Kant, both on the individual and the collective level. For individuals, the "critical" reception, that is, the reception in judgment that matters noumenally is God's judgment, who sees instantaneously whether we have truly become good or not. Phenomenally, we can never know for certain, as the bottom of our hearts (*Herzensgrund*) is inscrutable to us. We can, to a degree, infer it from the morally good life we lead (*guter Lebenswandel*), as our own critics. If to all outer appearance we act morally, we may gradually, over the course of our lives, build confidence that we actually have become moral. Of course, all such judgments are only ever preliminary. They can be reversed at a moment's notice if new evidence presents itself.[105] – Collectively, too, the judgment on any public revolution in religion, whether it is to count as an instance of progress or not, is subject to revision at any point. Kant thinks the judgment on whether Christianity will, in the long run, be a force

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noumenally it is pre-determined who will make such a revolution of the heart and who will not. Many forms of Protestantism thought, of course, that God had elected some human beings to be saved, and others not, prior to the creation of the universe, and knew exactly who falls into which category. Kant calls this idea of predestination the "*salto mortale* of reason" (*Religion*, 121). But I think he would not go so far as to say that we can rule out with theoretical certainty that there is no such thing as divine election. It is merely something we must never assume practically. Phenomenally, it certainly remains unforeseeable who will become moral and who will not.

[105] Another such test is whether we serve as moral exemplars to others (for example, as parents to our children). Exemplars are important in Kant's theory of pedagogy—"everywhere [in education] examples are all-decisive (*allmächtig*)"—because imposing rules and enforcing them through threat of sanctions always risks producing hypocrisy. Kant, *Pedagogy,* 486.

for good is still out;[106] he thinks that in the past it mostly has not been, and anticipates that even if, during his own lifetime, its purely moral core has come into view ever more clearly, setbacks are to be anticipated, and many more reforms and even revolutions in public religion will be needed.[107]

The real difficulty is with A2, which I labeled "Inspiration" above. The idea that some other agent or force beyond our own conscious control could be necessary for becoming moral is one that Kant firmly rejects, as it would suggest that we could become moral through a heteronomous determination. Here, Kant is going against eighteen centuries of Christian soteriology, which argued that humans are utterly incapable of becoming moral without the help of divine grace (particularly in the Protestant traditions).[108] Grace is the cornerstone of Christian soteriology that Kant most opposes: all errors in religion, he summarizes at the end of his book, boil down to thinking that grace could make you moral.[109] Supernatural determination is heteronomous determination, too. Yet, although Kant thinks that practically we must never suppose that grace or anything like it is necessary to become moral, he notes that we find the idea of a morally perfect human being in us without being able to think of ourselves as its originator. Since we cannot think of ourselves as its originators, we have to imagine it as having come down to us from heaven.

Precisely because we are not its authors, but it has come to dwell in human beings, without us being able to comprehend how human nature could have ever been receptive for it, one ought to say, rather, that this archetype (*Urbild*) has come down to us from the heavens.[110]

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[106] Kant, *End of all Things,* 339.

[107] Kant, *Religion,* 105, 129-131.

[108] See footnote 72 above.

[109] Kant, *Religion,* 200-2.

[110] Kant, *Religion,* 61, cf. 82. „Eben darum aber, weil wir von ihr nicht die Urheber sind, sondern sie in dem Menschen Platz genommen hat, ohne daß wir begreifen, wie die menschliche Natur für sie auch nur habe empfänglich sein können, kann man besser sagen: daß jenes Urbild vom Himmel zu uns herabgekommen sei…"

Such language suggests something like universal moral inspiration. For Kant, each of us has what we can only think of as a spark of moral genius. It takes human effort in the form of moral schooling that, at some long-awaited and prepared-for moment, this spark might burst into a flame.

Does inspiration so conceived differ from the way it is conceived on the poetic paradigm? The universal moral inspiration all humans share in has taken place inside us long before we become moral. It might thus seem to fall more properly under the temporally prior success-conditions, rather than the temporally simultaneous success-conditions. The rhetoric of inspiration is present. Conceptually it still might seem like slightly different case, if we consider the act of becoming moral as an individual act only. But consider that, phenomenologically, the hallmarks of "Inspiration" on the poetic paradigm were found to be that some condition beyond our conscious control has to be *awaited* and *prepared* for. It is easiest to see that something of that structure exists for Kant on the collective level.

It happened then that in this very same people, at a time when it felt all the pains of a hierarchal constitution to their fullest extent, and which by this very fact, as well as perhaps also through the moral teachings about freedom of the Greek sages, which shake up all slavish disposition, and which gradually had come to have an influence upon it, had for the most part provoked a reckoning among it (*zur Besinnung gebracht*), thus made it ripe for a revolution, – then it happened that, all of a sudden, a person, whose wisdom was even purer than that of the previous philosophers, appeared as if he had come down from heaven…[111]

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[111] Kant, *Religion,* 79-80. "Nun erschien in eben demselben Volke zu einer Zeit, da es alle Übel einer hierarchischen Verfassung im vollen Maße fühlte, und das sowohl dadurch, als vielleicht durch die den Sklavensinn erschütternden moralischen Freiheitslehren der griechischen Weltweisen, die auf dasselbe allmählich Einfluß bekommen hatten, großenteils zum Besinnen gebracht, mithin zu einer Revolution reif war, auf einmal eine Person, deren Weisheit noch reiner, als die der bisherigen Philosophen, wie vom Himmel herabgekommen war…"

From Judaism thus – … when … already a lot of foreign (Greek) wisdom had been brought into it, which likely also contributed to enlighten the people through notions of virtue and, together with the heavy burden of their statutory faith, prepared them to undertake a revolution as soon as the opportunity should present itself in the form of a weakening of priestly powers … – from such a Judaism now arose, suddenly but not without preparation, Christianity.[112]

Peoples have to be prepared (*vorbereitet*) or made ripe (*reif*) for a revolution in religion, through enlightenment (*Aufklärung*). After a long time of such preparation, the revolutionary change will then appear all of a sudden (*plötzlich*) and its leaders – Christ, who is, for all practical and religious purposes, for Kant, nothing but the moral *Urbild*, whether taken empirically, in history, or innerly in the heart of each reasonable being under the moral law – will appear as if they had come down from heaven.

There is an equivalent for this in the lives of individuals becoming moral, too. We are not born moral, but only become so, after a long work of education and enlightenment that prepares us to, eventually, adopt by ourselves and for ourselves the moral law. Thus, although the moral law is in us, individually and collectively, from the moment on that we are rational beings, as the latent spark of moral genius, it takes preparatory work and the ripening of character and circumstances, for it to be actualized in an act of moral becoming, which refashions the existing moral self in a manner that, if at all successful is noumenally instantaneous, but phenomenally just the beginning of a long journey of

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[112] Kant, *Religion,* 127-8. "Aus dem Judentum also … aus dem schon durch allmählich darin öffentlich gewordene moralische Lehren mit einem Religionsglauben vermischten Judentum, in einem Zustande, wo diesem sonst unwissenden Volke schon viel fremde (griechische) Weisheit zugekommen war, welche vermutlich auch dazu beitrug, es durch Tugendbegriffe aufzuklären, und bei der drückenden Last ihres Satzungsglaubens zu Revolutionen zuzubereiten, bei Gelegenheit der Verminderung der Macht der Priester, … aus einem solchen Judentum erhob sich nun plötzlich, obzwar nicht unvorbereitet, das Christentum…"

further reforms, beset by challenges and setbacks. If the collective conditions are right, the becoming moral of an individual can be exemplary in such a manner as for it to spark a revolution in public religion, which, given human shortcomings, needs to work with existing materials and will depend on future revolutions to realize what it could not yet achieve. Therefore, I conclude that the agency involved in becoming moral and, thus, potentially also a historically salient moral exemplar to others, is an instance of the poetic paradigm as described above.

4. The First Left-Hegelian

How far does the poetic paradigm of human historical agency extend? I cannot conduct a comprehensive investigation here. But let me suggest that the poetic paradigm allows us to draw a line from Kant to Marx and critical theory generally. Kant anticipates core tenets of left-Hegelianism when he argues that reason needs to become productive in history to realize humanity's true historical ends, while also maintaining that it is still an open question whether reason will be able to achieve this.[113]

Intersection of freedom and nature. Allan Wood famously argued that Kant was an "historical materialist" in that he thought that civilizational progress, as I have called it, occurred in stages, individuated by their modes of production.[114] That would only establish that Kant was open to more materialist conceptions of history as far as the "epoch of nature" (Wood) is concerned, that is, the first two kinds of progress, but not the moral or the moral-historical realm, which Wood calls the "epoch of freedom," which alone leaves room for agency in a robust sense. But is the realm of freedom idealistically separated from other realms of history for Kant, especially political history, centered around the state, and economic history, which were paramount for Hegel and Marx, respectively? The challenge here is first to show that moral-historical progress and political progress, though distinct,

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[113] To be sure, Kant did not historicize reason itself quite to the extent that his and Hegel's successors did. That remains a crucial difference.
[114] Wood 1999, 244f.

are also structurally linked, such that one can speak of them as two sides of an integrated history, under a univocal conception of history as such.

As has often been noted, Kant argued that philosophy (of history), could and ought itself be efficacious in bringing about the good end of history.[115] For Kant, as for the young Marx, the point of philosophy was not just to interpret the world, but also to change it (and for both, we might add, the "critique of religion is the prerequisite of all critique").[116] Sometimes, it can sound like Kant is primarily concerned with the right kind of philosophy of history helping us maintain the requisite mental dispositions to further historical progress: hope, rather than despair, as the latter would lead to moral laziness. But for Kant, philosophy might also intervene more directly, and more drastically, in the moral-historical religious realm, as can be gleaned from the following, overlooked historical episode.

Early on in the *Religion*, Kant suggests that the book as a whole could serve as critical intervention in the moral-historical sphere, as potential text-book for theology students; the later chapters contain much by way of a blueprint for a moral rational religion, its doctrine and institutional shape.[117] The proposals might seem utopian, but the ink had not dried on its second edition—the preface dates it to Jan 26, 1794—when, less than four months later, on May 7th of that year, Robespierre tried to enforce an almost exact copy of it politically. The first article of the "Decree establishing the Cult of the Supreme Being, of 18th Floréal of the Year II" enshrines into positive law the postulates of practical reason; its second article specifies that religious duties are identical with morality, which is a one-line summary of Kant's program:

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[115] The earliest instance I found is Habermas (1970, 225–27).

[116] Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right,* 1.

[117] Kant, *Religion,* 10.

Article 1. The French people recognizes the existence of the Supreme Being and the immortality

of the soul.

Article 2. It recognizes that the cult worthy of the Supreme Being is the practice of human duty.[118]

The rest of the document specifies that there should be festivals named after virtues, which is about as much outer form as Kant envisions for rational religion.[119] Kant could not have asked for more—except, of course, that to enforce such a moral-religious ideal through state violence perverts it utterly. One month later, in June 1794, Kant publishes *The End of All Things* in which he warns against any attempts to arm religion (that is, morality) with "imperious authority" (*gebieterische Autorität*) as leading to the "perverted (*verkehrte*) end of all things".[120]

This example illustrates how politics and morality intersect for Kant: in the moral education of the political sovereign on the part of the philosophers.[121] Kant speaks of monarchs and princes, but, as with the churches, I suggest we do not get hung up on this historical specificity and translate is as "sovereign." In a democracy, that could be the people ultimately and their elected representatives proximately. The point is more general: political progress might be ensured by the cunning of nature. Rational political leaders will eventually, he thinks, through sheer political self-interest be brought to rule in a republican manner (*de facto* if not necessarily *de jure*) and institute a world-federation of republics. But they might fail through political rationality alone to also secure the necessary religious freedoms required for moral-religious progress. Worse yet, they might, out of zealotry, attempt to

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[118] "Art. 1: Le peuple français reconnoît l'existence de l'Être suprême et l'immortalité de l'âme. – Art. 2: Il reconnoît que le culte digne de l'Être suprême est la pratique des devoirs de l'homme." To be accessed here: https://archives.var.fr/article.php?laref=11110&titre=decret-du-18-floreal-an-ii-instaurant-la-fete-de-l-etre-supreme-1l64.

[119] Kant, *Religion*, 198-200.

[120] Kant, *End of all Things*, 339. Those passages come at the very end of the text, as if quickly appended in response to the recent events.

[121] Cf. Kant, *Contest of the Faculties*, AA 7:89-91.

hasten progress and enforce rational religion politically. That would spoil its moral substance to the core. But seeing this requires more than merely political *Verstand*. It requires insight into the nature of morality, and such insight requires a moral education. There is thus a genuinely historical need for the moral education of the political sovereign by the philosophers for Kant.[122]

The philosopher as church-founder. In conclusion, let me briefly consider the question whether Kant's own interventions at the intersection of morality and politics fall under the model which for him describes agency in the "epoch of freedom," the poetic paradigm? Here we move from a reconstruction of Kant's views to a recursive application of that view to the philosophical practice he exemplified. Naturally, Kant's practice will permit of several interpretations; I will content myself with showing that it is possible to describe it as instantiating the model of the poetic paradigm.

Kant's moral-historical intervention in the *Religion* aims at a new and better form of religion (O2), and there can be no doubt, I think, that he thinks of his proposal as one to replace existing forms of Christianity. Though of course this struggle need not be violent, there is agonistic rivalry (O1). This can be seen from the way in which Kant works both with and against the existing religious and political institutional landscape (A1, Tradition).[123] He everywhere grafts his theory of a moral and rational religion onto Biblical quotations, and supplements this pure philosophy of religion with excursions into Biblical exegesis, in apparently conservative, but often highly subversive ways.[124] "Waiting" and "preparation" have been conceptually isolated as the distinguishing characteristics of A2, Inspiration. The act in question does not happen at will, but circumstances need to be right, and they can be made

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[122] Cf. Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 370f.

[123] This has been impressively documented by Reidar Marik's contextualist study of Kant's political thought.

[124] For an analysis of his rhetorical strategies here see especially Yovel (201-24). With one exception (*Religion*, 121), every time Kant cites Paul he seems to do so approvingly, but the elevation of the (moral) law contrasts sharply with Paul's criticism of those who rely on the (Mosaic) law only for their salvation. For Paul, salvation is found only through grace; for Kant, we must never suppose that grace alone could make us moral. As Paul sometimes covered his traces through extensive citations from Hebrew scripture, so Kant hides his radicalism behind Pauline quotes.

right. Kant stresses that he could not have done the work he is doing in another age.[125] Only now, he says have the right principles begun to emerge, the social conditions for further improvement come about (principally, a public sphere to debate them), and the prospect is opened for further improvements, to which his own work contributes, preparing future revolutions, or "evolution" in morality, religion, pedagogy, and politics (A3, Reception).[126]

There is thus reason to think that the shape of Kant's own intervention is deeply consonant with the way he theorized moral-historical interventions to take place generally. Theory and practice seem to inform each other here.

5. Melancholy Genius.

I suspect that most readers will be inclined to agree that insofar as genius, whether aesthetic or historical is still our model, it is a problem. But what exactly is wrong with it? In this concluding section I offer a critique of the poetic paradigm based on the analysis of world-loss, and especially radical conceptual loss, from the first chapter. This will orient our search for better alternatives in the following chapters.

The critique I submit for consideration is that the poetic paradigm structurally obscures the need for mourning that arises when a world is lost. World-loss always calls for a work of mourning, because to inhabit a world means to be affectively attached, positively or negatively, to at least some of the practices and concepts that are distinctive of that world. This is a challenge for each individual inhabitant of the world in question, but it is also a shared problem for them *qua* inhabitants to that world. The poetic paradigm, I want to argue, is of a piece with a quintessentially modern incapacity to acknowledge the need for mourning lost worlds, practices, and concepts, both personally and

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[125] For example, *Pedagogy*, 444, *Religion, 131-2*, *Contest*, 85-9.
[126] Kant, *Contest*, 87.

structurally. Such incapacity, I argue, leads to distinctive forms of unfreedom. This ought to matter to modern philosophies of history, particularly those that think of themselves as emancipatory or progressive, concerned with theorizing forms of agency that contribute to greater human freedom.

Let me briefly recapitulate here the relationship between mourning and freedom that the previous chapter proposed, before I show how the poetic paradigm gets in the way of seeing the need for such mourning. We said that mourning retains two aspects, a negative and a positive one. The negative aspect is de-cathexis, the loosening of our affective attachments to what has been lost. Crucially, includes both love and hatred, positive-libidinal and negative-aggressive attachments. I call this work of de-cathexis negative because it results in a form of negative "freedom from" that which has been lost. Our attachments no longer determine us; the result could be seen as indifference. But that is only one side of the mourning process.

The other, positive side we referred to as internalization. Often some version of what has been lost stays with us, whether we like it or not. The challenge there is to integrate it well. We restated Hans Loewald's idea of "degrees of internalization" in the vocabulary of an intersubjectivist, pragmatist account of selfhood as constituted by relations of (mis)recognition. The recognitive demands of formative alterities are internalized. Poor or unsuccessful mourning means that their demands appear to us either as enigmatic (the Id position) or as underwritten by threat (the superego position); successful mourning, to the contrary, means that these internalized formative alterities, under whose recognitive demands we continue to constitute ourselves, speak to us with the voice of counsel (alter-ego) position or have merged with our ego core. Instead of "ghosts," as Loewald put it, they have become "ancestors," continuing supportive presences.

We also distinguished between personal and structural mourning. Personal mourning, of either private or publicly shared loss, is transformative of individuals' psychic structures by way of de-cathexis and internalization. It is often needed, albeit essentially conservative, because it leaves

antecedent worldly structures of subject-formation untouched. Structural mourning, on the other hand, is precisely when those structures, too, are reworked on the occasion of the loss of a world, or of some practices and concepts belong to that world. Such structural mourning (or processing, if a less psychologically connoted term is preferred), by definition, is a transformation of worlds rather than merely a reconciliation to what is, hence it does not share personal mourning's in-built conservatism.

The question, we noted at the end of the first chapter, is whether we have any concepts for thinking such structural mourning. They would help us think what it would mean to work through a complex and ambivalently cathected past with a view to achieving a transformative integration of past practices and concepts into our own world, recognizing as lost what has to be lost, and mourning it, but perhaps also creatively re-working others elements of that world that it seems possible and desirable holding onto, internalizing them into a new world. Such work could arguable be seen as conducive to historical freedom: to free relations between the inhabitants of a world and their past, such that their attachments to that past are not felt as a heteronomous determination, an impossible to fulfill, super-ego-like demand or a haunting, Id-like presence. Such free relations with the past could be mostly negative, a desired and genuine indifference, but they could also include forms of more positive freedom, as the capacity to engage ever more deeply with a past that is affirmed as heritage, strong differences notwithstanding.

I argued that *qua* action upon worlds and practices in response to their loss, the concept of structural mourning would have to be theorized under the label of historical action, and that we first ought to look at existing concepts of historical action, to see whether these meet the challenge. Now we have one influential model before us, the poetic paradigm. However, I believe it does help us think what successful structural mourning would look like.

The poetic paradigm and the incapacity to mourn. The reason is that the past only ever appears in two forms on the poetic paradigm: as material to be used or as predecessor to be overcome, and "using" and "overcoming" here are precisely conceived in such a way as to preclude successful mourning. (Wherefore it also cannot surprise us that genius has longstanding associations with melancholy.)[127]

What is needed to mourn well are, first of all, acknowledgements that there was a loss, that the loss was a genuine *loss*, and that it was ours. The problem with the poetic paradigm is most distinctly visible regarding the second of these pre-requisites, so that is where I will start. Where it fails on the other two counts, I suspect that this derives from the fact that it fails on the second count, recognizing the loss *as* loss. It matters that the loss is not just factually acknowledged (that some world is now gone, in the sense of its practices and concept have become practically unintelligible). These need to be furthermore acknowledged as being themselves subject-like grounds of subject-formation. Recognitive demands issue from them, which those who suffer the world-loss have internalized (and even their descendants, potentially, in case these demands, the values and ideals in question, have been passed on). We therefore value them not just instrumentally; they are the non-instrumentally valued grounds of our very sense of self and value.

This is what the poetic paradigm obscures, however. To it, the past appears in the form we referred to as Tradition, the temporally prior success-conditions, which includes materials to be used and predecessors to be overcome. Mere materials are no formative alterity from which recognitive demands can issue. They just exist for use. With predecessors whom one struggles to overcome certain recognitive relations are thinkable. But insofar as they remain merely agonistic rivals, the only freedom vis-à-vis them is a purely negative freedom. On the poetic paradigm, one aspires to realize that freedom, in fact and, ideally, perhaps also the recognition of this freedom from the past one has

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[127] Dixon (2013).

struggled to overcome. But ultimately this turns the agentive past into an object, too: a subject that is vanquished, which, in the end, has no claim on us anymore.

We might summarize this in a handy slogan by saying that, one way or another, the past, on the poetic paradigm, is always only an object-lesson, never a subject-teacher. The past, once it has been successfully agonistically engaged and overcome has no claims on us anymore. It is simply dead, and if it is not yet dead enough, more agonistic overcoming is required. By contrast, successful mourning as we described it holds up the possibility of diachronically extending relationships of recognition, such that personally or structurally internalized formative alterities retain a beneficial presence, life in the mode of ancestrality. They continue to have things to teach us; we grow in our sense of self through continued dialogue and negotiation with them.

Note here that it is not necessarily a matter of misrecognizing *that* there is an attachment of agents to their worlds, but of the nature of those attachments. In Kant, for example, becoming moral involves a kind of self-overcoming, a "killing of the old Adam." Clearly, the idea is that one was attached to this old self in some form. How could one not be? But the attitude he calls for to that self is then one of self-overcoming, and self-overcoming as he portrays it is still a form of overcoming. It is conceived of as an agonistic rivalry, a negative working-off of the old. As such, it leaves no room for acknowledging the need for mourning.

Note, secondly, that an incapacity to face our complex attachments to the past might itself provide further reason to deny that there are any such attachments, or that they are ours—the first and third conditions mentioned above. The problem certainly seems easier if one believes, for example, that some kind of sublation (*Aufhebung*) were possible where all that matters was not lost and all that was lost does not really matter. Or, alternatively, one might act as if there is little worth preserving in the past anyway, that it is all one oppressive Dark Age, or that only other people (say, one's political enemies) would have any investment in this past world, avoiding any potential ambivalences or, indeed,

the truth that negative investments in the past stand in need of mourning, too.

The rest of this dissertation is dedicated to searching for historical agency concepts that allow us to think what it means to mourn an ambivalently cathected past, such that what we want to lose can be truly let go, and what we want to retain, if at all possible, can have an afterlife, however transformed, and what we want to retain, but cannot, can at least be buried. A poet provides us with a hint where to look.

Chapter Three.

Concepts of Translation.

The first chapter argued that agency in response to world-loss needs to be theorized as a form of historical agency and gave a pragmatist account of what such agency refers to generally. The second chapter looked into a particular, thick (normative-descriptive) concept of historical agency. I called it the poetic paradigm, because it took an 18ᵗʰ century notion of poetic genius as its model. And I argued that this model is ill suited as a form of response to world-loss, because it obscures the need for a work mourning the past, personally and structurally. The remaining chapters of this dissertation will propose the translator as an alternative. This chapter begins by isolating a concept of translation that had its heyday in the practice of literary translation, ca. 1750 to 1830. That concept of translation will be the basis on which the next chapter then proposes a concept of translational action as a suitable form of historical action in response to world-loss. The final chapter will discuss an extended case-study. But first, why would translation be a promising alternative model?

1. **"In the Beginning was the Act" (of Translation).**

Among contemporary philosophers of history, Eelco Runia stands out through his interest in historical agency. He proposes a psychological account of it in which we can readily recognize a version of what the previous chapter described as the poetic paradigm.[128] Runia cites a line from

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[128] To begin with, the rhetorical markers are all there: the "enthusiasm" (2, 10), the "flashes of inspiration" (7), the "intoxication" (14) that are said to accompany such acts all have pedigree in the tradition we have been tracing. More conceptually, he clearly positions such actions as responses to conceptual-loss caused by world-loss, moments when the old ways have gone stale, "in which we no longer have a 'history before us,' or, perhaps better, in which we have 'consumed' the future" (18-9). The old ways have exhausted themselves and though there still might seem to rule order, it is the kind of order that gives rise to deep boredom and fantasies of violent escape. He opens with a quote from Musil on World War One: "Somehow or other, order, once it reaches a certain stage, provokes an urge for bloodshed" (2; "Irgendwie geht Ordnung in das Bedürfnis nach Totschlag über." My modification of Runia's translation.). The heart of Runia's argument is now that the actions that result

Goethe's *Faust I* (1808) as short-hand for this view: "In the beginning was the Act," *im Anfang war die Tat*. If we look at that line in context, we recall that it is, in fact, a translation: the fourth and final version of an attempt at a German rendering of the opening line of the Gospel of John on the part of the play's eponymous protagonist.

Why is Faust translating from the Bible? Arguably, because the Gospel, the *evangelion*, literally the "good news" (*frohe Botschaft*) has become unintelligible to him. Two scenes prior, Faust, whom Goethe intends also as an allegory of modern man, confesses, in a moment of existential despair: "although I hear the gospel (*Botschaft*) / yet I lack in faith.[129]" The sound of church bells—Easter morning—resonates in the deep strata of his self and pulls him back from the brink of suicide.[130] The implication seems clear enough: the Christian message has lost its vibrancy and translucency for Faust and the moderns, even as they continue to draw on religious sources, which, though only dimly understood, hold them back from (self)destruction. The only question seems to be: for how long yet? The rest of the tragedy suggests that it might already be too late.[131]

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here are not rational in any sense that aligns rationality with self-interest, however capaciously defined. These acts are rather rejections of an entire way of life that has become impossible to inhabit creating a tension that is met by a flight forward into the unknown. He draws on the psychoanalytic concept of vertigo which, he argues, "may feel like a fear of falling, but really it is a wish to jump, covered by a fear of falling" (1). On my reading, he is providing a psychological account here of a structural moment immanent to historical agency as the poetic paradigm conceives of it that we have in the previous chapter theorized under the heading of Inspiration and the phenomenal prospective irrationality of so inspired actions. Retrospectively, Runia agrees, there is a possibility of rationalization (what we have discussed under the heading of Reception), even a strong psychological urge to rationalize the disruptive action. He explains it through the psychological concept of "post-decisional dissonance reduction" and argues that this is, in effect, what the greatest 19th century historians, from Tocqueville to Ranke, did in response to the French Revolution. There is, finally, also the element of Tradition, as I have been calling it, in Runia's account: the half-forgotten elements of within the old world that the historical agents draw on in their actions, albeit in novel ways – including, interestingly, past models of the very agency in question (20).

[129] Goethe [1808], Faust I, ll. 765, trans. Atkins (2014). Translation modified.

[130] Faust I, ll. 742f.

[131] When Gretchen asks Faust about his religion, she is less interested in his theology, than she is in whether he believes in the holy sacrament of marriage and, thus, the possibility of legitimate children resulting from their love. Faust's refusal of this religiously and legally sanctioned social form – ironically toyed with again at l.3670 – leads directly to the play's tragic end. Needless to say, I limit

Whether this is an accurate characterization of the role of religion in modernity need not concern us here.[132] More pertinent is the observation that Faust turns out to be as faithless a translator as he is a lover.[133] We shall return to this issue below. For the moment, I would like to simply take the line Runia points us to as starting point for thought. That famous line, which Runia is right to argue captures the poetic paradigm in a formula, is itself a translation. The "Act" performed in its enunciation is an act of translation. In a moment of maximal resolve and (self-)certainty, Faust takes action and translates as action:

> My spirit prompts me, now I see a solution
>
> and boldly write: "In the beginning was the Act." (ll.1236-7)

Performance and translation coincide here. But in the context of the play, this act is also a response to a loss in the practical intelligibility of cultural forms and the concepts they enable. The play suggests

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myself to Part I here (1808). Regarding the redemptive ending of Part II (1832), I confess that, although I hear the sound of Mahler's Eighth, I lack all faith in Goethe's text.

[132] Versions of this view are a mainstay of anti-modern critique. See Victoria Kahn (2016, 1–23) for a recent assessment of these debates. – It is not just theory either: translators of the age, whose discourse I will analyze below, echo such sentiments. In 1780, one of them wonders whether there will be any Christianity left in 50 years; almost exactly half a century later, in 1831, another translator claims that "what fifty years ago one only suspected for a few scholars that has now … become the parole of the day," socianism, free spirits and deists rule the universities. It did not mean the end of the world, of course. Cf. 1780_030, 1831_007. See below p.96 for my citation practice regarding translator's prefaces.

[133] A text should not be blamed for its reception, and Goethe is not Faust, but some receptions can be revealing as to the faithlessness of this particular translations. Consider first, a letter from General Moltke to the historian Ludwig Hahn from November 1883: "For many years people have talked about German unity, have glorified it in verse and song; they held meetings, rifle-corps festivals, and passed resolutions. As long as they translated the Logos as the word, nothing came of it. Only when someone thought of Force, when the emperor in conjunction with Roon created the army, and when Bismarck made Action inevitable, there was creation. But now again the Word dominates." (Quoted in Haupt (1920). The Gospels teach many things, but not Prussian militarism. Otto Wagener reports that Hitler also approved of Faust's "correction" of John and suggests going further yet: "I, however, say, in the beginning was the drive (*Trieb*)," Wagener (1978, 295, cf. 359).

that translation might be the form such a response takes.[134] What if we take this idea seriously? Can we articulate a concept of translation that makes Goethe's suggestion practically intelligible to us today?

2. How to Theorize Translation From its Practice

Ultimately, this inquiry will take us beyond translation in the narrow, literal sense, but that sense is where I want to begin. My suggestion is to turn to the practice of textual translation between natural languages in the Germanophone world, 1750-1830. I focus on this time and place because, as the previous chapters have shown, this was the context in which the dominant model for theorizing responses to historical crises also emerged, the poetic paradigm. This age also saw a revolution in translation theory and practice.[135] My claim is that the potential of the conceptual resources implicit in the practice at this moment has not yet been fully exhausted, or even unfolded, for theory. Such explication is what I seek to do in this chapter. I isolate a concept of translation that I find to be operative in the practice at that the time, but tacitly, not fully theorized. On its basis, the next chapter will articulate a further concept of translational action, moving beyond the narrow sense of translation, proposing it as a species of historical action, which is to say of a type of response to historical crisis that leads to world-loss and conceptual-loss, as described in the first chapter.

Why the practice, rather than existing translation theory? I begin with the practice because practice-immanent concepts are highly determinate concepts. Some theorists in the 20th century have argued that a wide range of fundamental semiotic processes can be described as translations.[136] That

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[134] Within the play, Faust's translation of John might be a dead-end. That leaves open the question, which I cannot pursue further here, whether the play as a whole could be read as Goethe's translation of tragic form.

[135] Berman (1995; 1999), Kitzbichler, Lubitz, and Mindt (2009, 15).

[136] Within translation theory, Jakobson (2013, 232-4 and *passim*) and Steiner (1975, Ch. 1), have highly-expansive notions of translation. In philosophy, Heidegger claimed that every interpretation is also a translation ([1942] 1993, 55:75). In anthropology, Hanks (2014) has proposed that translation be seen as a constitutive feature of social life with language.

might be true, but at that level of abstraction translation remains too indeterminate to be of much help for our purposes. If every act of communication, interpretation, signification, etc. is to count as an instance of translation, then the term becomes so thin that not much more can be said about its meaning. Of course, translation theory has also produced more conceptually determinate reflections on "translation proper" (Jakobson), translation between natural languages.[137] Theorists around 1800, in particular, have produced a small number of canonical texts in translation theory that often sprang from their own activity as translators.[138] But just how they reflect on the practice can only be brought into view by first looking at the practice itself, as the understudied background to their theoretical innovations. Then we can see how, for example, the debates between these theorists reflect tensions between different strands of the practice.[139] I turn to the practice not to dispense with theory, but to offer a new ground from which to re-read it.

I focus on text-based translation, as opposed to oral translation, because it left us material traces in which the practice's self-understanding manifests: primarily translator's prefaces and, secondarily, related paratexts internal to the translations, such as title pages, dedicatory letters, and postfaces.[140] Analyzing both the form and content of these paratext across a large corpus of translator's prefaces will allow us to see how the genre changed over time, and how these changes reflect the emergence of different concepts of translation.[141] Methodologically, this approach circumvents a structural limitation in translation studies: in-depth studies of literary translations, as a rule, are feasible only for

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[137] Jakobson, 233.

[138] Schleiermacher and Humboldt, most famously, but also Goethe, Herder, Hölderlin, Novalis, and A. W. Schlegel.

[139] See Section V below.

[140] Genette (1997), who coined the term, refers to such book-immanent paratexts as peritexts (5).

[141] There exist about a dozen studies of translator's prefaces in a number of languages dating from the last decades. For German, as far as I am aware, the only corpus is Knufmann (1967), who mostly looks at bibliographical data, rather than the preface as a literary form. Though randomized, his corpus is too small (n=76) to be widely representative across genres, periods, and source languages.

small sets of examples at a time.[142] Larger numbers of cases can be read at a distance, sociologically or computationally, but without the same hermeneutic depth. By contrast, translational paratexts are short enough to be read closely in large quantities. That means we can hermeneutically reconstruct the concepts of translation operative in the practice through close attention to form and content, and, at the same time, we can do this for large quantities of prefaces attached to translations from various genres, sub-periods, source languages, and socio-institutional contexts. This will provide some guard against a recurring tendency among theorists—we will see examples below—, to elevate principles that make perfect sense in the context of one particular translation project into allegedly universal translation norms.

Looking only at what translators say they do, rather than their actual translation choices (except insofar as they discuss examples in their prefaces), might seem like a bad form of idealism. Translators might put forth ideals of translation in their prefaces which they fall short of in their practice. Since it is precisely those ideals that we are interested in, that in itself is no problem for our inquiry. We want to know what practitioners thought they should avow, which understandings of translation the practice as a whole subscribed to. Those are the normative potentials that we want to extract from the practice to then redeploy in addressing our concerns in the philosophy of history. But, of course, the practice might fail to live up to these *systematically*, insofar as, for example, structures of exclusion and oppression are built into the practices themselves and their larger social contexts. Such systematic distortions, the materialist can challenge, hollow out the norms which the practice professes, making them toothless at best, without any real grip on reality, and, at worst, ideological tools that serve, tacitly, to reinforce those very exclusions and oppressions.

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[142] Short forms like lyric poetry sometimes allow for in-depth comparative analysis of a number of translations of the same text. For example, Weinberger and Paz (1987) on Wang Wei, Gass (2000) on Rilke. But even here the limits are quickly reached. For long forms, like novels, it is barely feasible to analyze more than a handful of translations comprehensively.

The pragmatist agrees that this is a serious problem. If the charge of structural distortion is to stick, it will have to be specific, however. When dealing with historically developing practices, and the thick concepts embedded therein, there is no point in looking for moments of undistorted purity. Such moments could only be posited in a realm outside of history: a mythical origin in the past, an equally fictitious end of history, or a trans-historical present "beyond the reach of time and chance" (Rorty). We can remain agnostic here on both the existence or the epistemic accessibility of such a point of view, and hold quite simply that, in this post-Babelian world, we need to make do with historically mediated or determined practices and concepts and, as far as the pragmatist is concerned, there is no principled way of drawing the line between simply historical determination and structural distortion in the abstract.[143] The question is always: which structures in particular are we dealing with, how can we bring them into view, and, if we wish to, counteract them?

Some structural deformations of the practice can be detected by historicizing and contextualizing it, holding the practice at one historical moment up against another and against the larger social structures in which it is embedded. For example, I will argue below that nascent capitalism had an impact on translation practices in that the emergence of commercial book markets also gave rise to translation practices different from others of the same periods and can be plausibly read as distorted versions of the latter. Of course, as long as we analyze a finite number of cases, some structural deviations from self-avowed ideals can always go unnoticed in the analysis. Moreover, there are limitations to the approach that are not due to insufficiently large and varied samples of cases analyzed. Take the fact that translator's prefaces categorically address target-language audiences. It seems possible that translators would put forth different explanations and justifications of their practice when

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[143] My suspicion is that, however we conceptualize its logical or temporal location, such a moment of undistorted purity would simply be a point of radical indeterminacy. That makes it useless at best for guidance within historical existence and, at worst, harmful, if utter indeterminacy is its itself elevated into the guiding ideal (perhaps in the form of an anomic messianism). But it seems better not to get bogged down in these metaphysical issues.

addressing themselves to source-language audiences.

This puts some specificity on the charge of structural distortion. Once we have given up on the idea of an undistorted point of view, the next step, after detecting distortions, is to see if there are ways in which they can be remedied, by expanding the forms of practice we analyze, the places where its self-understanding manifests, or the tools with which we analyze it. For example, if we notice that the cases analyzed feature almost exclusively male translators, but also that they feature both a small set of female translators and include many traces of invisibilized female labor, this may lead us to establish a separate corpus exclusively of women's translations from the period to see how gender inflects translation practices. And one could consider looking at different kinds of paratexts, like translator's letters, memoirs, or criticism written by them, to see how translators talk about their practice to source-language audiences. Beyond that, we simply have to see if, limitations notwithstanding, the normative ideals that we do find operative in the practice at any historical moment can, as a matter of fact, still be made to do interesting work in the practice itself or, indeed, elsewhere.

The corpus. I have thus assembled a database of 473 translations into German on the basis of the catalogues for the Frankfurt and Leipzig book-fairs for the years 1750, 1760, 1770… 1830.[144] Of these, 331 had paratexts reflecting on translations ("translator's prefaces" from here on). The corpus contains translations from sixteen different languages, a wide range of genres, both fiction and non-fiction. The graphs below illustrate this diversity (Figures 1 & 2). The database and corpus are available online, together with a directory of prefaces that lists bibliographical information and assigns to each preface a Corpus IDs.[145] The first four digits give the year, the last three are a running number. I will cite individual prefaces by their Corpus ID. Appendix Two accounts for the decision-making that went

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[144] I want to extend my deepest thanks to Jeffrey Tharsen for invaluable assistance with all technical aspects of the process.
[145] Link to database and corpus: https://uchicago.box.com/v/GermanTranslatorsPrefaces.

into establishing both database and corpus in detail.

Number of translations per genre
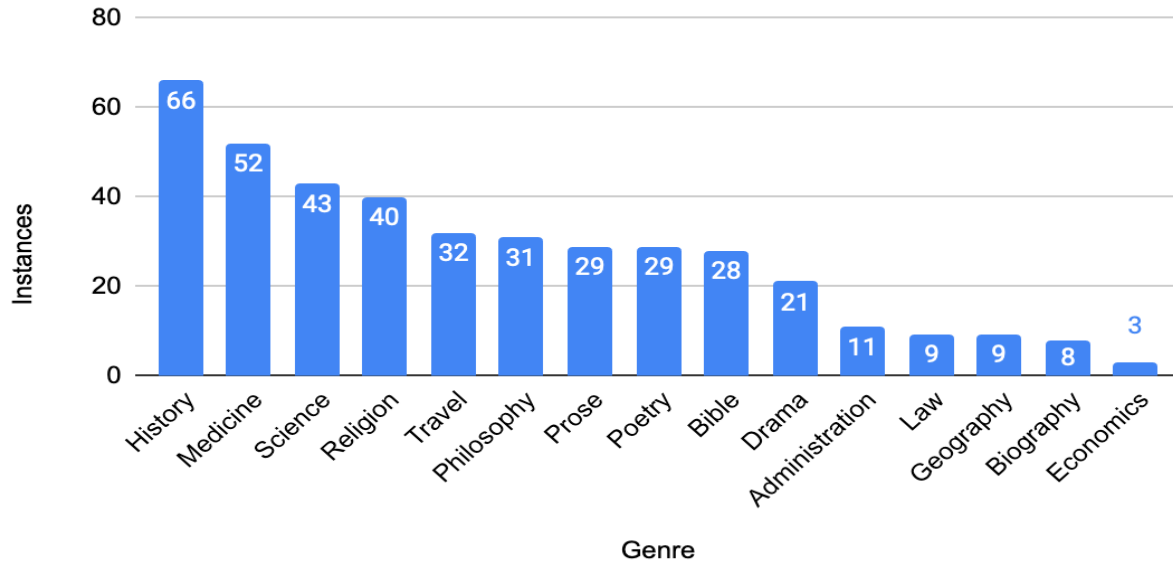
Figure 1. Absolute numbers of translations per genre.

Number of translations by language
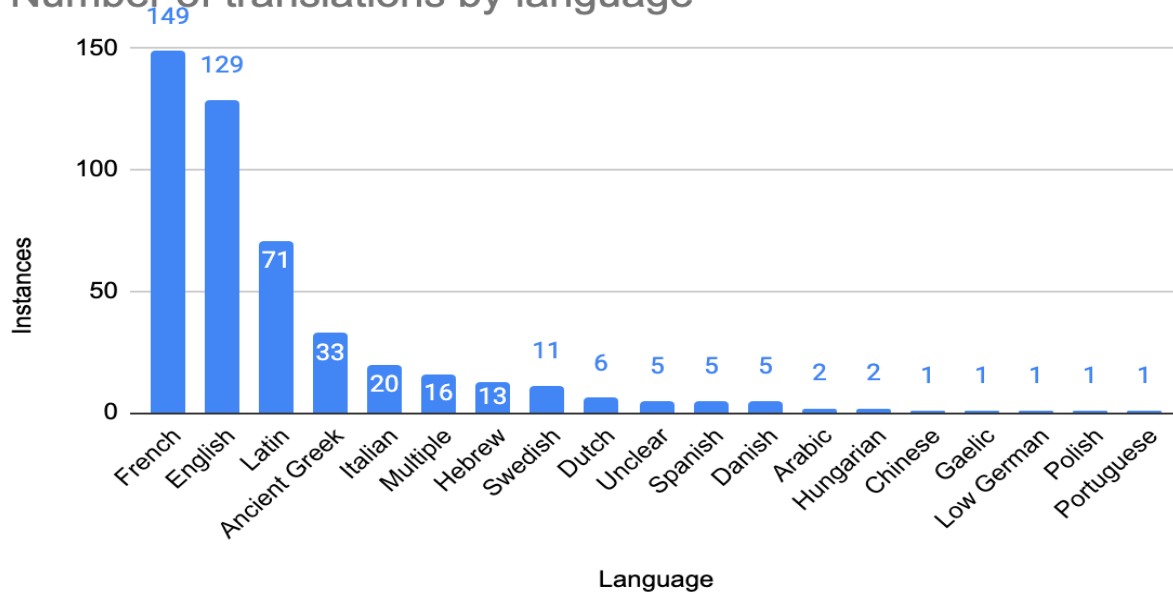
Figure 2. Absolute numbers of translations per language, "multiple" includes anthologies and relay translations.

3. A General Concept of Translation

To isolate historically specific concepts of translation from this corpus of translational paratexts, I need to bring the general structure of a concept of translation into view, if only as a heuristic, to have some sense of what it is we are looking for. The level of generality aimed at here, in keeping with the above, is still that of translation in the narrow sense only: "translation proper" (Jakobson) between natural languages.[146] This will already also allow us to note some differences between translation, in this narrow, but general sense, and creative acts as the poetic paradigm conceptualizes them, as well as the importance of these differences to our larger concerns in the philosophy of history.

My proposal is that any concept of translation (in the sense we are interested in) should make determinate claims about four basic terms and their relations:

(1) translation as an action performed,

(2) the translator as the agent of that action,

(3) the original as the object on which the action is performed,

(4) the translation as the object produced by the action.

My basic argument for why these four is that if one were missing, I believe we would not find the term translation to apply, at least not literally. Admittedly, this intuition might just be sedimented prejudice (Rorty). Consider this a fallibilist proposal. If presented with counter-examples, we would either have to revise the picture or, more likely, limit the scope we claim for it. Perhaps we are looking here only at the general structure of a concept of translation in a European context, or a modern European context, or a modern German context. As a heuristic, I can say, it works well for our corpus.

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[146] Although I do believe that the situation is fundamentally alike for oral and textual translation, at least with regards to the aspects that will concern us here, I shall not argue this in detail.

There also is reason to think that it is not wholly parochial. Consider the fact that in many languages, ancient and modern, Western and non-Western, the equivalent of translation or a very close cognate (*traduire-traduction, Übersetzen-Übersetzung, translatio*, μετάφρασις, fānyì 翻译) can refer to both an activity (as in "translation is an art") and the object produced by that activity (as in "this is a fine translation"). Our way of construing the four basic terms that make up a concept of translation keeps both sides in play: translation as a type of action (1) and as the object produced by it (4). If we recall that, as the second chapter has argued, the poetic paradigm, too, includes only actions that are productive of some object—hence its name, from Greek *poiesis*, making—, this already points to a baseline-level of comparability. I will elaborate on it below.

If these four basic terms seem to be indispensable conditions for applying the term, are they also sufficient? Could there not be other terms that should enter the make-up of the concept? For example, is not every textual translation the translation of some author and for some reader, such that a concept of translation should make some claims about the role of author and reader in the process? This intuition seems plausible, and in our corpus, we often find translators justifying their translation principles with reference to the particular readership they had in mind, or, indeed, the authorship.[147] But considerations of parsimony, I would argue, should leads us to limit the basic picture to these four terms. Having readers and authors is not specific to translations, and only those terms that are specific to translation should be taken up into its concept. More general notions like reader and author, I would contend, should be theorized as part of a more general concept, perhaps that of a publication.

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[147] In one of the earliest instances of an insistence on utmost, literal fidelity to the original text in my corpus, the theologian Johann Albrecht Bengel provides an argument for such an approach from the presumed divine authorship of the Bible: free translation, he contends, might be fine for cases of human authorship, but in the case of directly inspired Scripture only the most scrupulous fidelity would be acceptable. 1769_005, p.8. – On conceptions of the reader (*Leserbilder*) in various translation practices around 1800 see Konopik (1997).

Beyond this level of generality, I want to be careful to not overdetermine the general concept. Its purpose is to orient the search for more determinate, historically concrete concepts of translation embedded in the practice of one place and time. Even so, the relation of object acted on, the action itself, and object produced by it can be specified yet further at this level already.

Separation of contexts. The first crucial point to remind ourselves of is that, constitutively, translation, the action (1), responds to a discontinuity. Original (3) and the translation produced (4) per definition belong to two different contexts; this difference, as a rule, comprises a combination of linguistic, cultural, historical, and other aspects. This might seem trivial, but it has important implications for our inquiry into the potential of translation for the philosophy of history, re-conceived along pragmatist lines. I can make its potential in this regard more plausible here already by pointing to the deep contiguities between, on the one hand, the discontinuities that translation responds to and, on the other, the discontinuities that translational action as a form of historical action responds to.

In the first chapter, I drew on Frank Ankersmit to argue that the historical past is not historical by nature but becomes a distinctly historical past through events that induce a collectively felt rupture in life-worldly continuity. Linguistic differentiation processes are alike in some crucial respects. From a pragmatist point of view, the ontological proximity between these phenomena is indicated, first, by the proximities in methods that we bring to bear on our investigations into them. There are no objective criteria – nothing that the methods of natural sciences could determine – to tell one historical epoch from another; the same is true for languages: there are no objective, purely linguistic criteria to tell one language from another. This is not to say there are no facts of the matter about either history or languages, or that quantitative methods have no bearing here. Rather, my point is, that there is always ample room for how to interpret qualitative or quantitative observation, and such interpretation will implicate the interpreter's standpoint in all the familiar ways humanistic-historical inquiry does, certainly when it comes to demarcating the end or beginning of an epoch or a language.

Historical and linguistic differentiation processes are different regarding the agency implied in them and their temporalities. But my claim is that, on closer inspection, these are differences of degree rather than kind. In the first chapter, I argued that history is still *historia rerum gestarum*, the history of actions, done by agents, in virtue of their agency, and offered a pragmatist account of these terms by reconstructing some of the criteria for ascribing agency that the relevant expert community of historians employ. In the case of linguistic differentiation processes, direct human agency is somewhat limited. Political actors, historically, have been more successful at attempts to enforce or suppress the usage of individual languages or scripts, than at attempts to enforce wholesale linguistic secessionism more directly, although the line between these two is certainly very fluid.[148] Indirectly, the consequences of policy on language are significant and traceable, however. Fundamentally, the history of linguistic differentiation is the history of empires rising and falling, of centers imposing languages and peripheries resisting, of migrations, displacements, modernization and standardization projects, their success and failures. All of these, if the first chapter is right, are the result of historical agency, in the sense given to these terms in the first chapter.

Another difference is one of temporality. Ankersmit's focus is on large-scale and rapid historical crises sharply delineated in time: the weeks in which, as someone once put it, "decades happen."[149] This makes sense, I argued, for analytic and genealogical reasons: they bring out some aspects of world-loss inducing historical crises with great clarity, and they informed the tradition he (and I) are working with. But it should not obscure the fact that some historical crises can be much slower. Linguistic differentiation might typically be yet slower still, trailing behind historical differentiation – but sometimes not very far. Changes in vocabulary and *parole* more broadly, for example, can be as quick as Ankersmit's paradigmatic examples, like World War One. The historian Paul Fussell has

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[148] The example of Yugoslavian languages after the 1990s is instructive: Kordić (2004), Nakazawa (2015).

[149] Lenin, by some accounts, but the ascription might be apocryphal.

demonstrated how the war brought about rapid shifts in vocabulary and eroded the possibility of an unironic usage of entire language registers.[150]

The differences between historical and linguistic change, regarding agency and temporality, would thus seem to be of degree rather than kind. These socio-cultural differentiation processes, for all their differences, ontologically, are contiguous phenomena, investigated by neighboring fields, and, in many instances, historical correlates, one following closely on the heels of the other. That further suggests translation, in the narrow sense, as a promising candidate for theorizing responses to historical crises as translational, in a broader sense.[151]

***Translation as* poiesis*.* Translation, as an action, responds to discontinuity, but it is not the only thing to do so. Looking into the precise nature of its productive, or *poietic*, character can help differentiate it from neighboring phenomena, such as bilingualism, citation, gloss, paraphrase, adaptation, pastiche, parody, and interpretation, as well as from the kind of *poiesis* that is distinctive of poetic creation on the view we called the poetic paradigm.

Translational productivity is essentially *re*-productivity. This sets it apart from mere bilingualism, for example. Passive bilingualism, as the capacity to understand two languages, need not be productive at all, and active bilingualism, as the capacity to produce speech or texts in two languages, is productive, but not essentially re-productive the way translation and neighboring phenomena are.[152] The re-

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[150] Fussell (1975).

[151] A brief word about the observe question, not about the necessary discontinuity, but about the minimal of continuity that is needed for translatability between contexts, or: the specter of untranslatability. I think that in-principle untranslatability is just another word for meaninglessness, for Davidsonian reasons, and need not worry us much, but that de-facto untranslatability—this being untranslatable for that person, in that context—very much is a real phenomenon. This yields a kind of transcendental realism about translation asking, against the skeptics ("translation is impossible") or the dogmatics ("everything is necessarily translatable"): what are the concrete historical conditions of the possibility of any one translation?

[152] This aspect is often lost when translation is taken in a broad sense, perhaps because oral translation and bilingualism can appear so similar. But oral translation, too, is productive – in the form of sentences that correspond to other sentences, the way textual translation is. And whatever one thinks of the translational qualities of their results, the lack of bilingualism has not kept some writers from

productive quality also sets it apart from creation as conceptualized on the poetic paradigm. Such creation is not *ex nihilo*. It draws on a variety of pre-existing linguistic and artistic forms which we grouped under the label of "Tradition." But, on the poetic paradigm, the creation may draw freely on many of these forms and selectively on any one of them. By contrast, translation looks backwards at one thing of which it is the translation. Insofar as it does not, it will look less like a translation in the literal sense and more like some neighboring phenomenon, perhaps a free adaptation, mash-up, compilation or the like.

Here we need to be careful not to overstate our case: the very intelligibility between translation and its neighboring phenomena, which alike are re-productive of some object, will not be intelligible for all contexts. As Haun Saussy observes, "translation is certainly one name for the opening of a gap between what is said and what is meant," but "[w]hether something is a translation or not," just like "whether a language is foreign or not, depends on what you are trying to do, what you are trying to prove."[153] In some contexts, the differences will not be intelligible at all because they have no grounding in textual practices. In other contexts, the distinctions will be merely fuzzy – but not, therefore, useless. There is good reason to believe that, for our corpus, some of these distinctions are meaningful. (For example, the distinction between translation and paraphrase is one that translators themselves will routinely insist on.[154])

Let me focus here only on a single neighboring phenomenon, interpretation, which is often suggested to have a particularly close relation to translation, which will shed some light on the

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trying to translate works from other languages; Ezra Pound and M. S. Merwin are famous examples. Inversely, there are bilinguals who have great difficulties translating between the languages they speak.
[153] Saussy (2022, 67). This is also the reason why we cannot take the concept of translation as primitive when trying to demarcate languages. Rorty has observed that, "roughly," the line runs where "we start using translation rather than explanation in talking about geographical and chronological differences" (1989, 7). I suspect he would appreciate Saussy's point, however.
[154] 1790_007, 1790_008, 1791_016, 1803_003 ("Goethe's schöne Paraphrase"), 1830_005, 1831_005. 1834_004. 1800_003 talks of *Nachbildung*, 1800_007 of *Nachahmung*.

distinction with other neighboring phenomena as well. It is a cliché to say that all translation implies an interpretation, and some theorists have claimed that the inverse also holds.[155] What sets the two apart, in my view, is that translation produces something that is fundamentally *of the same kind* as the object it looks to, while the same does not necessarily hold for interpretation. A translation of a poem would still have to be a poem, whatever else can be said about it, while an interpretation of a poem, as a rule, is not itself a poem. Of course, one might translate interpretations of, for example, poetry, and those would be criticism, too: again, of the same kind as that which is translated. And interpretation can beget interpretation: commentaries upon commentaries, where there is, again, a genre-likeness. Thus, while interpretation *may* produce something of the same kind, translation *necessarily* does so, and where it does not, we are less inclined to call it a translation in any but a metaphorical sense. For those contexts where this does hold, we can usefully look at translation and interpretation as opening up a spectrum on which to situate the other neighboring phenomena mentioned. Adaptation, pastiche, and parody will be closer to translation here, while gloss, paraphrase, or citation will be closer to interpretation.

The distinction between translation and interpretation as we have construed it holds interest for our larger concerns in the philosophy of history. There are philosophies of history, particularly in a Hegelian mold, were some forms of spirit, or as we might say today: some forms of human practice, are sublated in altogether different forms in later historical stages. In Hegel's own thought, it is philosophy that ultimately recollects all other past forms of spirit, both objective and absolute spirit, in its own terms. Poetry, and cultures in the period of their poetic blossoming, will have their spiritual essence distilled by philosophy after their time has passed and placed in philosophy's own museum, the image gallery (*Bildergalerie*) of philosophical history (*begriffene Geschichte)* that Hegel introduces in the

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[155] See footnote 136 above.

concluding pages of the *Phenomenology*.[156] On this view, spirit is not a bone, indeed; it is, rather, in its highest philosophical form, the curation of bones.[157] "Poetry survives" then not, as Auden had it "in the valley of its making," but in the form of prose interpretation – if one can call that survival.[158] This will be relevant in the next chapter, but we can note here already that translation, in the narrow sense in which we take it and for the cases we are working with, rules out a translation of literature into theory. Translation, in the sense in which we take it, produces something of the same kind as the original: literature for literature, theory for theory.

Translation as kinesis. So much for the product. What about the action itself? As a type of making, *poiesis,* it is also a kind of *kinesis*, an action that begins at some moment in time and terminates at another, in this case: in the completion of the translation, the product.[159]

On the poetic paradigm, creation is also conceived of as existing in time. But its parts are portrayed as drawn together into an instant. The creative act is thought to puncture the temporal axis, producing something that separates time into Before and After. Whatever temporal extension the act has does not enter the concept. Conceptually, its temporal extension is thought of as undifferentiated: pure, instantaneous interruption. By contrast, translation, on the view I am offering here, does not essentially effect a rupture, in time or in cultural space.[160] But it does essentially respond to an existing discontinuity. This discontinuity will in many cases include a diachronic dimension; insofar as it does, translation responds to a temporal discontinuity, rather than seeking to create one. And where on the poetic paradigm the effected discontinuity – belonging neither fully to the Before, nor yet quite to the

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[156] Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* ([1807] 1970, §808).
[157] Ibid.
[158] Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats."
[159] Aristotle, *Metaphysics 1048b*. For an overview of debates on the relationship between *poiesis* and *kinesis* see Hübner (2008).
[160] Although it may do that, too: some translations are events in the history of literature. But if it does, this quality pertains to it accidentally. *Qua* translation is need not accomplish such a break, the way a work of genius needs to, conceptually, on the poetic paradigm.

After, but situating itself rather in the moment of their separation – is drawn together into an undifferentiated instant, translation is extended in time in such a way as to allow for an inner differentiation. It has an inner dramaturgy: a beginning, a middle, and an end.[161]

These phases correspond with our four basic terms. The translation begins by turning to the original (3). Prior to such turning and "taking up as" there is, strictly speaking, no original. There is an object in a foreign language that comes, after being judged worthy of translation, to be taken as an original for this translation. The status of an original is pragmatically conferred upon an object by the act of translation; such conferring marks the beginning of the action. Note that the original so taken need not necessarily be a whole text. One might, at first, want to translate only a part, and later decide to translate the whole text – or stick with the part; in either case, the original, for all intents and purposes, is simply that which one decides to take, in the beginning of the action, as that which one now has reason to translate. This is the object on which the action of translation proper (1) is then performed. In the inner dramaturgy of the action, this performance of the action of translation on the object designated as the original makes up the middle of the process. The process culminates in the translation produced (4).

We can note further that among the *kinetic* actions, translation will also be a complex action, consisting of a series of more simple actions, whenever the object to be translated is mereologically complex: if the object consists of multiple semantically charged units arranged sequentially (word after word, sentence after sentence, etc.) and in nested hierarchies (words forming sentences, sentences paragraphs, etc.), then the translation will also consist of a series of more simple actions, translating semantic unit after semantic unit, and unit-cluster after unit-cluster. Chronologically, the order may vary, of course, and the isomorphic parallelism between the mereological composition of the object

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[161] The theorist who has most strongly insisted on this, as far as I am aware, is George Steiner. However, much I disagree with him on the particulars, I want to acknowledge a debt here at the outset to his account of the "hermeneutic motion" of translation in *After Babel* (1975).

to be translated and of the action of translating, as a rule, will be imperfect. Quantitatively, the translator might choose to translate only some parts, skipping some and adding others; qualitatively, she might break some units down into smaller units, or bundle smaller units into larger ones. But for all complex objects, where some kind of distinction between the whole and its parts is in point – and that includes all the cases we are looking at in our corpus – a distinction will be in point between the action of translating the object as a whole and the component-actions of translating its parts. The successive translation of all the parts is what makes up the middle of the action.

When it has been completed, however provisionally, the translated parts will again form some whole, the translation produced. Where it does not, we will be less inclined to call the translation finished, and of course the result may be a whole only in the pragmatic sense of "the whole of the original having now been translated;" aesthetically, its status might be that of a fragment or a draft, as when one translates an originally fragmentary text.

Translational reasoning. The distinction between whole and parts is useful for analyzing, finally, the practical reasoning that is distinctive of the action of translation. There is translation-specific practical reasoning about the original that precedes the action of translation. It needs to establish two things: the desirability of translating the original, in virtue of its translation-worthiness, and the possibility of doing so. Once that has been established and the action initiated, parallel forms of reasoning continue to carry the action as a whole through all its component-actions, in the middle part, bearing on the component-parts of the original.

Desirability. Regarding the desirability of the action, there might of course be all kinds of reasons that compel one to undertake a translation that fall under what Alasdair MacIntyre has called the goods external to a practice: money, fame, professional obligations, and the like.[162] The prefaces in the corpus often do mention such factors. But much more commonly translators will cite as reason for their

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[162] MacIntyre (2007, 188).

translation some quality of the original that, in their eyes, makes it worthy of translation. Often these come in combination with arguments from some aspect of the reception-context, for example, that it suffers from a lack which the translation seeks to address. Whichever of these is the case, translators, as a rule, are capable of giving reasons for why they undertake the translation as a whole. This contrasts with George Steiner's insistence on the centrality of what he calls, borrowing a term from Goethe, elective affinity: a deeply felt, if not always discursively articulable or rationally justifiable affective investment on the translator's part for the object of her choice. There are a few cases in my corpus of translators reporting such motivational sentiments; below I will look at an example. On the whole, it remains a rather rare phenomenon, albeit real for certain translations. What is common to all kinds of translations, on the other hand, is that they make some reasoning about the original transparent, particularly about the qualities that make it worthy of translation.[163]

The same judgement as to the object's translation-worthiness that underwrites the action as a whole also needs to underwrite it at every step. Reasoning about the parts of translation will be continuous with reasoning about the whole. The qualities that designate the original as translation-worthy will be the guiding values for particular translation decisions. The corpus holds many examples of such reasoning: the usefulness, the pleasantness, the aesthetic, moral, scientific, or religious values that distinguish the whole, as such or for a particular readership, guide the translators' choices at every level. Down to what level this reflection penetrates is highly variable. Some translators reason only at the most general level, others show how the most high-level principles bear on individual word-choices. One point worth noting is that the justificatory priority of the higher-level judgments about the translation as a whole, need not mean that these are epistemically or temporally prior to judgments

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[163] 61% of prefaces state the purpose of translation explicitly; 74% of the prefaces offer justifications for the translation-worthiness of the original. For many cases who do not make such reasons explicit, it is because they take them to be obvious: for example, medical treatises or academic translations. In these cases, it is quite clear what they are for, why, or for whom, they are useful.

about the qualities of some part of the original. They might be. But the various levels might also exist in hermeneutic circularity where knowledge of and judgments about the whole are arrived at from, and after, knowledge of and judgments about the parts, and vice versa.

That such reasoning is possible at all is a crucial difference with poetic creation as conceptualized on the poetic paradigm. On the poetic paradigm, prospective reasoning that would guide the creator in the act of creation is impossible. Genius cannot explain to others, nor to itself, how step-by-step it arrived at its products. Critics can retrospectively contextualize it, and the example of genius' arts will be found to be exemplary by her followers. But such emulative practice will involve little reasoning between creator and imitator on the poetic paradigm. By contrast, translators, as a rule, can give reasons for why they translated as they did, both to others and to themselves. Such reasoning will often be a crucial part of their practice already during the process of translation. Different alternatives lie before them. What is a reason for translating as A rather than as B? Generally, they will be able to cite facts about the original, its context, or the reception context as reasons.

To an extent, such reasoning can be implicit, habitual, rather than conscious. An example will be familiar to everyone who has ever translated a text with technical terms: once one has settled on a way of rendering a technical term, one sticks to that translation consistently throughout. The question need not be re-opened every time; the translation of X as Y becomes habitual. And even regarding reasoning about the translation as a whole, some degree of habitual translation is thinkable: think of a case where someone has decided to translate every volume in a series after translating the first volume and from then on follows that decision mechanically, without revisiting it. As we will see in the next section, the degree of reflexivity varies considerably across time and across different strands of the practice.

Possibility. Regarding the possibility of the action, Steiner has emphasized the need for trust at the beginning of each translation.[164] Few prefaces thematize this explicitly, but some do, and even for

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[164] Steiner 1975, 312-3.

those who do not, such trust seems to be a logical necessity: one would not set out to undertake an action that one believed to be impossible to accomplish. This negative phrasing is important, however. Trust does not require a positive conviction that the translation is possible, much less positive knowledge of its possibility.[165] All that it requires is that the possibility is not ruled out: belief in the possibility of the possibility of the translation.

What precisely is the object of the trust here? Steiner thinks of translation as continuous with all forms of understanding and signification. For him, trust is a condition at the outset of the very first approach to the original. When one even begins to read it, one already trusts that something is there, invests in its meaningfulness. This might be so. But that kind of trust is different from a more specific trust that translation, in our general, but narrow sense requires. It is not trust in any quality of the original, be that its meaningfulness, goodness, or whatever else enters into its translation-worthiness. Those, I have argued, ordinarily can be discovered, judged, known by the translator, even before the action of translation proper begins (and continue to be discovered during the process). The specific translational trust is rather in the possibility, or the non-impossibility, of the *transfer* of the qualities that make the original worthy of translation. The language of transfer, of course, easily makes it sound like these qualities are some kind of substance moved from A to B. So, let me be more precise: the trust is that it will be possible to create in the target-context some object (the translation) alike to the original in the requisite manners, so that it will have the qualities that justify the undertaking of translation the original in the first place, or enough of them, at least, to make it worthwhile.[166]

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[165] The latter might even be said to rule out trust. Trust, on that view, would be essentially in what one has no certain knowledge of.

[166] Steiner sees the need for that kind of trust as well, as evinced by the two parts of this formulation: "we grant *ab initio* that something is there, that the transfer will not be void." In our general construal of translation in the narrow sense, we include here only the second half, "that the transfer will not be void." (312)

Trust at the inception of translation contrasts with inspiration at the beginning of the creative act in the poetic paradigm. "Inspiration," recall, was the label under which we gathered what needed to be present to initiate the creative act, whether agents (muses, human or divine) or other (a natural landscape, a beautiful artwork in cases of ekphrasis). Phenomenologically speaking, their hallmark is that, *qua* sources of inspiration, they are awaited and prepared for but cannot be enforced. Once present, there is subjective certainty of their presence on the part of the agent: the inspired poet knows in the moment of inspiration that she is inspired. There is no guarantee how long it will last, but there is a felt conviction that for as long as it does, creation is possible. Creation begins with, and only with, the subjective certainty that, right now, for as long as it lasts, the action is possible. Translation is different. It begins with the conviction that it would be good if the action were possible, and that this possibility cannot be ruled out, but there is no certainty that it will be possible until it has been achieved. In theological parlance, poets begin when they know that the Gods are, right here and now, favorable; translators set out on their task and know only at the end of it whether their work has found favor.[167]

In conclusion, when looking for concepts of translation in the corpus, we will need to look at features of the prefaces that reveal something about the basic terms (1) to (4): about the norms that govern the relation between (3) and (4), assuming, always, that these two belong to different contexts; about the action (1) that produces (4) from (3) at its beginning, middle, and end: about the reasoning that initiates that action, bearing on the desirability and possibility of translation, as a whole and in all its parts, and carries the action throughout; and, finally, about the agent who reasons and acts thus.

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[167] Do translators never wait? Once we get to our expanded sense of translation, in the next chapter, as translational action in response to historical crisis, we will see that there are cases where translators, too, need to await certain external conditions to be right before they can translate. Translational action depends on the opening of a historical gap to which it responds. While that gap is in the process of opening up, there might already be a strongly felt need to translate, but it might be the case that translation cannot proceed until the dust has settled, so to speak, that is, until the rupturing event has receded into the (very recent) past. We will see an example of this in the final chapter.

4. Three Concepts of Translation Around 1800.

What concepts of translations can be found in the corpus? My assumption here is that concepts are differentiated both externally, or horizontally, in determinate opposition to other concepts on the same plane, and vertically, through their inner differentiation into sub-versions of the same concept. Following major macro-sociological fault-lines of the time around 1800, the first, horizontal, distinction I propose is between the translation practices of the feudal *ancien régime*, the practices of the emerging bourgeois cultural sphere, and the commercial translation practices of early capitalist book markets. Let us call them the A-concept, the B-concept, and the C-concept respectively. The B-concept will be our focus, because it is the most self-reflective translation practice of the three and the vast majority of cases in our corpus fall under it. Later we will look further into its internal variety, isolating one formally distinct sub-strand: translations made in and largely for the academy. First, let us differentiate A-, B-, and C-concept.

We can begin with the question: who translates? If we look at translators' social class (Figure 3), we see the share of translators from the bourgeoisie rising over the course of the 18th century, to become the dominant group circa 1780. During the old regime, most translations were anonymous, hence their class cannot be ascertained, and we see an uptick in anonymous translations also with the onset of the Restoration after 1815. I have included here also the developments for members of the aristocracy and clergy. Clergy moves roughly in tandem with old-regime, anonymous translations: from a peak of almost 22% in the 1760s to only 6% in the 1790s to recover again somewhat during the Restoration. During the Restoration we also see, for the first time, members of the nobility constitute a sizeable share of those who put their names and titles on the cover pages.
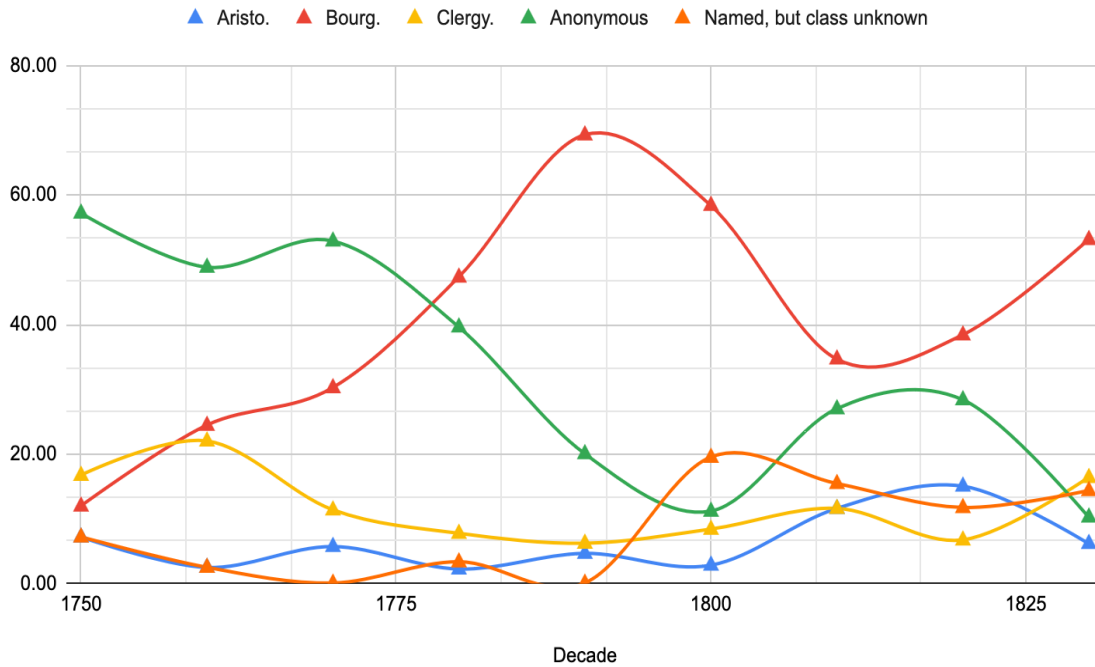
Figure 3. The relative share of translators from various classes. Each triangle represents the averages for its decade, 1750 to 1820. The final point represents the year 1830. The sample sizes for each class are: A = 30, B = 202, C = 52, N = 158, X = 33.

From the 1790s on, we seem to see a decline in translators from the bourgeoisie. That is partly deceptive, however, because of the corresponding rise of a group of translators, tracked in orange above, whose names we have, but whose class affiliations cannot be determined with certainty. My interpretation is that this shows the rise of translators from the lower bourgeoisie. If they were aristocrats or priests, but also professors, doctors, or famed writers, we would know at least those biographical facts about them. The fact that we do not know anything about them, most likely means they had enough *Gymnasium* education to know foreign languages and work as translators—including, sometimes, Latin and Ancient Greek—, but whose biographies otherwise remain unrecorded.[168]

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[168] Of the 34 translations for whom we have translators' names, but no class affiliation, ten are from

On this basis, I want to postulate now that one hallmark of the A-concept, if there is such a distinct concept, is that the translator, typically, is unnamed. On this presupposition, let us compare cases of anonymous translators with identifiably bourgeois translators, to see in what other ways they differ, and whether their differences are reflected in the form and content of the translators' prefaces in ways that let us deduce something about their differing understandings of translations. For the remainder of this analysis, we shall leave aside aristocratic, clerical, or named, but otherwise unknown translators, also because the corpus contains only relatively small samples of each (30, 52, and 33 cases, respectively), but large samples of anonymous or bourgeois translators (158 and 202, respectively).

Before analyzing differences in the form and content of their prefaces for insight into their contrasting concepts of translation, a brief look at the translations themselves, to gain an initial sense of the differences between the two groups. We have already seen how the two samples vary over time in Figure 3 above; Figures 4 & 5 show us that there are stark differences also when it comes to source languages and source-text genre. Anonymous translations are common for translations from the modern languages, particularly French and English, by far the most common source languages throughout. They are much rarer for ancient languages, especially for Ancient Greek. The translators of the bourgeoisie, by contrast, are the most likely to translate ancient languages, while still relatively strong when it comes to modern languages, especially Italian and English.

French, six from Latin, five from Greek, three from English and Italian each, two from Dutch, one from Spanish.

Figure 4. Shares of bourgeois vs. anonymous translators for the six most common languages.

We also see stark contrasts when we look at the share of each group by genre. Bourgeois translators are strongest in high-prestige, secular genres: science, poetry, philosophy, and medical writings, while anonymous translators dominate in drama and prose and religious writings other than Bible translations. Translations of (parts of) the Bible follow their own logic. Both groups have a relatively low share here, because Christian Bible translations, at least, were often done by clergy; Jewish Bible translators make up a larger share of bourgeois Bible translations. Anonymous Bible translations, in any case, are a rarity. The groups' shares are more balanced when it comes to history and travel writing, two popular genres for the entire period.

Share of translator class by genre
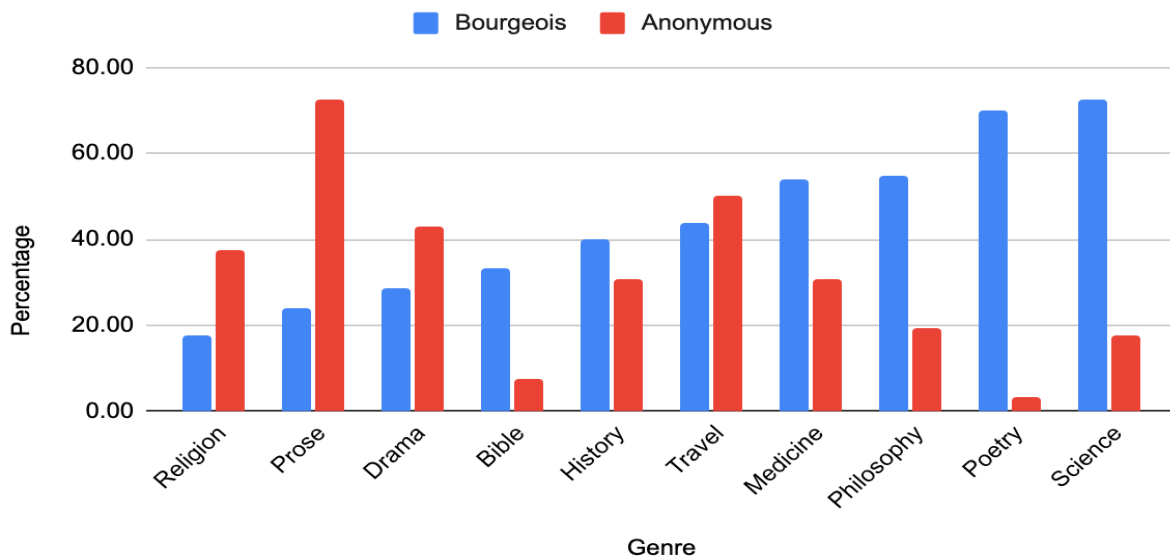
Figure 5. Shares of bourgeois vs. anonymous translators for the ten most common genres.

This corroborates the claim that the two groups really translate different kinds of texts. But do they differ in their understanding of translation as such, that is, in the concepts of their practice? For this, we need to look further into the form and content of the prefaces. One fact to note at the outset is that only 51% of anonymous translations receive a preface at all, compared to 82% of translations done by bourgeois translators. This is still rather high compared to, for example, 20th century novels translated into English, for which a recent study of 800 cases found that only 10% have a preface reflecting on translation.[169] It further confirms the Germanophone world between 1750 and 1830 as one in which the practice of translation was unusually self-reflective. Nonetheless, within the corpus, anonymous translations stand out as the least likely, by translator class, to have a preface. Anonymous translators also tend to write much shorter prefaces, if they do, with an average length of 1579 words, compared to an average 2112 words for bourgeois translators.

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[169] McRae (2010). For more direct comparison, 48% of prose literature in the corpus has a preface.

When it comes to differences in preface form and content, our analysis is aided by the fact that translator's prefaces are extremely generic. A relatively small number of formal, rhetorical, and argumentative features are being repeated endlessly across the corpus, which some sub-variations on each feature. The term "genre move" has been proposed for these features.[170] Following our general concept of translation, we can track genre moves that reflect on the translational reasoning that precedes the action; those that reflect on the beginning of the action, or the turn to the original; on the middle of the action, or the *how* of translation; and the end of the action, or the translation produced. I have tracked the following for each translation in the corpus. (Appendix 2 expands on how exactly each of these has been construed.)

Reasoning

Desirability	Description	Does the preface describe the content of the text?
	Context	Does it provide context about author or original?
	Purpose	Does it explain the purpose of the translation?
	Self-location	Does it reflect on the target context?
	Justification	Does it justify the undertaking?
Possibility	Trust	Does it thematize the need for trust in translatability?

Beginning	Philology	Is it aware of the text as historico-material entity?
	Cuts	Has the original been cut prior to translation?
	Additions	Has the original been supplemented?
	Other	Have other changes been made to the original?

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[170] Cotos (2018).

Middle	How	Does it thematize the *how* of translation?
	Previous	Does it compare previous translations of the same work?
	Language	Does it reflect on peculiarities of source or target language?
	(Proto)theory	Does it make (proto)theoretical claims about translation?
	Examples	Does it discuss examples?
	Aids	Does it reflect on translation aids used?
End	Apologies	Does it look back on remaining deficiencies?
	Hopes	Does it look forward to what might follow the translation?
General	Preface	Does it have a paratext reflecting on translation at all?
	TP proper	Is its primary purpose to reflect on translation?
	By translator	Is it written by the translator?
	Nymity	Is the translator named?

This allows us to quantify a bit more precisely what I have been loosely referring to as the practice's degree of self-reflexivity (*Reflexionsniveau*). For each case, we can tally the sum of our affirmative answers to each of the questions above into an Index of Reflexivity. The higher the number, the more sophisticated the reflection on translation evinced in the paratext would be, with a maximum of 22. Of course, this remains only a proxy. It does not reflect, for example, whether any of the questions above is answered in a single, throw-away line or in detail over several paragraphs. The general distribution of degrees of reflexivity across the corpus is indicated in the graph below (Figure 6). For anonymous translators, the average reflexivity index is 7.4, close to the overall average of 7.2; for bourgeois translators, it is 10.3, and thus slightly above average. To really get a sense of their different concepts of translation, we need to look in more detail into the values for each of the above questions.

Distribution of degrees of reflexivity
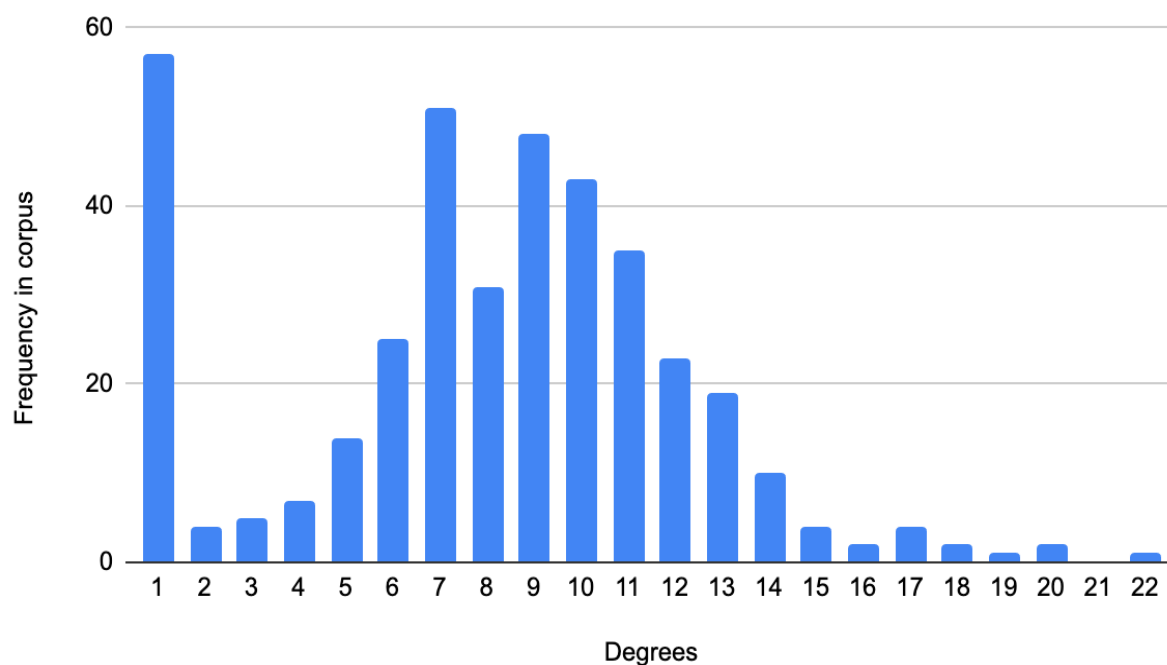
Figure 6. Distribution of degrees of reflexivity by frequency for all cases in corpus that have a paratext reflecting on translation. 1s reflect cases where the translator is named, but no preface included.

The first set of features, reflecting translational reasoning at the level of the whole, particularly on the desirability of translation, are by far the most common across sub-periods, genres, source languages, and translator classes (Figure 7). Justifications, in particular, of why it is good that one translates or, at least, not harmful are something almost all prefaces will have. If they do not, then usually because the goodness can be assumed.[171] Especially in the earlier decades under consideration, if nothing else, translators will often offer defensive reasoning about their undertaking.

Similarly common are descriptions of the book's content. Where none are given, it is usually because the answer is obvious from the title, or because the author is well known. A higher score for

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[171] Bible translations score lowest by genre for Justification, but even of those 63% will still contain self-justifications.

anonymous translators here is in line with the expectation that, in an earlier stage, during the *ancien régime*, when anonymous translations dominate, there are yet fewer texts being translated, much less re-translated, and audiences need more introduction to their books. So, on both justificatory reasoning and descriptions, as well as reflections on the target context (self-location), the two groups score similarly.

Two differences stand out in that category, nevertheless. Bourgeois translators are more than twice as likely to provide context about their author or the original, which might partly be explained by the fact that, as we have seen, they are also more likely to translate classical authors which, in turn, are more likely to receive contextualization in their prefaces.[172] Regarding trust in the non-impossibility of the translation, there are very few prefaces altogether that thematize it, usually in the form of reflecting on the difficulty and hazardousness of their undertaking, but among the anonymous translators there are none.
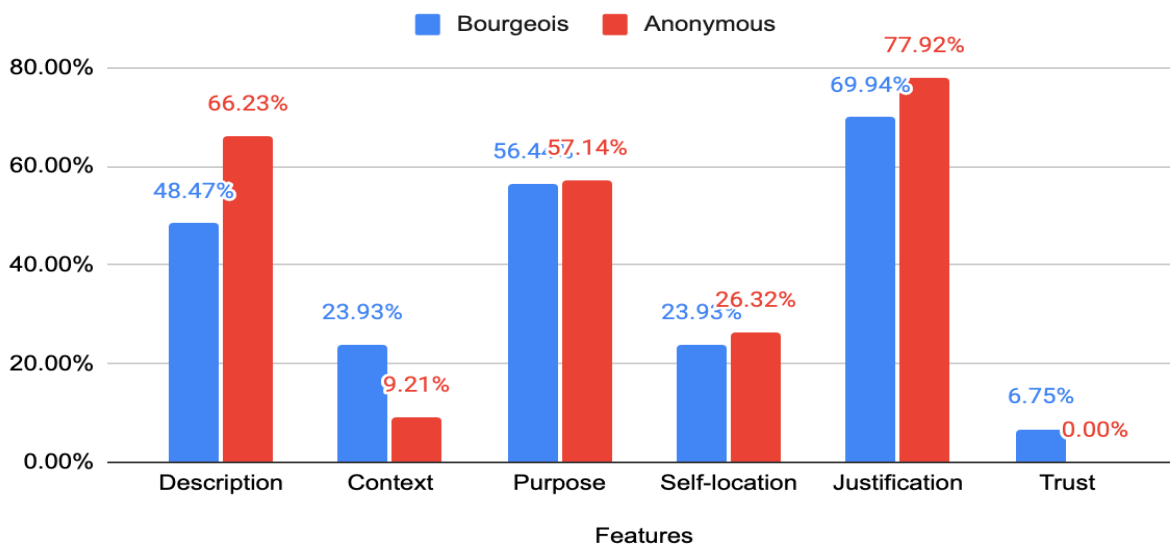
Figure 7. Genre moves reflecting on translational reasoning.

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[172] 37% and 24% for translations from Ancient Greek and Latin respectively, compared to an overall average of ca. 19%.

Differences come into sharper focus when we look at the features that reflect on the action of translation, beginning with the turn to the original (Figure 8). B-translations are much more likely to show a (proto)philological awareness of the text as a historical-material entity (for example, by discussing manuscript histories, comparing different editions, or simply providing bibliographical information about the original). They are also much more likely to supplement the original with other texts, by the same author, commentaries of their own, or, in the vast majority of cases, simply with translators' notes.[173] By contrast, they are more reluctant to make any cuts to the text, and slightly more reluctant to make other changes to the original, like re-arranging parts.

Beginning of translation
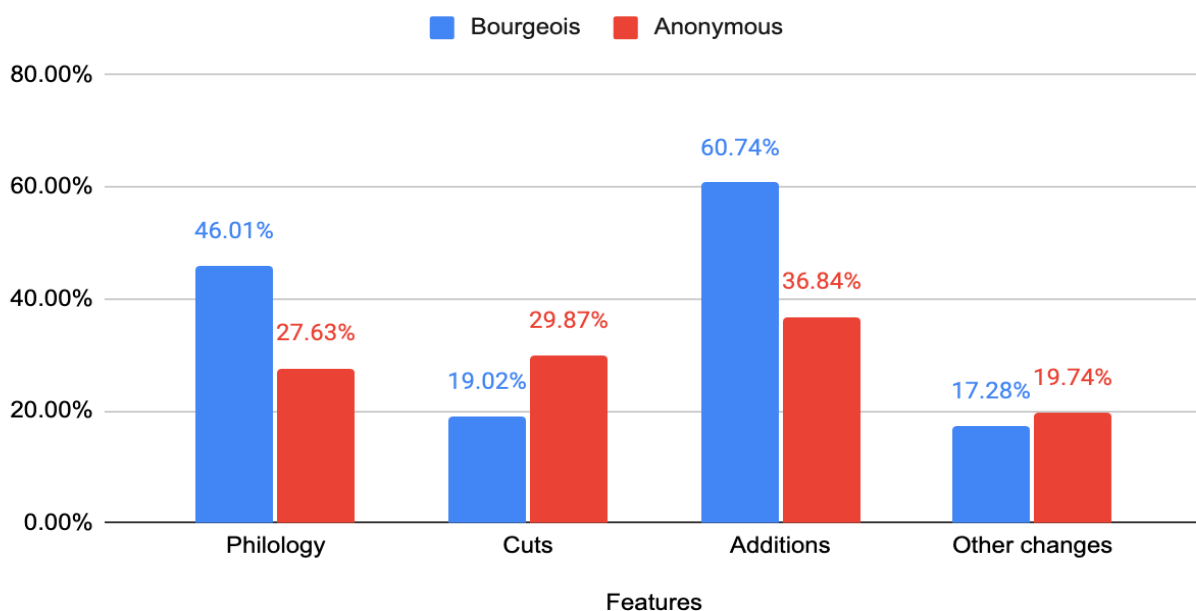
Figure 8. Features reflecting on initial turn to original with which translation begins.

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[173] 1751_002, 1760_009, 1761_004, 1790_011, for example, explain why they did not offer any notes, indicating that notes were, indeed, something expected from translators at the time, at least for certain kinds of texts; 1787_002 comments on the fact that it's become fashionable to announce notes (*Anmerkungen*) on the title page.

Stark differences appear when we look at the features that reflect on the *how* of translation (Figure 9). Here, the B-concept scores higher on each feature, often more than twice as strongly: from simple descriptions of how the translator takes themselves to be translating (which could be as simple as a few adjectives to characterize their approach), to comparisons of their own approach with previous translations, to reflections on the peculiarities of source and target language and their implications for the translation, to (proto-)theoretical reflections on translation in the form of claims that aspire to some generality beyond the translation at hand. The B-translators are more likely to illustrate their principles with examples. The most common examples discussed explicitly are translations of foreign proper names. They also score higher, finally, on thematization of translation aides such as dictionaries and commentaries. All these suggest that for the B-concept translators, *how* one should translate was a live issue. In the next section, we will unpack their internal differences further.
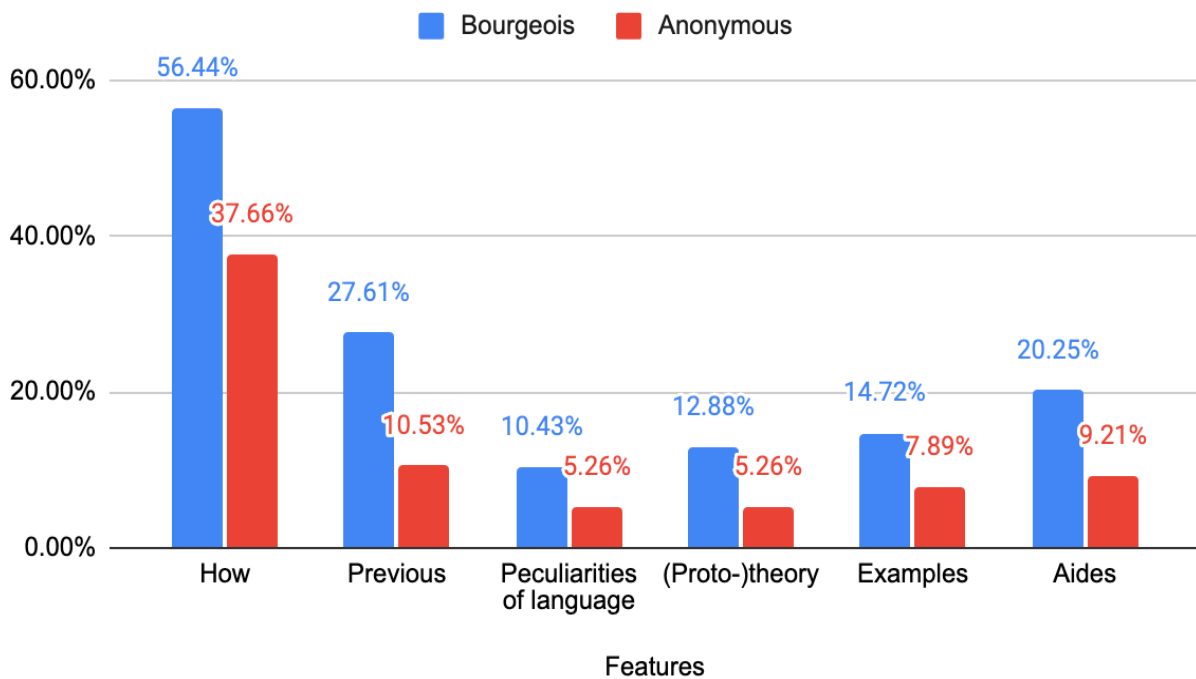
Figure 9. Features reflecting on the middle of the action by translator class.

B-translators are also more likely, at the end of their work, to reflect both on the deficiencies that remain in the work: they identify them, explain why they occurred and why they could not have been avoided; they promise that they will be remedied in future editions, and ask their readers for indulgence (44% in the B-group vs 29% for anonymous translators). And they look forward to the good that they hope to come from the translation, to future editions or improvements, to other translator's attempts to outdo them, and to target-language creative work they hope to inspire (53% vs. 38%, respectively).

I conclude from this that A and B concepts reflect translators of different classes, texts of different genres and languages, and different understandings of translation that find expression in their respective translator's prefaces, in the likelihood they have to give their translations a preface at all, as well as the typical length and sophistication those show. Because the B-concept seems more reflexive overall and specifically when it comes to reflections on the action of translation at all its—beginning, middle, and end—the next section will examine a paradigmatic specimen of a B-translation in detail to reconstruct its concept of translation more carefully. Before we turn to that, a brief word about the C-concept, the concept of early capitalist-commercial translation practices.

The C-concept. Two methodological difficulties prevent us from separating B- and C-concept the way we separated A- and B-concept. First, as Nobert Bachleitner has argued, C-translations really only take-off in large quantities in the 1820s, thus at the very tail-end of our corpus.[174] Secondly, they never advertise themselves as factory translations but hide that fact. Typically, they would be novels meant for mass-marketing, split up among twelve or so anonymous translators, supervised by a head-translator who would put their name on it, but rarely a preface before it; all done at break-neck pace due to pressures from intense competition. What we do have and already since at least the 1780s, is discourse, often polemical, on the part of the translators in our corpus, which shows that they were aware of such practices and defined their own in sharp opposition to it.

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[174] Bachleitner (1989).

One thing to note is that the prefaces that thematize factory-style translation practices cluster in the period we associated most strongly with the B-concept: 1780 to 1815. Some of the earlier ones will use the older term day-laborer (*Tagelöhner*), rather than factory worker.[175]

> … translation, … which certainly has not been done in day-laborer fashion, carelessly (*von der Faust weg*), but with examination and various subsequent corrections… (1780_024)[176]

> In a word, I have not acted cursorily (*flüchtig*), over hastily (*übereilt*) or carelessly (*leichtsinnig*) … not as a hired day-laborer in this translation… (1786_002)[177]

As we move further ahead into the Industrial Age, images of factory work, translation factories, and factory-produced commodities (*Fabrikwaare* [sic]) become more common.[178] The same vices of shallowness, carelessness, hastiness are ascribed to it, with the translators in question correspondingly claiming for their own work the opposite virtues. They also trace these vices back to the commercialization of the book markets and the resulting market pressures that force a prioritization of speed over quality. In this way, the C-concept becomes legible as not just an alternative to the B-concept, but as its structural deformation. A few more examples.

> I vividly feel what damage the now common hunt for translations causes literature … that the demi-educated (*Halbgelehrten*) and dilettantes now produce most translations … that they promise

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[175] 1790_001 extends this to reviewers working as day-laborers for literary journals.

[176] "Übersetzung … welche gewiss nicht nach Tagelöhner-Art von der Faust weg geschrieben, sondern mit Prüfung, und darauß fließender vielfältiger… Berichtigung abgefasst ist."

[177] "Mit einem Wort, ich habe nicht flüchtig, übereilt und leichtsinnig … nicht als ein gemietheter Tagelöhner bei dieser Übersetzung gehandelt"

[178] 1831_005.

a translation or an extract in thus many volumes, before even the author knows in how many

volumes he wants to offer his work; and as soon as an important work appears, already we find

three or four translations offered. … they are entrusted to those who work the most speedily,

ready for the next book fair (*Messe*). … I have even watched carefully over the printing, which

German translators … particularly those of a certain translation factory do not commonly seem

to think of doing. (1788_003)[179]

That, by the way, my translation is no mere fabrication (*Machwerk*) of some factory worker, I can

honestly assure you of… (1800_005)[180]

For if anywhere factory work has taken over in German literature, it would be with the overcast

translations of foreign works. That not only dishonors Germans in the judgments of foreign

countries; it also causes damage to the good cause of making tasteful (*gediegen*) foreign works

more available in German lands. … incorrect, sense-distorting, cursorily (*flüchtig*) thrown-

together translations transgressing against grammar and syntax… (1830_021)[181]

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[179] "Ich empfinde es zu lebhaft, welchen Schaden die jetzt gewöhnliche Uebersetzungsjagd überhaupt der Literatur zufügt … dass Halbgelehrte oder Dilettanten die meisten Übersetzungen liefern… dass sie eine Übersetzung oder Auszug in so und so viel Bänden versprechen, eher der Verfasser selbst noch weiß, wie viel er seinem Werke Bände geben wird; und dass sobald ein wichtigeres Buch erscheint, gleich drei bis vier Übersetzungen angeboten werden. … sie muss dem übergeben werden, der am geschwindesten arbeitet, und sie zur nächsten Messe fertigt. … Auch über den Druck habe ich sorgfältig gewacht … woran gewöhnlich die deutschen Übersetzer … besonders in einer gewissen Übersetzungsfabrik gar nicht zu denken scheinen."

[180] "Das übrigens meine Übersetzung kein bloßes Machwerk irgendeines Fabrikenarbeiters ist, kann ich ehrlich versichern

[181] "Denn ist irgendwo die Fabrikarbeit in der deutschen Literatur eingerissen, so ist dies der Fall bei den übereilten Uebersetzungen ausländischer Werke. Dies entehrt nicht nur die Deutschen in dem Urteile des Auslandes; es schadet auch der guten Sache der Verallgemeinerung … der gediegenen Werke des Auslands auf deutschem Boden. … unrichtige, sinnentstellende, gegen Grammatik und Syntax … verstoßende, … flüchtig zusammengeschriebene Übersetzungen …"

"[After describing sickness during translation" … that one does not ascribe [mistakes] to culpable inertia, negligent hastiness and a careless predilection for the superficial (*Oberflächlichkeitsliebe*), which are not uncommon with factory commodities of this kind… (1831_005)[182]

5. Translation Concepts of the Emerging Bourgeois Sphere

The B-concept is thus both distinct from the A- and C-concepts and more interesting to us, because it is more self-reflective. The remainder of the chapter reconstructs it with its inner tensions and variety, for each of our four basic terms: the translator (2), and the action of translation (1), beginning with a turn to the original (3) and ending with the finished translation (4). The next chapter will theorize a concept of translational action on its basis, as a form of response to historical crisis more generally.

A paradigmatic specimen of a B-translation preface will serve as our guiding thread, Christoph Martin Wieland's (1733-1813) preface to his translation of Cicero's letters from 1808—the same year, incidentally, as Goethe's *Faust I* with which we started.[183] With a reflectivity index of 20 (the highest in the corpus for the period we are looking at), it has all the features we would expect from a B-concept translation.[184] Wieland was not just a prolific translator; his example is also among the most commonly and positively referred to by other translators within the corpus.[185]

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[182] "… nur, damit man sie nicht strafbarer Trägheit, nachlässiger Übereilung und leichtfertiger Oberflächlichkeitsliebe zuschreiben möge, welche man nicht selten bei Fabrikwaare [sic] dieser Art findet."

[183] For studies of Wieland's extensive translational practice, which included Shakespeare, Horace, Lucian, Aristophanes, Isocrates, Xenophon, Euripides, and Cicero, see the volumes edited by Heinz (2008) and Menke and Struck (2010).

[184] Preface 1831_005 has a perfect index of 22, but falls outside the period and, unlike Wieland, contains no interesting theoretical reflections, but is of a mostly philological nature. Similarly, 1792_007, a preface to a series of travel reports, which also has an index of 20. This shows well that the quantitative reflexivity index should just be taken as a first indicator where to look. It cannot replace careful judgment of individual cases.

[185] 1778_003, 1800_007, 1808_002, 1816_001, 1827_003, and 1835_001; 1830_006 praises his literature alongside Goethe's and Schiller's.

The Translator. *If* the anonymity of the translator is a hallmark of the A-concept, then, in contradistinction, we can note that, on the B-concept, the translator is named.[186] They take a responsibility for the translation in a manner analogous to the author of the original, a fact which is underscored by two points. First, they are often referred to as *Verfasser*, sometimes qualified as the *Verfasser* of the German text, whereas in today's usage that term is exclusively reserved for authors. Nor was this was an empty title at the time because, our second point, we see translators of the Goethezeit retain virtually exclusive rights to dedicate their work. The vast majority of books have a dedication. In the earlier decades, those often took the form of long dedicatory letters to aristocrats who extended material support to the translators. Like many other features of the A-concept, these make a comeback during the Restoration, while during the high-phase of the B-concept, we see shorter dedications, often just a single page long, and often by bourgeois translators, whose professions provide income enough for them to not depend on aristocratic benefactors, and who dedicate their work to friends and colleagues. In one memorable case, this leads to a translator, signing as *Verfasser*, dedicating his translation to the author of the original, addressed also as *Verfasser*.[187]

But it would be a mistake to think of translatorial agency on the B-concept as simply a doubling, or an imitation, of authorial agency. Consider the possibility of shared agency within authorial and translational agency. Co-authorship is a rarity in the entire database, with only five occurrences in total.[188] They also get rarer over time: three of the five are from the early to mid 1750s. By contrast, there are thirty instances of co-translatorship. Not all of them advertise themselves as such on the cover page, but during the period most strongly associated with the B-concept, we see co-translation gaining visibility. Of the thirty co-translations, nineteen advertise themselves as such on the cover, and

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[186] 1788_003 encourages its readers to never trust anonymous translations. 1830_021 explicitly advertises that for all the translations of this series the translator will always be named.
[187] 1792_006.
[188] 1829_001, 1785_002, 1756_002, 1751_007, 1751_004.

of those only one, from 1767, pre-dates the 1790s. By contrast, of the eleven co-translations that do reveal themselves to be such in the preface, but not on the cover, nine date from 1780 or earlier; only two hidden co-translations appear afterwards. This suggests that according to the norms of the times translational agency allowed for an inner plurality which authorial agency did not, and that, although shared translational agency was a reality throughout the period, it was on the B-concept that this reality was brought into the concept, affirmed and made visible.

One form of co-translation that, for the most part, remains invisible throughout the corpus, however, is that of women translators. Authors and translators in our database are overwhelmingly male. Yet, we do know that there were many women translators, whose work was often invisibilized. Sometimes male translators admit that their wives did the work in the prefaces, sometimes anonymization intentionally preserves traces of the translator's gender ("Translated by Mrs. A.", "Translated by a woman," and similar phrases). In total, we have eleven translations in the database which we know were done by women, five of which are also identified by name: Lucie Domeier, Meta Forkel-Liebeskind, Louise Abelgunden Gottsched, Caroline Paulus, and Caroline Pichler, all of them hailing from the educated (upper) middle-class. Only ten of the eleven translations by women translators have been digitized; of those, six have a preface and four do not. The majority of them again appear in the later decades: only three translations by women, one of them identified by name, appear before 1780. With such small numbers, it is difficult to say how gender inflected translation practice and theory. That could be remedied, however, by establishing a large enough corpus of women translators' prefaces, which I hope to do in the future.

The Original, or the Beginning of the Action. Translation, in the sense we are interested in, begins with an original. The original appears in the translation in several ways, at different points: as given, as taken, and as to-be-constructed. That last way is distinctive of the B-concept. Prior to the action, it first appears to the translator *qua* translator as *given*, in a judgment that establishes the translation-

worthiness of a text.[189] This text then comes to be *taken* as an original because of its translation-worthiness, which, if the conditions are right, marks the beginning of the translation. That much would seem to hold for many concepts of translations.

On the B-concept, there is yet a third way in which the original appears, before the work of translation proper can begin (the middle of the action): as *to-be-constructed*. Now the translator *qua* translator intervenes in the original that, hitherto, had been taken as it is, and taken as an original because of the way it is. Between the decision that marks the beginning of the action and the translation proper, we see translators perform a variety of operations on the text, that we can gather under the heading of philological operations: locating the text as a historico-material entity, cutting or supplementing it, and other changes. They conceive of these as integral parts of their work as translators. They thematize these operations and justify them in light of their overall translational reasoning (cf. Graph 8).[190] Let us look at each of the three ways the original appears on the B-concept —given, taken, to-be-constructed—in turn.

Original as given. The translation-worthiness of the original is typically derived from its instrumental or non-instrumental goodness, ascertained in the judgment that precedes the action. Instrumental reasoning is extremely common across translation concepts in the corpus. We see

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[189] Of course, considered epistemologically or psychologically such judgment might involve all kinds of mental activity on the part of the subject. But that is immaterial to the concept of translation. From a purely translational point of view, the translator qua translator, initially, is receptive. The text appears given to them, because they do not affect it in any way, at this point, which would be considered part of their translational work.

[190] The distinction between whole and parts is useful here again. For as long as it appears as given and taken, the original also appears as a whole (for all translational purposes). When it appears as to-be-constructed, it also appears as consisting of parts, some of which, for example, might now be cut or rearranged, with others being added. Our general understanding of translation as a kind of kinesis allows us to see why, nevertheless, there need not be a contradiction here. The different ways for the original to appear – given and taken as a whole, to-be-constructed from its parts – correspond to different structural moments: first, the reasoning that precedes the action (without being external to it, because it is the kind of practical reasoning that belongs distinctly to that kind of action). Secondly, within the action, from its beginning through its middle part to its end, when a new whole will have been formed: the translation produced.

translators praise the text's pleasantness (*Annehmlichkeit*, less often also *Gefallen, Vergnügen*) or its utility (*Nützlichkeit*), which can again be of many kinds: moral, scientific, legal, religious, etc. For religious texts, one of the most common terms of praise is an "edifying nature" (*Erbaulichkeit*). More rarely, but also more interesting for us are cases where the translation-worthiness of the original is arrived at from a judgment about its non-instrumental goodness. The translation theory of the time is well-remembered today for championing one such non-instrumental value in particular: the foreignness (*Fremde*) of the text.[191] Wilhelm von Humboldt distinguished such positively valorized foreignness from a negatively connoted *Fremdheit*;[192] with Friedrich Schleiermacher we associate the distinction between domesticating and foreignizing approaches to translation.[193] Although the distinction precedes him and was, indeed, articulated not just by Goethe, a few months earlier, in his 1813 eulogy for Wieland, but a commonplace in the translatological discourse of the late 18th century, Schleiermacher certainly came down in favor of the foreignizing approach much more vehemently than other theorists of his time and standing.[194]

Wieland himself discusses the dichotomy in his 1808 preface and supports a balanced approach. Like Schleiermacher and Goethe, he characterizes the domesticating approach as "letting the author speak as if he had written in German."

> By letting Cicero speak as good a German as I myself have learned, I am far from the thought of letting him write how he might have written, if he had been a German of our times, and the most recent times in particular.[195] (21)

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[191] For example, Berman (1995).

[192] Humboldt (1816) in Robinson (2002, 240).

[193] Schleiermacher (1813), in Robinson (2002, 238).

[194] The most well-known contemporary heirs of that tradition are Antoine Berman and Lawrence Venuti. I think of Steiner and Ricoeur (2004) as the heirs to the counter-tradition. For a critique of the Schleiermacher-Berman-Venuti line cf. Saussy (2018, 10–5).

[195] "Indem ich dem Cicero so gutes Deutsch als ich selbst gelernt habe, leihe, bin ich weit von dem

Wieland also centers another non-instrumental value, which was equally, if not more prominent in the discourse at the time, and from an earlier time on: *Eigenthümlichkeit,* which, especially from Wieland's hands, I would like to translate as singularity. Wieland continues:

> But most I wished to get close to a certain something that can only be perceived and felt, but not described, the singular (*Eigenthümlichen*) in Cicero's spirit and style in his letters, in short that which some call his Ciceronity (*Ciceronität*), as far as our language permits…[196] (22)

The two non-instrumental values of foreignness and singularity seem to imply two different pictures of the relation between original, source context, and target context. Focus on the original's *Fremde* casts it as representative of the source context, which is foreign to the target context, or one's own (*Eigene*). It locks the two in opposition. For Schleiermacher, Humboldt, and their followers one's own and the foreign form a historical dialectic in which the two terms mutually negate and, through negation, determine each other. The foreign is valuable, not just because it is not one's own, but because it negates one's own, helps one overcome it, expand it, rejuvenate it. For this reason, emphasis on the non-instrumental value of foreignness tends to slip into an instrumentalization of the foreign text. This comes through quite clearly, for example, at the end of Schleiermacher's famous speech, when he proposes a national cultural policy in which fidelity to the foreignness of the text is instrumental to national-cultural rejuvenation.[197]

Gedanken entfernt, ihn so schreiben zu lassen, wie er vielleicht geschrieben hätte, wenn er ein Deutscher unserer Zeit, zumal der neuesten, gewesen wäre."

[196] "Aber besonders wünsche ich einem Ewas, das sich nur wahrnehmen und fühlen, nicht beschreiben, läßt, dem Eigenthümlichen des Geistes und der Schreibart Cicero's in seinen Briefen, kurz dem was Einige seine Ciceronität nennen, so nahe zu kommen, als es unsere Sprache gestattet…"

[197] Similarly, Friedrich Christian Wolff in his Cicero translation, 1801_004. cf. below.

The singular, on the other hand, is representative first and foremost of itself. The term contrasts with the common (*Allgemeine*). As such, it locks source and target context not in opposition, but in irreducible difference. This leaves open whether that difference also results in (partial) opposition or something else. The singular is valuable because it is different, and encountering such difference will teach us something about who one is oneself, and who the other is. The other, on this paradigm, is valuable not because it negates one's own – although such negation is not, initially, ruled out. Rather, in measuring the distance between us and the other, target and source context, translations that preserve the singularity of the original, reveal something about both self and other. There is a gain in determinacy, but it is the determinacy of difference, rather than of negation.

Original as taken. After being judged translation-worthy, the text is then taken as original. Steiner has argued that it is not so much translator who chooses the text, though, but rather the text who chooses the translator, when the latter feels taken in by a text, discovering an elective affinity.[198] There is some language to that effect in Wieland, when he describes the way in which "this daring thought" of translation Cicero's letters had "come over him like a armed force" (*wie ein Gewappneter über mich gekommen ist*) and talks of his "good genius (*guter Genius*) having breathed this felicitous intention" into him. This surely sounds a lot like poetic inspiration, which I am intent on differentiating from translational trust.[199] But recall that inspiration, as it was conceptualized on the poetic paradigm, entails a subjective certainty, for the time being, of the possibility of creation. What Wieland talks about, on the other hand, is subjective certainty of its desirability, not its possibility. Right after talking about the thought that overcame him like an armed force, he explains:

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[198] There are very few prefaces that speak of such sentiments, but they do exist: 1780_022, 1800_016, 1816_001, 1828_001, 1831_011.

[199] See Section II above.

Back then, I felt a twofold need in myself, without the immediate satisfaction of which I thought I could endure no longer: for once, to transport myself from an awfully constricting present into another world … and, on the other hand, to undertake some great, difficult, and laborious intellectual work (*Geistesarbeit*) that would give hope that … that I may soon leave the world with the consolation of having spent the last years or days of my life not without merit for my fellow comrades in language (*Sprachgenossen*). (15-6)

Wieland's translation is less escapist then it sounds, because he is all-too aware of the parallel between Cicero's political situation, witnessing in old age the end of the Roman Republic at the hands of a dictator, and his own, witnessing at seventy-five, the end of the Holy Roman Empire (in 1806) at the hand of Napoleon.[200] Nor are the two reasons Wieland gives for translating separate: the utility he finds in turning to Cicero, is precisely the image he offers of a life well lived times of historical crisis, in his virtuous as well as his shortcomings.[201] The singularity of Cicero's character and style in the context of his time, and the needfulness of own time, are the reasons that made the translation appear so desirable to Wieland. It is precisely this perfectly articulable and reasonable desirability that leads Wieland to trust in the possibility of the translation, despite the uncertainty of the outcome and the difficulties inherent in the process mentioned in the quote above.

Original as to-be-constructed. After establishing the desirability of his translation and expressing his trust in its possibility, difficulties notwithstanding, Wieland begins the action of translation by turning to the original as now something to also be constructed. The fact that translators cut from, add to, or otherwise change the original before they start translating is, of course, nothing new. What is distinctive of the B-concept, however, is that these changes are extensively thematized and

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[200] The first half of the preface is dedicated to these parallelisms, p. 4-15.
[201] Wieland, 11-14.

elaborately justified. Wieland's guide in these operations and justifications is the "recently established science of classical philology (*Altherthumswissenschaft*)."[202] Josefine Kitzbichler has argued that the integration of translational practice with modern philological science was a central feature of what I have been calling the B-concept.[203] We have already seen the strong correlations between B-translations and philological operations on the text (Figure 8).

And yet, there is internal variety within the B-concept as to how far a philological approach should determine translation practice. Towards the end of the 18th century, we see the emergence of a distinct sub-type of the B-concept. We can call it the bourgeois-scientific concept. Their hallmark is that they classify their translational paratexts as Introductions (*Einleitungen*), rather than prefaces (*Vorrede*).[204] A *Vor-rede* quite literally is a pre-speech; it has a rhetorical function, to speak for the text before the text. In its oratorical heritage, it is partisan. The academic introduction, by contrast, that we see emerging implies a scholarly distance to the text, which becomes an object of study. This comes with a distinct approach to translation. The sample of these in the corpus is rather small (n=20), so we should take quantitative assessments with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, their distinctness as a group is striking. With four exceptions, they date from the 1820s and early 30s. They are almost exclusively from Latin and Greek (8 and 9 cases, respectively). Only 65% of them reflect on translation at all, but 91% provide context about their author or the original. 83% locate the text philologically; only a quarter reflects on the purpose of the translation: why it is good to translate this text. The paratexts also tend to be unusually long, an average of almost 5500 words.

The main strand of B-translation, as represented by Wieland, takes a different approach even for classical authors, like Cicero. Acknowledging the need for using all the tools of philological science, a scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) appreciation of the text alone can never be the final purpose of a translation.

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[202] "… von einem der ersten Philologen unserer Zeit vor kurzem aufgestellte Alterthumswissenschaft."
[203] Kitzbichler, 27-8.
[204] More rarely, we see also the now more common term for preface *Vorwort*, starting in the 1820s.

A distinct ambivalence towards philology—neither dispensable, nor ultimate—results from this. Wieland, after explaining his philological reasoning for arranging the letters in a novel order and adducing commentaries of which he had availed himself, captures the ambivalence in an image.

> … it takes a peculiar inner vocation to not let oneself be scared off such a difficult and dangerous undertaking; especially, when a poor translator should have the misfortune to imagine our philologians and critics as so many giants, surrounding the unapproachable magic castle, club-swinging and with shining eyes, ready to discipline the audacious who would set out on such an adventure. Without any fear of such dread visions (*Schreckbild*), I shall wait with calm for the judgment of true and reasonable critics.[205]

It is a Romantic image of the translator as adventurer and philological science as barrier to the magic castle of the text, ready to discipline those who dare to approach a text for other than, in an academic sense, disciplinary ends. Wieland does not affirm this picture but presents it as a nightmarish vision (*Schreckbild*), a momentary dream almost or a haunting possibility, how their relation might be construed. At the end, he places the ball in the court of the critics: whether philology will try to extend its dominion over the entire practice of translation, for classical texts at least, is up to them, too.

   The Middle, or the Action of Translation Proper. Once the original has been established, the translation proper begins, the middle of the action. Here the question arises *how* to translate? German translation theory around 1800 is remembered for its insistence on the value of fidelity (*Treue*) first of

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[205] "… ein sonderbarer inner Beruf dazugehört, um sich nicht dadurch von einem so schweren und gefährlichen Unternehmen abschrecken zu lassen; zumal wenn ein armer Übersetzer noch das Unglück hätte, sich unsre Philologen und Kritiker als eben so viele, das unzugangbare Zauberschloss umgebende Riesen einzubilden, welche mit funkelnden Augen und geschwungenen Keulen bereit stünden, den Verwegenen zu züchtigen, der sich eines solchen Abenteuers unterfangen wollte. Ohne Furcht vor solchen Schreckbildern erwarte ich das Urteil ächter und billiger Richter mit Ruhe."

all.[206] There was disagreement, however, on just what fidelity ought to mean. My thesis here is that this diversity concerns primarily the object of fidelity (fidelity to what?), but that there is unity regarding the form of fidelity (what fidelity?).[207]

We return to the scene from Goethe's *Faust I*, which we started with, reading it as a poetic reflection, not just on how to translate the Word, the Johannine *logos*, but words generally. With the corpus as our background, we can see the scene dramatizing tensions between prominent positions in the translational discourse of the time but also highlighting their unity by framing differences internal to the B-concept through a contrast with an option external to it. Here is the full passage:

Mich drängt's den Grundtext aufzuschlagen,	1220
Mit redlichem Gefühl einmal	
Das heilige Original	
In mein geliebtes Deutsch zu übertragen.	
(*Er schlägt ein Volum auf und schickt sich an.*)	
Geschrieben steht: „im Anfang war das Wort!"	
Hier stock' ich schon! Wer hilft mir weiter fort?	1225
Ich kann das Wort so hoch unmöglich schätzen,	
Ich muss es anders übersetzen,	
Wenn ich vom Geiste recht erleuchtet bin.	
Geschrieben steht: im Anfang war der Sinn.	
Bedenke wohl die erste Zeile,	1230

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[206] Kitzbichler, 31–32.

[207] Note that we are here concerned with the question of what one ought to be faithful too in the original insofar as it is considered to consist of parts; the previous section has dealt with values at the level of the original taken as a whole that B-concept translation strove to be faithful to: the foreignness and singularity of the work, in particular.

Dass deine Feder sich nicht übereile!

Ist es der Sinn, der alles wirkt und schafft?

Es sollte stehn: im Anfang war die Kraft!

Doch, auch indem ich dieses niederschreibe,

Schon warnt mich was, daß ich dabey nicht bleibe.   1235

Mir hilft der Geist! auf einmal seh' ich Rath

Und schreibe getrost: im Anfang war die That![208]

Philologian, philosopher, and poet. Faust proposes to translate *logos* first as "word" (*Wort*), then "sense" or "meaning" (*Sinn*), then "force" or "power" (*Kraft*), and finally "deed" (*Tat*). The first three name principles of fidelity known since antiquity: fidelity as literality (*Wörtlichkeit*), which Horace warned against;[209] the others name prominent alternatives, translating "not word for word, but meaning for meaning" (Jerome), or to preserving "the kind and force of each word" (Cicero).[210]

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[208] I feel impelled to open the text on which all rests   1220
and, deeply moved, properly translate
the sacred Greek original
into my own dear native tongue.
        (Opening a large volume and preparing to write.)
It is written, "In the beginning was the Word."
How soon I'm stopped! Who'll help me to go on?   1225
I cannot concede that words have such high worth
and must, if properly inspired,
translate the term some other way.
It is written: "In the beginning was the Mind."
Reflect with care upon this first line,   1230
and do not let your pen be hasty!
Can it be mind that makes all operate?
I'd better write: "In the beginning was the Power!"
Yet, even as I write this down,
something warns me not to keep it.   1235
My spirit prompts me, now I see a solution
and boldly write: "In the beginning was the Act."
[209] Horace in Robinson 2002, 15.
[210] "non verbum e verbo, sed sensum experimere de sensu" (Jerome in Robinson 2002, 25); "non

All of these were live positions in the translational discourse around 1800. Consider, exemplarily, three different translations of Cicero in the corpus. The philologian Friedrich Christian Wolff in his 1801 translation of Cicero's *De Oratore*, advocates for a literal translation; his approach is typical of academic, philological translation generally, including in its insistence on the importance of preserving the original syntax as far as possible.[211] The philosopher Christian Garve in his 1783 translation of Cicero's *De Officiis* prioritizes the meaning (*Sinn*) or the ideas of the text.[212] Wieland, the poet, finally, translating Cicero's letters, cares very much about the portrait these offer of Cicero's persona in his time and about the poetic force of Cicero's style.[213]

> No concern weighs heavier on my heart than that no beautiful or powerful (*kräftiger*) expression shall escape, no meaningful metaphor that can be carried over into our language, none of the finer nuances or turns, no gracefulness that I can catch.[214] (21-2)

While these might look like irreconcilable differences, I would argue that they express, rather, differences of emphasis within the B-concept that are explained, in part, by the translator's writerly

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verbum pro verbo necesse habui reddere, sed genus omne verborum vimque servavi" (Cicero in Robinson 2002, 9).

[211] "I strove to translate faithfully, … that is, the words themselves, according to their order and connections." – "Ich wünschte treu zu übersetzen, … das heißt, die Worte selbst, und zwar nach ihrer Ordnung und Verbindung," p. 4. – Other texts in the corpus to insist on fidelity as literality are 1770_007, 1788_003, 1800_009, 1803_003, 1820_001, 1821_005, 1830_014.

[212] "I have made it my intention not to portray the spirit of Cicero, … but to present his ideas. … I did not want to offer a painting, but teach useful truths." – "… habe ich mir zur Absicht gemacht, nicht den Geist des Cicero abzuschildern, … sondern die Ideen desselben … vorzutragen. … Ich will kein Gemälde, sondern ich will einen Unterricht in nützlichen Wahrheiten geben." – Other texts in the corpus that insist on fidelity to the meaning first are 1780_031, 1780_044, 1781_005, 1781_013, in explicit opposition to literality 1782_002, 1791_018, 1811_009.

[213] Other texts in the corpus that insist on fidelity to the poetic force of a text are 1769_003, 1769_005, 1815_001, the latter for certain poetic Bible passages.

[214] "Nichts liegt mir mehr am Herzen, als dass mir kein schöner oder kräftiger Ausdruck, keine bedeutende, in unsere Sprache übertragbare Metapher, keine der feineren Schattierungen, oder Wendungen, keine Grazie die ich erhaschen kann, entgehe."

backgrounds—a philologian, a philosopher, and a poet—and also by the affinities between the translators' respective professions and the texts they chose to translate: a rhetorical treatise, a philosophical treatise, and the more personal and literary letters. Garve even explicitly distinguishes between writers, primarily of a literary bend, who have their *Eigenthümlichkeit,* which the translator ought to capture, and those who do not. The disagreement between him and Wieland is only about what class Cicero belongs to.[215] Johann Gottfried Herder already saw the need for a synthesis in 1767: "Where is a translator who would be philosopher, poet, and philologian at once: he should be the morning star of a new epoch in our literature!"[216]

Compatibility is not the same as conceptual unity, however. This is where Faust's fourth option comes in, which falls outside the B-concept and perhaps even outside of any concept of translation. Faust translates as action and takes action: action and translation coincide. In keeping with reading the passage as commentary on various approaches to translation as such, the final option, in my view, illustrates translation that knows of no fidelity but to its own deed. Translation crosses over into pure poetic creation here. Witness the fact that Faust claims for his translation to be inspired ("*Wenn ich vom Geiste recht erleuchtet bin… mir hilft der Geist!*). By what spirit? Despite the use of the definite article at ll. 1228 (implied) and 1236, it is unlikely that Faust is here invoking the Holy Spirit, which on the day of Pentecost bestowed the gift of language onto the Apostles.[217] At this point in the play, we have already seen Faust, the alchemist, conjure up various unholy spirits and the entire surrounding scene, too, is populated by them.

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[215] In the preface to the second edition of his translation from 1787, Garve doubles down on his claim that Cicero has no *Eigenthümlichkeit*—indicating that his claim met with a lot of resistance four years earlier.

[216] "Wo ist ein Übersetzer, der zugleich Philosoph, Dichter und Philolog ist: er soll der Morgenstern einer neuen Epoche in unsrer Literatur sein!", Herder*, Fragments*, II.3.7.

[217] Acts 2:2-4.

Witness, further, the fact that his turn towards the spirit means also a progressive distancing from the letter of the "text on which all rests" (*Grundtext*, 1220). To begin with, it is not at all clear whether Faust even looks at the "holy original" in its original Greek. He opens a volume and claims: "It is written: "In the beginning was the Word!" Of course, this "is written" in Luther's German translation, not in the Greek (John 1:1). He repeats the "it is written" alongside his first suggestion, "in the beginning was meaning (*Sinn*)!" An adaptation for the stage might want to make some decision here whether Faust is still expressing what, in his view, is written in the original, looking at the volume before him, or if he is perhaps looking at the draft which he himself just jotted down on some paper, announcing what he has written there; the text itself admits both readings.

The ambiguity persists in Faust's next considered alternative. "It ought to say: In the beginning was force!" How are we to take this ought (*sollte*)? It might be that Faust is talking to himself about what he, now, ought to write down. Or it might be him, as it were, telling the evangelist in absentia (or perhaps Luther) what they should have written or meant! With the final suggestion, there are no worries about the original anymore: "Suddenly I see a solution / and boldly write (*schreib getrost*): in the beginning was the deed!" It is a moment of maximal resolve and (self-)certainty. "Schreib getrost" conveys a strong sense of insouciance. Any doubts about the original meaning, its difficulties and demands, are left far behind.

The letter is sacrificed, but not for the "spirit that gives life" (2 Cor 3:6). Faust's approach to translation bespeaks an attitude that, in the play, directly leads to tragedy. When Faust's love-interest Gretchen asks him about his religion he famously claims to be full of the spirit, but, as the supposedly naive girl immediately points out with cutting perspicuity, Faust's spiritualism, for all its verbosity, is no Christianity: "Du hast kein Christentum" (ll. 3468). He knows neither the name and certainly not the letter of this religion, which is to say its law and ritual and, most pertinently, the sacrament of marriage. Hence, no legitimacy to their child; hence, the double-murder of Gretchen's newborn and

mother. To distinguish between Faust's tragic hubris in translation and Goethe's or the play's stance towards his choice, of course, need not turn the play into a Christian morality tale—but perhaps something like a fatalist look at the tragedy of pre-modern forms of life, including religious forms, in modernity.

Letter and spirit. The question of the translatability of social, cultural, religious, aesthetic, etc. forms across historical crises will occupy us in the next chapters. Returning to our concerns with the unity of B-concept of translation, we note that, if the coming-apart of letter and spirit is the hallmark, on Goethe's view, of the obverse of translation, or of failed translation, this also points to the integrity of letter and spirit as the underlying conceptual ground on which the unity of the first three options rests. My proposal is the following. Abstracting from individual cases, we can say that on the B-concept the idea is that, since trade-offs are inevitable in translation, fidelity means simply to do this well, to be faithful to what one discerns to matter most in a text and then make trade-offs accordingly. The terms, or metaphors of letter and spirit are common in translational discourse of the time to characterize exactly those trade-offs, even as the aspects of the original to which letter and spirit refer vary from instance to instance. One translator might think of the meaning as the spirit to which the literal letter is sacrificed, another might think of the poetic force as the spirit and the meaning as the letter. Letter and spirit, on this construal, name logical, rather than substantive positions.

This yields the following picture. For each translation there is, on the B-concept, some hierarchy of Xs, we need to be faithful to, relative to some context C. Typically, that context will be a text, but it could also be smaller than that: a passage, an individual poem in a cycle; or it could be wider, such as an entire genre of texts or an entire source language for which one might claim certain translation principles, in the form of such value-hierarchies. Whatever its scope, the idea is that within that context one can, and, indeed, must sacrifice according to the hierarchy of priorities discerned. But—and everything depends on this!—on the understanding that the spirit, in its difference from the letter, is

known only through the most meticulous attention to the letter. Where the spirit is conceived to come from anywhere outside the text or the translators think of themselves as beholden to anything outside the original, translation crosses over into poetry.

What about target-context reasons for translating one way or another? Are they, per definition, outside the body of the text? Our earlier distinction between the original given as a whole, in the judgment which precedes the translation, and taken part after part during the action of translation, is useful here. Target-context reasons for translating one way or another enter into the judgment of the whole: the judgment as to why the original, being as it is, letter *and* spirit, in the parts that matter most and those that we sense perhaps already do not, as a whole, is worth translating. It might be translation-worthy for us, target-side, only, but so is, because it is as it is, in its entirety. This is different from poetic creation, which is free to take parts from many and any places and treat them according to its own principles, faithful to its own act.

Of course, in construing letter and spirit as logical, rather than substantial terms, we, too, go beyond the translational discourse of the time. But, I would argue, only beyond its letter, not beyond its spirit—and only after attending to its letter scrupulously.[218]

The Translation Produced, or the End of the Action. At the end of the prefaces, we typically find two more genre moves: looking back at the now finished translation, translators offer apologies for any remaining deficiencies, explain them, promise to remedy them on future occasions, and ask for readers' indulgence. Looking forward, they express hopes that good may come from the translations: future editions, more successful translation attempts, creative works in the target language, as well as the good that the translation itself sought to provide. It is easy to overlook these as just bits of

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[218] Similarly, with regard to the theologians, who might object to such free usage of the Pauline distinction as implying, already, an emptying of their substantial, soteriological content. The resultant concept of translational action might have something to offer them, too. Only those who lose themselves, will find themselves.

rhetorical flourish. Sometimes they are as banal as listing and apologizing for printing errors. With beautiful irony, Wieland concludes his paragon of preface with the words: "In case something is missing from this preface – since I had to write it rather speedily –, that would need to be said or would have been useful for the reader to know, then I shall supply it in one of the following volumes" (24). But apologies and expressions of hope recur systematically in the corpus. The only thing missing in Wieland's preface, at that point, had been the very reassurance that, if anything were missing, he would provide it in the future. They are part of the very form of the translators' preface. The B-concept translations especially are strong in this regard (cf. Section III). The two features, moreover, go hand in hand: because there is always room for improvement, the translators look forward to the future. We may say that, on the B-concept, translation, constitutively, is open-ended: it can be finished, but can never be final.

As far as the relations between competing translations are concerned, two modes of progress are conceived of in the corpus. Some translators project an ideal of perfection (*Vollkommenheit*) onto an imagined future translation, which provides a horizon for their own work.[219] There is a strong sense in the corpus that some translations are better than others, and often translators will discuss previous translation attempts quite critically (cf. Graph 9), including translations of their texts into languages other than German. But equally there is a sense in the corpus that even perfection would be temporary, because language itself changes.[220] However perfect a translation might have been for its time, after a while it will be dated, even unusable, and hence, require new translations.[221] And, of course, there is a sense also in which different, non-perfect translations can simply be complementary. As one translator puts it in 1769: "And thus two translations can stick together, each compensating for its defects by

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[219] 1769_003, 1800_001, 1830_023.
[220] A point famously driven to delightful extremes by Borges ([1939] 1998) in his "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote."
[221] 1782_002, 1800_007, 1810_006.

means of the other." What is more, the same translator continues, there are some translations who should not even be superseded, even if another translation was better – and even if there was a perfect translation available, that had all imaginable benefits. He is thinking, of course, of Luther's Bible.

> When, at this hour, we would have such a translation as contain in itself all the excellencies of all the more recent translators and Luther's own on top, nevertheless, neither we nor our proximate descendants should give up Luther's version. … and especially the well-known core phrases (*Kernsprüche*) should be kept as he translated them.[222]

The generational qualification leaves open the possibility that Luther's translation might be superseded eventually. But this does not take away from the striking claim that even a perfect translation today might not be preferable all translations. Of course, this particular translator might have entirely pragmatic reasons: people are used to Luther; his translation works fine, "never change a running system." But his remarks seem to me to point to a deeper insight into the difference between translations and originals, precisely by pointing to the possibility that some translations can become like originals.[223] Translations are deemed supersedable or may complement existing translations. But nowhere in the corpus is there a thought of a translations superseding an original. In this regard, progress consists never only ever in deepening the relation between irreducible different source and target-contexts through a proliferation of more and more translations, sometimes and in some regards better, and sometimes simply different from previous ones.[224]

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[222] "Wenn man auf diese Stunde eine solche Übersetzung hätte, die alle Vortrefflichkeiten aller neueren Übersetzer und Lutheri selbsten dazu, unstrittig in sich begriffe: so sollten doch weder wir noch unsere nächste Nachkommen Lutheri Version aufgeben. … und insonderheit sollten die bekannten Kernsprüche, wie er sie verdeutschet, beybehalten werden."

[223] The period has produced many translations that, in German world became canonical in their own right: Voss' Homer, Schlegel's and Tieck's Shakespeare, Schleiermacher's Plato, and so on.

[224] Perhaps this should be limited to cases where one translates for non-instrumental reasons. But

Conclusion. We now have all elements of the B-concept before us: how it conceives of each of the four basic terms of our general concept of translation (action, agent, original, product), the requirements of genre-likeness and the separation of contexts, and as far as the action of translation is concerned, how it reflects on its beginning, middle, and end, and the reasoning that precedes and carries it throughout. The next chapter will propose a way of integrating this concept into our pragmatist philosophy of history, to answer the problem of world-loss set out in the first chapter—and answer it better than the poetic paradigm does, as described in the second chapter.

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consider, anecdotally, the counter-example of 1833_001: a translator of a geometry textbook who had, since the first edition, written his own geometry, which he thought was better than the one he translated, and partly written in order to remedy its deficiencies; yet who nevertheless sets out to update his translation when a new edition of the original came out.

Chapter Four.

Translational Action as Historical Action

The previous chapter reconstructed a concept of translation from the practice of textual translation in the German-speaking world, ca. 1800. On the basis of this concept, I will now propose a concept of *translational action* as a concept for philosophy of history, in order to address the problem we set out with: historical crises leading to conceptual loss.

To this end, the chapter seeks to fulfill three tasks. So far, we took translation in its ordinary, narrow sense of textual translation. By contrast, translational action, as I propose it, translates concepts, making them practically intelligible (again) in a context in which they previously had not been (anymore).[225] The first task for this chapter is to make clear what that difference amounts to.

The second task is to show how such translational action could count as a historical action. I mean historical action here in the emphatic, technical sense developed in the first chapter: actions that retain an essential link (*Wesensbezug*) to historical crises. Historical crises, we said, are those ruptures in temporal continuity that establish a past *as* historical, as the possible object of historical interest, prompting historical writing. Such writing will be, among other things, *historia rerum gestarum*, an account of deeds done. Those deeds that historians think it paramount to feature in their accounts of the crisis are historical actions as we intend this term. The question is: under what conditions can we expect translational actions to be such historical actions in a non-accidental, systematic way?

Finally, chapter two has argued that the dominant account of historical agency is what I have called the poetic paradigm, which looks to an 18th century concept of genius as the implicit and general model for such agency. A problem with this model, I argued, is that it prevents us from seeing the

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[225] Strictly speaking, it is the translations of the concepts that become practically intelligible, not the original concepts themselves. But a good translation will be one, precisely, where that difference, though transparent, will matter less.

need for mourning in response to historical crises. I made a distinction between personal and structural mourning. The former concerns only individual inhabitants of a world, while the latter operates on the worldly grounds of subject-formation. I will argue that translational action *qua* historical action can do better than the poetic paradigm precisely because it entails a work of both personal and structural mourning.

1. The Old *Translatio* Paradigm and Herder's Critique

It might seem strange, initially, to integrate a concept of translation into the philosophy of history. But a concept of *translatio* has been the backbone of Latinate Western historical thought for over one and a half millennia, from Roman Antiquity to early modernity roughly. Over the course of the 16th century, it mostly fell out of usage—and for good reasons we shall see. If my new concept of *translatio* is to fare any better, a brief, critical assessment of the old one will be helpful.

The history of the concept of *translatio*, spanning some fifteen centuries, is extremely complex. Nonetheless, we can determine certain core elements of the concepts on the basis of existing historiography.[226] As a technical term, *translatio* took three objects in the history of Western thought which we may think of as political power (*translatio imperii*), intellectual power (*translatio studii*), and spiritual power (*translatio religionis*).[227] It featured prominently in historiographical, legal, and theological discourses, sometimes as a theoretical concept, providing a framework to historians' writings; sometimes it was a practical concept, as in the so-called curial theory of translation according to which the pope retained the legal right to transfer the emperor's right to rule as heir to Rome, his *imperium*,

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[226] In the 20th century, scholarship on these concepts begins with Étienne Gilson (1932, 183ff) and Ernst Robert Curtius (2013 [1948], 35–38, 388–89). The best book on the subject matter, on which I here rely throughout, is still Werner Goez (1958), which inspired also Franz-Josef Worstbrock (1965). Because Goez' book has not been translated to date, Anglophone scholarship developed largely independently and lags behind in many ways. A notable exception is J. G. A. Pocock (2005).

[227] Alternative or closely related terms are *translatio regni, translatio sapientiae* or *artium*, and *translatio sacerdotii* or *gratiae*, respectively.

to other suitable candidates. Sometimes *translatio imperii* and *studii* were thought to go together, reciprocally legitimizing each other, but just as often they were treated as independent phenomena;[228] sometimes, but by far not always, they were fused with other theologico-historical schemata, most prominently the idea that history consisted of a series of four empires, the so-called four-monarchy schema.[229] Across this variety, seven core features mark the concept of *translatio imperii* and, to an extent, also *translatio studii*.[230] The concept of *translatio imperii* referred to

(1) irregular transfers of power,

(2) in history,

(3) which are unidirectional,

(4) and complete both quantitatively,

(5) and qualitatively,

(6) in a single,

(7) spoliative act.

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[228] We often think of *translatio imperii* as underwritten by *translatio studii*, or vice versa. Goez has shown that this fusion is true of only a few, albeit prominent thinkers of the concepts in the 12th century: bishop Otto of Freising, student of Abelard and Hugo of St. Victor, uncle and court-historiographer to emperor Frederic I. Barbarossa, and shortly after him Chrétien de Troyes, in the prologue to his *Cligès*. There is a consensus that *translatio*-thinking peaks in these two writers. But for most of the history of the term before and after them, the terms often were discussed separately. To give just one example, Herbert Grundmann (1961) discusses the curious cases of Alexander of Roes (13th century), who argued that as the Italians had inherited the *sacerdotium*, so the Germans had inherited the *imperium*, and the French the *studium*.

[229] The Christian tradition owes the idea to Book of Daniel, but similar ideas can already be found in Hesiod and, later, Ovid, and probably trace back to Ancient Mesopotamia (Oellig 2023).

[230] A comprehensive history of the concept of *translatio religionis* has yet to be written and thus I leave it aside here. It referred to the historical transition from Judaism to Christianity from a Christian point of view. In what might be the term's earliest usage, Origen, at the opening of Book IX of his commentary on *Romans*, sums it up neatly: "… the Apostle [Paul] taught in what manner the sum of religion had been translated from the Jews to the gentiles, from circumcision to faith, from letter to spirit, from shadow to truth, from carnal observance to spiritual observance…" (*docuisset Apostulus quomodo a Judaeis ad Gentes, a circumsione ad fide, a littera ad spiritum, ab umbra ad veritatem, ab observantia carnali ad observantia spiritalem religionis summa translata sit*), quoted in Theresa Heither (1990, 57 & *passim*).

(1) The idea of *translatio imperii* is, first, dependent on the prior idea of political power being transferrable, of power attaching to an office, rather than to charismatic individuals directly.[231] With the idea of such transferability came a distinction between regular and irregular transfers. It is notable then that, historically, the formula of *translatio imperii* has been used almost exclusively to refer to irregular transfers of power; regular transfers, via inheritance, for example, were referred to with other terms.[232] This is to say that, like translation in the literary sense, the old idea of *translatio* applied only in cases where we find what the last chapter has called a separation of contexts, a salient discontinuity.

(2) One dimension of this discontinuity will be historical, whatever other dimensions—cultural, spatial, linguistic, religious, etc.—it might also entail.[233] At this point, we are well prepared to see the deeper reason for this: because, as the first chapter has argued, the historical *as such* is constituted by irregular ruptures in forms of life, including, perhaps paradigmatically so, ruptures in political continuity. As far as these first two points are concerned, my concept of translational action, as the next section develops it, overlaps with the old concept. But the remaining points indicate its reliance on pre-modern metaphysical premises that a contemporary philosophy of history can no longer accept.

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[231] Cf. Goez, 32f. Herder's critique of *translatio* in his *Ideas*, II.9.4 strikes directly at the idea of hereditary power.

[232] Goez, 33-34. We are excepting here those historical cases where the term *translatio* is used to refer to what is more properly understood as a *concessio*. According to Goez, in Roman law, it was the *acclamatio* of the Roman people that made an emperor. Following Jerome's saying that "the army makes the emperor" (*exercitium facit imperator*), the people here has often been equated with the army, which, of course, reflects well the political realities of late Roman imperial times. As Goez points out, however, at its origin, the notion is ambiguous, because the *exercitium* might refer, in its broadest sense, to the totality of Roman citizens capable of bearing arms. This notion of *translatio* as *concessio* of the power by the people to a ruler, which right is, however retained by the people, is historically important. With Mommsen, Goez sees here the origins of the notion of popular sovereignty: a particular Roman popular right that was later universalized on a natural-law basis. Goez, 386-92.

[233] There are cases where the term *translatio imperii* had been used in a purely spatial sense, to refer to relocations of the seat of power, but where the insistence falls on the purely spatial character, it is also a conceptually distinct usage of the same terms, because the stress then is on the idea that it is precisely not a transfer of *imperium*, of political power but merely of the seat of government. The classical object of contestation here was Constantine's relocation of the Roman capital to Byzantium in 330 CE. Depending on one's allegiances, one saw in it either a genuine *translatio imperii* or a merely spatial shift. Goez, 54f & *passim*.

(3-7) These *translationes* were thought of as unidirectional.[234] The power transfer goes from one holder to another, and nothing is given back in return. The transfer is in no way reciprocal. They were furthermore thought to be perfect, both quantitatively and qualitatively complete in a single act. They were complete in that *all* of the *imperium* was thought to have been transferred without remainder, quantitatively, and nothing about the *imperium* was thought to be either lost in the process or in any way changed, qualitatively, whether corrupted or augmented, and this perfect transfer was thought to be accomplished at one stroke, in a single act.[235] There is no thought here of gradual or partial transfers. Finally, they were thought to constitute a spoliation of the source-context. The transfer was also a taking-away of the power, so that nothing would be left of it in the place from where it was taken.

The concept of *translatio studii* entailed many of the same features, with some variations.[236] Like *translatio imperii*, it applied to cultural breaks that entailed also diachronic-historical dimensions, and it was similarly conceived of as a unidirectional transfer. For the most part, the *studium* and its synonym *sapientia,* like *imperium,* were thought of as singulars.[237] But in some forms, especially ancient discourses, a more differentiated picture of the quality of the transfer was available: loss, gain, and friendly competition, including the desire to improve over predecessor-cultures could be thematized; the

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[234] Many theorists of *translatio* believed that the multiple *translationes* in history would add up into a single, spatially unidirectional movement, from East to West, typically, and that this movement was irreversible. *Ex oriente lux.* But there were exceptions. The popes, during some of their struggles with the German emperors, at least toyed with the idea of translating the imperium back to the French, and, of course, East Rome and later Russian powers were happy to allow for an eastward reorientation of the imperium's movement in history. The unidirectionality that interests me here, rather, is immanent to each instance of translation. See also Aleida Assmann (2001), Stephen Baehr (1978), Laurence Dickey (2002).

[235] The claims to such perfection are shown, for example, *ex negativo* in the fact that those who wanted to deny that a particular instance of translatio had taken place often would argue that it had been either a splitting (*divisio*) of the imperium (for example, of the Roman imperium into a Western and an Eastern sphere of dominion) or, alternatively, that it had been a mere *concessio*: an transfer of power onto a ruler on the part of a more sovereign body who, nevertheless, retains the right to retract that power and invest it in someone else. Goez, 82, 136-7, 201-2, and *passim*.

[236] Here I follow F.-J. Worstbrock (1965).

[237] Culture continued to be used as a singular until the late 19th century (Michael Forster 2012).

thought of *translatio* as an extended process rather than a single act started to be conceivable, however inchoately.[238] Nor was the transfer conceived of as inherently spoliative. There might be nothing left in the place now that one learned from, but that would not be because of the *translatio*.[239]

My concept of translational action will share features (1-2) but let go of (3-7). As argued in the first chapter, the challenge is to think forms of responses to historical crises and subsequent world-loss that entail a work of personal and structural mourning. Per (1) and (2), the old concept was an attempt to theorize responses to historical crises. But the remaining five features also make clear why it was ill suited to truly facilitate a work of mourning. Mourning well requires us to acknowledge the reality of loss. *Translatio* discourse has been read as so many Christian attempts to mourn the loss of Rome—and through one of its own concepts, fittingly, since the European Middle Ages inherited the idea of *translatio* from Roman historiography.[240] But given the underlying metaphysics of lossless transfer outlined in (3) to (7), it cannot surprise us that more often it has appeared as the transmission of shared and unprocessed historical trauma, rather than successful mourning: narratives drawn up to smooth over centuries of historical discontinuity, more than a structural work of transforming Roman practices and institutions and our attachments to them in a beneficial way.[241]

Translation and empire. And even that mostly ceased with the onset of modernity. As a legal and historiographical category, the concept largely fell out of usage during the 16th century.[242] The thought

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[238] See Worstbrock's discussion of ancient heurematography, a genre of historical writing dedicated to discussions of the invention and transfer of cultural techniques across the Ancient Mediterranean and Middle East (2-5). It goes back at least to Herodotus and Ctesias of Cnidus in the 5th century BCE. Worstbrock locates the origin of the concept of *translatio studii* here. Interestingly, the formulation of *translatio artium*, referring to the seven liberal arts of the traditional medieval curriculum, with its genitive plural, still treats the *artes* as an inseparable bundle as far as their transferability is concerned.

[239] A *locus classicus* for this version is the opening of Chretien de Troyes' *Cligès*.

[240] Via Jerome who inserted it into his Latin Bible translation, as Goez has discovered (4-16).

[241] The transmission of trauma argument has been made, in various forms, by Elizabeth Bellamy (1992, 69-75), Rebecca Comay (2010, 17-25), Julia Hell (2019, 1-36, 384). Comay is drawing on Jean Laplanche (1992).

[242] The precise history of how it ended, to the extent that it did, is complicated. Cultural, political, and religious factors all played a role. Culturally, the rise of national languages as languages of intellectual

that there was one single, unchanging *imperium* or *studium* in history, valid for all times and places, seemed less and less plausible in a modernizing and globalizing world.

What never entirely dissolved was the relation between translation, or *translatio*, and empire, in at least two ways. Diachronically, the practice of one empire citing an older one (Rome, usually) in its political rhetoric and iconography as a strategy of self-legitimization remains with us. Additionally, an essential link between empire and synchronic translation practices has been argued.[243] Wolfgang Stierle

and literary production since the Renaissance certainly contributed (Assmann, 43). As Goez points out, often it was not even clear how the term translatio imperii itself should be translated into non-Latinate national languages (381-5). Curtius concurs that the thought of *translatio* was genuinely at home only in Latinity (37-8).

Politically, the horizontal side-by-side of modern nations and empires presented an environment in which the thought of an historically neat, vertical chain of *translationes* seemed out of place (Stierle 1996, 63–67). With the 'discovery' of the New World the pretense to universality of the Roman *imperium* came to seem more doubtful than it ever had, which led even the Church's own foremost theologians, like Bellarmine and Suarez to all but abandon the curial theory of translation. Having served its purpose in the papacy's power struggles with the German emperors, it and was no longer needed and easy to let go of (Goez, 328f).

But while the end of the juridical concept of translatio can thus be dated with relative precision to the end of the 16th century, it is less clear whether the historiographical concept ever really ended. In a German context, Hegel might have been the last philosopher to organize history according to the four-monarchy schema and its corresponding *translationes*. Vittorio Hösle expresses surprise at the fact that the great thinker of triads chose a schema based on the number of four (2015, 211, note 16). Since reasons for a three-based schema would have been easily available to Hegel, I suspect the reason would have to be that even the mature Hegel was still more of a theologian than modern scholarship often recognizes. Among historians, Goez points to the survival of the idea in the very late thought of Ranke (393-7). In the minimal sense of a rhetorical strategy— one empire presenting itself as the heir of a past power for purposes of political self-legitimization—*translatio imperii* of course never ended. But that usage is conceptually rather different from the one we have been tracking. Cf. Pagden 1998 for the use of *translatio imperii* in the rhetoric of early modern empires.

Theologically, finally, new readings of Daniel became possible (again) with the Reformation. Calvin, for example, argued, as Isidor already had before him and against Jerome, that the prophecy of the four monarchies only covers history up to the advent of Christ (Goez, 71, 371), and hence the schema had no role to play for later historiography. Luther and others held on to it but saw the final empire in the Church and expected her imminent end (257f). Over the course of the 18th century, historical and political thought secularized further, at least on a surface level, and the continued existence of the Roman imperial *katechon* became a less urgently felt need. J. G. A. Pocock has argued, intriguingly, that *translatio imperii* was precisely what was replaced by Gibbon's Enlightenment narrative of "Decline and Fall" of the Roman Empire and the concomitant triumph of "barbarism and religion" (127f).

[243] On this alleged link see Douglas Robinson (2016), Michael Wintroub (2015); for a critique see Souleymane Bachir Diagne (2022).

has proposed that with the onset of modernity the old "vertical" (diachronic) translation paradigm was being replaced by "horizontal" (synchronic) translation—in a very broad sense, both metaphorical and ultra-literal, of the global circulation of concepts and material objects at an ever-quickening pace and on an unprecedented scale, leading to myriad cultural hybridizations.[244] *Translatio*, on this view, would still be linked with empire, but empire is not the object translated. Rather, empire becomes the political form securing translatability or commensurability through violence. If we take empire to be constituted by a contrast between center and periphery, where the center tries to secure the flow of intellectual and material goods between the two, ever to its own advantage, then the enforced multi-dimensional homogenization of (cultural, legal, topographical, etc.) space that enables these flows, would indeed appear to be close to the very core of what empire, as a political form, is.

This is where Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) becomes interesting for us. We have already seen in the avid translator an early and influential theorist of our concept of translation, the B-concept as I called it.[245] He was also a critic of the old *translatio* paradigm, as well as of its modern transformations, precisely on account of the two critiques we have reconstructed: first, its ties with pre-modern metaphysics of identity that we no longer think are fit for consoling us to the transience of things, including the transience of worlds, practices, concepts. In contrast to these metaphysics, Herder everywhere insists that human concepts and forms of practice are plural, historically mutable, and in the first instance locally normative. He drew the methodological consequences from these commitments, dedicating his life to the study of humanity in all its empirical variety across space and time and, in the process, he laid the groundwork for many of the emerging human sciences: anthropology, linguistics, ethnomusicology, comparative studies, etc.[246] Like many of his successors in

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[244] Stierle, 63f. On the notion of cultural hybridity see Homi Bhabha (2004). The amount of case studies that examine such circulations through the metaphor of translation is beyond count. Wintroub (2015) is an excellent example, see also Lydia Liu (1995).

[245] See p. 139.

[246] For Herder's influence on modern historical and comparative studies see David Damrosch (2003),

those fields, Herder was a sharp critic of empire, for its violence and for the cultural homogenization it enforced politically.[247] Historical and cultural pluralism, for him, was a normative value as much as it was a natural fact, yet one capable of being violently suppressed.

Herder did not let this opposition to projects of political and cultural homogenization carry him to the opposite extreme, as is sometimes alleged, of normatively opposing or factually denying what today we would call inter-, or trans-culturality, or hybridization in all its forms.[248] Yet it is true that one wishes he had been more explicit sometimes about what, precisely, a non-deleterious, non-imperialist kind of translation would have to consist in. For the most part, we are left to infer it *ex negativo* from his polemics against the imperialist projects he opposes.[249] There is a second, related theoretical lacuna here. Even where Herder describes what he considers felicitous instances of cultural translation and transmission, his focus is on the results, rather than on the actions that bring them about. He offers us case studies of cultural translation, but not, as far as I can see, a rigorously theorization of the conceptual form actions which effect positive, synchronic or diachronic translations of cultural, political, aesthetic, religious, etc. forms would have to take.

The history of humanity for Herder is most centrally the history of its *Bildung*, its cultural formation. Herder would thus have reasons to think of actions that are decisive for this cultural formation as historical actions, in the pragmatic sense we have given to this term.[250] Insofar as an account of such actions is lacking in Herder, what is missing is a distinctly Herderian concept of historical action. Let

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Michael Forster (2010, 199f), George Stocking Jr. (1996; 1998), John H. Zammito (2002).

[247] On Herder's critique of empire and colonialism see Sankar Muthu (2003), John K. Noyes (2014), Sonia Sikka (2011), and Nicholas Robinette (2011).

[248] The view of Herder as a purist, advocated by Wolfgang Welsch, has been thoroughly disproven by Michael Maurer (2012), for the entire span of Herder's oeuvre, from his early essay to the late *Letters*, pointing out how this misconception is rooted in an earlier nationalist, even national-socialist appropriations. Cf. Assmann, 51f.

[249] Maurer suggests that violence is a criterion for Herder: he endorses cultures interacting when this happens peacefully (ibid.). This seems right as a minimal condition, but it also leaves a lot underdetermined.

[250] See p. 37-47.

me conclude this section with a brief account why Herder was reluctant to theorize strong notions of historical agency.

Historical Agency in Herder. I believe that we can identify two reasons why Herder was reluctant to theorize a strong notion of historical agency. The first is that the most sophisticated philosophies of practical subjectivity, or agency, that Herder knew from Kant and his followers had a distinctly rationalist bent, which Herder opposed. De-transcendentalized, pragmatist notions of agency, such as we have been operating with, were not available to him. The deeper reason, however, I suspect, is theological. There are passages where Herder talks about the actions of historical figures, of course, sometimes even in language that would seem to put him in the theoretical orbit of what I have been calling the poetic paradigm.[251] But a closer look reveals that, throughout, Herder reserves genuine agency in history only for God (*sive natura*, as he will also say from at least the mid-1770s on).[252]

This seems to square well with a reading of Herder as the great forerunner of 19th century historicism.[253] Historicism, for all its rhetorical self-distancing from Hegel, followed him at least in that it subordinated historical agents' perspectives to the theorist's contemplative perspective on history, be it the speculative philosopher or the empirical historian (unlike, for example, Marxist forms of historicism).[254] Its focus was primarily on epistemic questions about the status of historical knowledge, in an attempt to lay foundations to the bourgeoning historical sciences. Historical agency was not, usually, straightforwardly denied, but it became an afterthought.[255] Historical interest was, essentially,

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[251] For example, Herder, *This, too, a Philosophy of History*, 105-8.

[252] On Herder's Spinozist turn see Michael Forster (2018, 288–93). The equivocation of providence and nature, fate and chance is present already in the 1774 essay.

[253] Thus Gadamer ([1960] 1990, 32, 204f). Of course, there is a more minimal sense of historicism, as the view that human phenomena ought to be considered in their historical dimension, their time and place, their becoming and decaying in history, then Herder certainly was a historicist. I take it that this is primarily the sense Michael Forster (207-8) has in mind.

[254] Karl Löwith ([1939] 1995, 65-153) offers a comprehensive treatment of changing conceptions of Hegel during the late 19th and early 20th century; Franz Rosenzweig's preface to *Hegel and the State* ([1920] 2010), too, is a powerful document in this regard.

[255] Consider, for example, the treatment in Jacob Burckhardt (1905, 210–52).

practical disinterestedness, whether in the form of theoretical curiosity or aesthetic contemplation.[256]

Often it retained elements of both, as in Ranke's famous dictum that all epochs are at equidistance to

God (and himself).[257] Herder, too, often casts history as either a natural process or an artwork. *Deus*

sive natura then appears as both history's natural unfolding and the ultimate spectator of this unfolding.

The theorist's gaze approximates God's in the latter function. Herder was reluctant to secularize even

divine spectatorship of history completely, arguing that only God surveys history as a whole;[258] he was

even more reluctant to secularize human agency in history, as Kant had done.[259]

And yet, as for Kant, Schiller, and later also Marx, history was an intensely practical concern to

him. This is where Herder breaks with later forms of academic historicism, decisively in my view. An

activist pathos pervades all his writings about history. This is most evident in the early polemic, *This,*

too, a Philosophy of History (1774).[260] His very titles already reveal that Herder writes history with a

practical intent: the full title of 1774 essay continues … *for the Formation (Bildung) of Mankind.* His

primary project during the 1790s are the *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity.* There can be no doubt,

I think, from these formulations that Herder intends them as contributions furthering substantive

historical ends: ultimately, the cultivation of humanity. History here has to be taken as things done (*res*

gestae) rather than merely the account of things done (*historia rerum gestarum*). In the programmatic

preface to his final work in the philosophy of history, the journal *Adrastea,* claims: "*We* will create the

new century; for humans are formed by time (*Zeit*), and ages (*Zeiten*) are created by humans."[261]

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[256] Gadamer, 201-21.

[257] Gadamer, 214-6.

[258] Herder, *This, too*, 109-10; Herder, *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Humanity*, 18.

[259] Cf. Chapter Two. I note here again that the thrust of Kant's *Religion* is against the notion of grace: morality requires autonomy, and such is incompatible with supernatural intervention. The summary at the end of his book makes this very clear.

[260] The later *Ideas* with their naturalist rhetoric are closest in spirit to later forms of historicism; they also break off before Herder gets to treat of modern times. The *Letters* and *Adrastea*, from the 1790s and early 1800s, fill that gap—and here we find the activist pathos again.

[261] Herder, *Adraestea*, 12.

Herder's concerns with humanity's historical formation past, present, and future, were practical, but he did not explicitly theorize the concept under which he thought felicitous practical interventions in the history of human *Bildung* should fall. My contention is that a concept of translational action, as a form of historical action in a pragmatist sense, is well positioned to fill that lacuna. The remainder of this chapter will propose such a concept as a contribution to a philosophy of history in Herderian spirit: rejecting the metaphysics of the old paradigm in favor of forms of social inquiry that take the plurality of human forms of life and practice as a starting point, and striving to think, *inter alia*, against the political forms that flatten this plurality, towards concepts that help us respond to the historical ruptures caused, for example, by empire.[262]

2. Translating Concepts

First, I will briefly recapitulate the concept of translation arrived at in the last chapter. Then I propose my own concept of translational action on the basis of it. I will argue that *how* I arrive at this concept is itself an instance of the kind of translational action I am theorizing such that thinking and doing can mutually illuminate each other here. Here is the concept of translation that I isolated in the last chapter again. I called it the B-concept of translation, because it was at home in the textual translation practices of the nascent bourgeois sphere.[263]

Concepts of translation, I argued, generally should make determinate claims about four terms and their relations: translation as an *action*, done by an *agent*, performed on an *original*, and producing a *translation*. The first of these is the most crucial for us. Translation, considered as an action, I argued

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[262] With the awareness, of course, that no concept is inherently safe from appropriation by the powers that be, as the histories of Christianity, Buddhism, Enlightenment morals, socialism, and other universalistic moralities show. Hans Joas (2025) charts this history in great depth.

[263] Correspondingly, I have suggested to see the practices of the *ancien régime* reflected in the A-concept, and the emerging practices of commercial publishers in the context of early capitalism as reflected in the C-concept.

is a kind of making extended and differentiated in time with a beginning, a middle, and an end (what Aristotelians would call a *poiesis* and also a *kinesis*). The action is initiated as the conclusion to an instance of practical reasoning, and carried by that same reasoning throughout, which establishes the desirability and the non-impossibility of the task. The desirability is established in the form of a judgment about the translation-worthiness of the original; the non-impossibility expressed in the form of trust in the original's translatability.

On the basis of these, the action of translation can begin, and it begins with a turn to what, properly speaking, becomes the original only then in virtue of being taken, pragmatically, here and now, as original *by* the agent *for* the purposes of this translation. On the B-concept, the original so taken appears as both given and as to-be-constructed in turn. It is taken as a translation-worthy original on the basis of it being what it is, because of how it is given to the translator. But on the B-concept, once it has been so taken, it also appears as in need of further construction. This construction is itself part of the translation; indeed, it is the culmination of the beginning of the action. The middle of the action is then the work of translation proper where, part by part, the text is translated. Since tradeoffs, on this view, are impossible to avoid, fidelity means trading off well, sacrificing what matters less (or: the letter) to retain, as far as possible, what matters more and matters most (or: the spirit). The crucial twist is that, on the B-concept, just what the letter is and what the spirit has to be discerned through the most scrupulous attention to the whole of the text, case by case and including (what will come to be seen as, here) the letter.

The translation ends when all the parts have been translated. It is then finished, but, on the B-concept, no translation can ever be final. Translations point beyond themselves to future translations, the individual, terminable *poiesis*, to the indefinitely repeatable *praxis* of translation. Further attempts will always be possible, sometimes necessary, and they will always be able to do both differently and sometimes also better than previous translations. There is no thought, on the B-concept, or a

translation ever replacing the original—but there is the possibility of some translations achieving themselves a quasi-original authority over subsequent translations.[264] Therein lies the distinct notion of translational progress immanent to the practice's self-understanding,

Finally, I pointed to two conditions that underly the action, qualifying the relation between original and translation produced.[265] The first, I referred to as the condition of genre-likeness: roughly, that the translation of a poem still has to be a poem, and the translation of theory has to be theory—if we are to speak of translation in a literal sense. This requirement helps us distinguish translation from neighboring phenomena like interpretation, adaptation, etc., at least for those contexts where such distinctions are at all intelligible. The second, I referred to as the condition of the separation of contexts. The argument there was that it is only appropriate to speak of translations where source context (of the original) and target context (of the translation) are sufficiently different.

The B-concept comes from the translation practices developed in the German-speaking world in the late 18th and early 19th century. It was a moment of unusually high self-reflexivity on the part of the practice. This and the fact that the same historical moment also saw the birth of the poetic paradigm make it a promising candidate for theorizing alternatives to the poetic paradigm. Or so I shall now try to demonstrate.

Translational action. Most basically, translational action, as I understand that term here, is the translation of concepts such that they become practically intelligible (again) where previously they had not been (anymore). The first challenge is to show how we can talk about translation in a precise, non-metaphorical sense when it comes to concepts, rather than texts or words that are being translated.

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[264] Luther's Bible was, of course, the primary example in the discourse then, but some celebrated translations of the time have achieved similar status today. To this day, any German translator of Homer, Shakespeare, Plato will have to contend with Voss', Schlegel's, Schleiermacher's translations.
[265] They certainly hold for the B-concept, but Chapter Three has offered arguments that these would be true for any concept of translation.

This is also the point at which I return to the three examples I started out with in the first chapter, in addition to the example provided performatively, by translating a concept of translation from the theory of translation around 1800 into contemporary philosophy of history: first, the Apsáalooke, a nation of Great Plains equestrian nomads, and how they transformed their concepts and practices in the late 19th century after being forced to give up their nomadic way of life, as related by the philosopher Jonathan Lear. Secondly, Chen Kaige's 1993 film *Farewell, My Concubine* as a translation of traditional Beijing opera. In the next chapter, I will deal with a fourth example at greater length, Rainer Maria Rilke's post-WWI translation of a concept of mourning via his work on the poetics of elegy and sonnet.

One caveat ahead. The examples of Rilke and my own translational action concern me greatly in the details, because they are argumentatively load-bearing for this dissertation. The overall argument of the dissertation stands and falls in part with the question whether these are, in the end, translational actions. I do care about the cases of the Apsáalooke and Chen's film, too, but argumentatively, they are intended as illustrative examples, to make the concept of translational action more tangible to the reader. To this end, I will provide many details on both cases. But I do not stake my claim on the intelligibility of the concept of translational action as such on either of these examples here. Both would deserve to be treated at chapter-length, and I cannot do them that justice here.

Four basic terms. We start with the general features that I argued in the last chapter characterize any concept of translation: that it ought to make claims about four basic terms (action, agent, original, translation produced) and the conditions of genre-likeness and separation of contexts. How are these general features modified if the translata in question are concepts, rather than texts?

In the case of Chen's film, the translational action is relatively clean-cut: the making of the 1993 film. Of course, it is a complex action, too, consisting of many individual sub-actions. In the case of the Apsáalooke, the translational action is even more complex: the collective transformation of several

practices over the course of the second half of the 19th and the early 20th century. In both bases the agents in question are collectives, with some individuals standing out as leaders of their collectives, shouldering more of the responsibility for the action: Chen, as the director of the film and leader of his team, and the Apsáalooke's last war-chief, Plenty Coups, respectively. Shared agency, recall, in the form of co-translatorship, occurred throughout the period we looked at, 1750-1830. But it became visible—affirmed and taken up into the concept—only during the rise of the B-concept. Our concept of translational action retains that possibility.

As far as the original and the translation produced are concerned, in the case of the Apsáalooke, I will focus on their concept of the good (life) and on their concept of courage as both integral part of the good and protective of it. These are the *translata* in question here. In the case of Chen's film, my contention will be that we see the translation of a thick, normative standard of ethico-aesthetic excellence that was immanent to traditional Beijing opera, even constitutive of this art-form. These ideals are translated in the film produced, just as the Apsáalooke's ethical ideals under consideration were traditionally intelligible through practices of buffalo hunting and inter-tribal warfare, and in translated form live on in certain practices of post-nomadic life, including modern warfare but also law, politics, and others. What does it mean to translate a concept from one practice to another, be that opera to film, or buffalo hunting to common law?

Direct and indirect translational action. The requirement of genre-likeness becomes important here. For B-concept textual translation that meant, in essence, that the translation of a poem still ought to be a poem, and that of an essay an essay. Original and translation need to be of relevantly like kind. In translational action, I suggest it takes the form of the demand that concepts be translated from like practice to like, where the sense of likeness is capacious but not infinite. I propose a distinction between direct and indirect translational action tracking the difference between theory and practice.[266]

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[266] Of course, on our pragmatist picture theory, too, is a form of practice, a practice of inquiry. But

Direct translational action moves theory-to-theory. It operates on concepts that have already been made theoretically explicit through articulation in some (proto)theoretical discourse. By contrast, indirect translational action translates concepts via a work on the forms of practice in which they are embedded. Work on such forms can count as translation, provided it meets the conditions that we are in the process of developing. But what translational action is *not*, then, as per the requirement of genre-likeness, is the translation of a practically-implicit concept into theory, simply by making it theoretically explicit.[267] Nor does indirect translational action need to pass through theory, first extracting it from the practice to then implant it in another.

Both Chen's film and the case of the Apsáalooke present us with examples of indirect translational action. Chen's film translates concepts of ethical-aesthetic excellence by operating on a form of artistic practice in which these concepts were implicitly operative: traditional Beijing opera as it had emerged during the Qing empire, probably sometime in the 18th century.[268] The Apsáalooke concepts of courage and the good were alive in the practical context of such core practices of nomadic life as buffalo hunting and inter-tribal warfare. Rilke's example, which the next chapter discusses, too, is a case of indirect translational action, working on the concept of mourning as it was embedded in forms of poetry, especially elegy.

By contrast, my own translational action is a direct translational action of a concept of translation, namely, from translation theory around 1800 into contemporary philosophy of history. Both domains of theory retain a certain proximity to practice. On the source-context side, I turned to theoretical (or at least proto- or quasi-theoretical) self-reflection of translational practice manifest in the form and content of translator's prefaces. On the target-context side, I now translate it into a form of purer,

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the distinction between theory (as a practice) and practices other than theory remains workable and important.

[267] The previous chapter pointed to such attempts in Hegel's philosophy, see above p. 104-5.

[268] William Dolby (1976, 157f).

philosophical theory: philosophy of history re-conceived in a pragmatist spirit to concern itself primarily with historical agency as a practical problem. What I did *not* do, in any case, was crossing the theory-practice divide unidirectionally, whether from practice-to-theory, simply by making a practice theoretically intelligible, or from theory-to-practice, simply by applying theoretical insight from one domain elsewhere practically.[269]

Synchronic and diachronic. Regarding the separation of context, at this point, I note only that this separation will usually combine synchronic and diachronic aspects. No translational action will ever be perfectly synchronous, because it never occurs instantaneously, but cases are conceivable where either the synchronic or the diachronic aspect seems more important and the other nearly negligible.

When we turn to translational action as a form of historical action, the latter dimension will become especially important. That is why all our case studies—the Apsáalooke, Chen's film, Rilke, even my own translation—are eminently diachronic, where that which is translated, the *translatum*, is felt to be in the translator's own past. The translation proceeds on the basis of a recognition of the source-context as a past version of the translator's present target context. The historical crises that separate past from present in the cases of Apsáalooke, Chen, and Rilke are the post-1850s transition to sedentary life, the late 1960s to early 70s Cultural Revolution, and World War One, respectively.

My own translational action does not respond to a particular historical crisis. It is intended prophylactically to help us think what successful responses to such crises might look like. But it retains both synchronic and diachronic elements, too: from the Germanophone world circa 1800 to a contemporary Anglophone theoretical context.

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[269] I am aware that direct translational action sounds like a method for the humanities, or any scholar working on concepts—and it should be, I believe—, while indirect translational action makes it sound like translational actions would be primarily an object of study for scholars, because *qua* work on practice it is done by non-scholars. In this way, my pragmatist proposal seeks to do justice to the fact that non-academic and academic practice, are distinct but can also be continuous.

Forms and instantiations. The *translata* of translational action are thus concepts, ultimately, and in the case of indirect translational actions also forms of practice, proximately. Before looking more deeply into the shape of translational action *qua* action—its beginning, middle, and end, and the reasoning that both precedes and carries it throughout—it is worth pausing to ask whether these *translata* are sufficiently alike to texts for us to speak of translation in both cases without culpably equivocating? I believe the answer is Yes, such that we may speak of translation here univocally. Consider the following two points of comparison.

First, texts, concepts, and forms of practice are all alike in being somewhat abstract entities that exist in and through their concrete instantiations. That is easiest to forget for texts, because text-instantiation (this copy here), when properly edited, do not differ much from other instantiations of the same text, at least for most readers' practical purposes.[270] But it is true for all three that the distinction between instantiation and instantiated is in place. All three will often allow for some imperfections in the instantiations without those ceasing to count as instantiations. Crucially for us, in each case, work on an instantiation or the production of a new, paradigmatic instantiation might count as work on the text, the concept, or the form of practice in question. The translation of a text-instantiation, for example, is not only a translation of that particular copy; it is a translation of the text instantiated in that copy.

There is a difference between texts, on the one hand, and concepts and forms of practice on the other. For textual translation, there will usually be one concrete instance of the original from which the translator works. There will be an initial one-to-one correspondence between one original in the source context and one translation produced in the target context, and this one-to-one correspondence will hold both on the level of the text and the level of instantiations. By contrast, for

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[270] Humanities scholars, librarians, and antiquarian booksellers would seem to be the exception in taking an interest in such differences.

translational action of concepts (directly) or the forms of practice in which they are embedded (indirectly), there will be one-to-one correspondence on the level of concepts or forms of practice, but there will not necessarily be a one-to-one correspondence on the level of instantiations, not even when the translation is first undertaken. Translational action can work on concepts that exist in distributed fashion, across their concrete instantiations, in the source context, by producing an instance of (what we will come to recognize as) the translation in the target context.

The example of Chen's film nicely brings out the optionality of working on a particular instance of the form, because here the case is even more multilayered. The movie, I argue, translates an art-form, Beijing opera, by translating a single, paradigmatic instance of that form, the opera *Farewell, My Concubine*. On that level, the original (Beijing opera) is concretized in a single instance (*Farewell, My Concubine*). Of course, that opera, too, is a form existing through instances (*this* performance, *that* copy of the score). On this second, lower level there is, as far as I can tell, no one particular instance of the opera that serves as the original from which Chen translates. Nevertheless, the opera as it exists in many versions, has enough determinacy to serve as a basis for his translation.

In the case of the Apsáalooke, their concept of courage had reality through practice-bound instantiations, particularly the practice of counting coup: recognized types of acts in inter-tribal warfare that were deemed paradigms of courage like touching an enemy with a so-called coup-stick before killing him or certain feats of horse-stealing.[271] There was not a single act of counting coup, or even a single practice in which one could count coup, like warfare, nor practices generally in which one could show courage, like warfare plus buffalo hunting, that served as the original. Rather, it was the concept as it existed across its many concrete instances that, we shall see, had sufficient determinacy to serve as a translatable original and translationally transformed to find a home again in different practices.

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[271] Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope*, 13–16.

In the case of my translation, I found a promising concept of translation to exist across many textual translations and reconstructed its conceptual content through a multi-method analysis of the many respective prefaces. I found it useful to state that concept with theoretical clarity, to put it before us as I did at the beginning of this section. From there I now translate it, part by part, theory to theory, in the mode of direct translational action. Indirect translational action might retain a moment of theoretical explication or self-reflection, as long as it does not content itself to stop there but makes sure that the translated concepts live on in some adequate target-side practice. Often, they will not need to take a detour through theory at all but proceed from a more intuitive grasp of the form, as Chen did on my reading here and, as we shall see in the next chapter, Rilke did in his work on poetic form.

Wholes and parts. A second difference between texts, on the one hand, and concepts and practices, on the other, concerns their mereology, the way in which the *translata* as wholes are composed of parts. Texts have parts that come in sequential and nested orders: one word, sentence, paragraph, chapter after another; one word within a sentence within a paragraph within a chapter, and so on. By contrast, concepts and forms of practices do not always have their parts arrangement in that manner. What they do have are constitutive elements. The defining features of ancient tragedy as a form of artistic practice, for example, might involve certain qualities of the hero, the unity of time and place, the evocation of pity and fear, the use of a chorus, a mythical subject matter, and others besides. Similarly, concepts have conditions of application. For the concept of tragedy, those would just be that each form-defining feature is present in a given instance, such that the concept applies to that instance.

What matters is that forms of practice and concepts are like texts in that their internal differentiation in principle allows for reasoned trade-offs, where some parts, elements, or applicability-conditions are given up, to retain other, more important ones, while preserving sufficient overall continuity. Just what that continuity ought to consist in will vary from case to case. Presumably,

continuity across time is contingent upon continuity in some constitutive elements or applicability-conditions, at least in the short-run. But it is also true that, historically, forms of practice and concepts can often drop some elements of features and gain others and change, quite radically even, without therefore becoming unintelligible for their practical purposes.

One difference has to be acknowledged, however. Text-parts come in sequential order such that translations of texts, as complex actions, can be broken down into simpler actions of translating text-part after text-part: a translation of the *Iliad* can move verse by verse and book by book. For some concepts or forms of practice this might also be possible. I was able to state the applicability-conditions of the B-concept of translation in a certain text-like, even quasi-narratival order: from the general conditions to the particular ones and from the beginning of the action to its end. I follow that order now, in this chapter, as I translate the concept bit by bit.

This might not always be possible. I believe neither Chen's translation, nor that of the Apsáalooke, nor Rilke's can be analyzed as an action into its component parts such that sub-actions neatly correspond to parts of the respective *translata*. Their translational actions reconfigure the constitutive elements of the forms in question "in one go." This logically unifies the middle part of the *kinesis* of translation. It does not conflict with an analysis of the translation as having a beginning, a middle, and an end. And, of course, chronologically, rather than logically, the actions might very much still be drawn out in time, consisting of many contributing sub-actions.[272]

This can all seem quite abstract and in the fourth section, I will show what these trade-offs look like concretely in the cases of our examples. But before we dive into their details a bit more, let me zoom in on the three parts of translational action, its beginning, middle, and end, and the distinctive reasoning operative throughout.

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[272] It would be interesting to explore to whether this difference between unified middle and analyzable middle reliably tracks the difference between direct and indirect translational action.

3. Translational Reasoning in Action

I argued for the translatability of concepts, either directly or indirectly, on the basis of a very general notion of translation. The focus on the previous chapter has been on a much more specific concept of translation, however, implicitly operative in translational practice in the Germanophone world around 1800. I now begin to make good on the claim that this concept in particular holds promise by zooming in on one of our four basic terms: the action of translation as defined by its inner temporal unfolding into beginning, middle, and end, and by the reasoning which both precedes it and carries the action throughout. In the last chapter, I argued that this preceding-and-sustaining translational reasoning needs to establish both the desirability and the possibility of the action (or at least that it is not necessarily impossible). Desirability here generally takes the form of a belief in the translation-worthiness of the *translatum*. The latter generally takes the form of trust that that which makes the original translation-worthy can be had in the translation produced, too, or at least be sufficiently close to make the action as a whole appear worthwhile. Now I want to show that the same holds for translational action.

Translation-worthiness, (non-)instrumentally. I distinguished two kinds of reasons given by B-concept translators for why they translate: the instrumental and the non-instrumental goodness of the *translatum* (and, thus, of the translation, if it succeeds). This distinction has remained theoretically vague so far, albeit workable in practice. Here is one way of sharpening it.

When we value a translatum instrumentally we value it as a means towards a given end. By contrast, when we value it non-instrumentally, we value it as potentially end-forming, as something that teaches us to see ends as ends in the first place. In the case of textual translation, some texts might be seen as simply useful, for example because they convey information. Other texts might not be primarily valued as means to given ends, but as end-forming. Insofar as they are end-forming, they are also subject-forming, because part of what shapes our subjectivity, particularly as regards our practical identities,

are the ends these are oriented towards. The same holds for concepts and forms of practice. We become who we are through the texts we read, the forms of practice we engage with, the concepts we learn and weave into our understanding of ourselves, others, the world. We might still value these instrumentally also, as means to ends, in some cases, but more profoundly, they are the things that first disclose ends to us as ends. We then value them non-instrumentally, as grounds of value.[273]

The cases that most concern me here—such as those of the Apsáalooke, of Chen, of Rilke—where translational action responds to conceptual loss brought about by world-loss, will predominantly involve diachronic translations of *non*-instrumentally valued *translata*. Because the translation is diachronic, from a past felt to be one's own, into one's present, that which is translated is something that one once had, but now has no longer, because it was lost. This loss, moreover, is not merely experienced as a lack that one needs to fill, pragmatically, with functional equivalents. It is loss in an emphatic sense, the kind that calls for a work of mourning, because the *translatum* in such cases was a ground of value and self-understanding that was tightly interwoven with one's own or one's ancestral way of being in the past world. Below, I will address how translation could entail a needed work of mourning.

Regarding the question of translation-worthiness, here I simply note that in these cases the *translatum* is not quite chosen in the same way as it is in cases of instrumental valuation. The past already has some claim on us insofar as it is our past. In the case of textual translation, we encountered an analogous phenomenon in the experience of elective affinity (*Wahlverwandschaft*) that some translators, predominantly of non-instrumentally valued texts, reported: a sense that the text had chosen the translator as much as the translator had chosen the text. The term is particularly apt in the

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[273] This is consonant with the observation that non-instrumental reasons for the translation-worthiness of texts were given primarily for literary, philosophical, or religious texts: texts that do not merely convey useful knowledge but enter more intimately into how we think of ourselves, others, the world.

case of *translata* taken from a past felt to be one's own, however mediated.[274] There is both *Verwandtschaft* here, affinity or kinship as we might translate, in the sense of an initially not chosen, but pre-established relationship, and *Wahl*, or election, in that there is, nevertheless, some degree of choice here in whether we take on this heritage and more choice even in how we take it on.

Trust and hope. Agnosticism about the possibility of a translation suffices to first initiate and then continue it, if the potential outcomes appear desirable. All we need for that is trust, both in the beginning and throughout, that the undertaking is not necessarily impossible. The same, I want to argue, holds for translational action.

In textual translation, trust is needed the most where the possibility of the translation is most uncertain. We see this from the fact that the prefaces that were most likely to thematize the need for trust at all typically were appended to works of literature, philosophy, religious texts: non-instrumentally valued texts, that is, which are difficult to translate—but also, potentially, the most rewarding. If nothing prevents it, one might as well try.

The situation is different for the cases of translational action that most concern us, where translational action responds to the loss of a world. This is not because the work itself is inherently more difficult in such cases. But our capacities are reduced. The incapacitation brought about by world-loss includes practical and ontological aspects. Worlds, recall, are the clusters of practices that allow us to inhabit practical identities in the first place, to do and to be as these roles. The loss of worlds is a loss of those possibilities. It also entails psychological aspects. The possibilities it afforded entered into our very sense of self. Their loss is intimate and puts us in what psychoanalysts call a "depressive position."[275] It works against our very capacity to trust, including trust in ourselves to translate, or for anything good to come from translation.

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[274] Of course, the experience is not exclusive to such cases.
[275] For example, Melanie Klein ([1940] 1994, 96).

In a moment, I shall argue that translational action can be a way of working through such loss. If that is true, then it seems we are left with a cruel irony: translational action might be needed most of all precisely in those cases where it also seems nearly impossible. There is no theoretical work-around here, I think, but it is worth pointing out a difference between trust and hope, which suggests that hope might be the virtue that can help where trust breaks down.

Trust is partially grounded. It is never perfectly so grounded, or else we would have simple certainty, and no need for trust. But neither is it groundless. When the grounds of our being and all goodness break away, then the grounds of trust break away, too. It can lead to despair that is the end of trust. By contrast, hope can be groundless, even desperate. We can hope even for what we believe to be impossible, and even for a goodness that is, as of yet, not even conceivable, a goodness that outstrips our capacities to conceptualize it. Jonathan Lear has called such hope "radical hope," arguing that this is precisely what the Apsáalooke achieved, and had to achieve, to accomplish what I am reading as their translational action.[276]

Whether such hope can be mustered can never be decided in advance, of course, but neither is a negative answer ever a foregone conclusion. What can be done, prophylactically, on the part of theorists, is to show what translational action implies if the concept applies. We can give a sense of what that option would entail, require, and may result in, wherever it is an option, and what would make it an appealing option, whether we pursue it in the end or not. And we can work with examples, as I am doing here, which may build trust in the factual possibility and possible goodness of translational actions, even if a gap remains for each case between pre-established trust and the trust or hope needed to actually begin the work of translation.

The letter and the spirit of the original. On the B-concept, textual translation begins with a turn to the original, and in this beginning the original appears variously as given, taken-as, and to-be-

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[276] Lear, *Radical Hope*, 91-100.

constructed. The concept of an original, as I construed it, is a pragmatic one: what is, here and now, taken as an original by the translator for their practical purposes. It is so taken, because of how it is given, simply because it is what it is. At the same time, once it has been taken as original, it also appears as yet in need of being constructed, in a distinctly translational sense.[277] The situation is similar for translational action, but let me first point out a problem with the B-concept here.

If we ask what norms govern this construction, we observe an inner contradiction. On the one hand, the B-concept, its translators and theorists, are well remembered for the emphasis placed on fidelity to the original. What fidelity meant exactly was disputed. But on any interpretation, such fidelity was deemed compatible with cuts, additions, and other changes to the original in prior gestures of exclusion and manipulation. In the case of ancient or non-Western texts, ideological assumptions of cultural-moral superiority disguised as scientific philological rigor often lend an air of legitimacy to such operations.[278] High ethical standards were set up—translate with utmost fidelity!—but these standards' range of application had been limited beforehand. The way these exclusions worked is not merely structurally analogous to the well-studied contradictions in Enlightenment morals and politics, where lofty proclamations of universal moral rights and duties go hand in hand with prior limitations placed on their applicability towards women, non-whites, workers, etc.[279] It is itself one way in which textual translation practices, in their own realm, participated in these larger structures of exclusion and domination. The norms of fidelity were interpreted in ways that systematically left loopholes for censorship already within the practice.

My suggestion for remedying this contradiction, as far as the concept of translational action is concerned, is to extend the logic of letter and spirit, which we identified to be operative in the middle

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[277] Different from the active, constructive role taken, for example, from an epistemic, a psychological, or a hermeneutic vantage point, though close, as I shall argue, to the last of these.

[278] See, for example, William Altman (2020, 23–25) on Schleiermacher on Plato; see Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee (2014) for a critique of German Indology along those lines.

[279] Marx and Engels ([1848] 1978), Charles W. Mills (1997), Carole Pateman (1988).

part of the action, to cover the entire process. That logic, in a nutshell, involved the following two principles: first, since trade-offs are necessary, one should make reasoned trade-offs where something less highly valued (which we then call the letter) is sacrificed for something more highly valued (the spirit). Letter and spirit are logical categories here, defined from a translational point of view as that which is sacrificed and that for the sake of which one sacrifices. Secondly, this should be done on the condition that just what the spirit is in each given instance is to be determined by the most scrupulous attention to the letter also. Only after the most careful attention to the original as a whole first, maybe we begin to make reasoned tradeoffs. All that is needed for that logic to be applicable is that the *translata* are internally differentiated into (text) parts, (form) elements, or (concept's) application-conditions, such that one can make reasoned trade-offs, sacrificing some for others.

There is a difference here, however, between B-concept textual translation and translational action, if we extend that logic from the middle of the action to the beginning. Quite simply, if it operates in the middle of the action, then the original has already been constructed. When one then sets out to tell the spirit from the letter and to make reasoned trade-offs, one can do this on the basis of an understanding of what the whole is and what its parts are. But how could the same logic apply in the beginning, when the original is also yet to be constructed (and one does not want to deny, in keeping with the B-concept, that *some* kind of constructive work on the part of the translator does fall under the concepts of translation)? It seems that we are in a situation where we would have to say that the original has to be constructed on the basis of what it is.

The apparent paradox dissolves, however, when we consider this construction as extended in time. Consider it like this. We reason about the translation-worthiness of the original. Perhaps, at first, it is just a hunch, then gradually we form a better understanding, or we might have a relatively clear understanding of why we translate it from early on. Either way, this understanding might increase throughout the entire of process. But at some point, a decision is made: we decide to take "this before

us now" as the original, because of the judgment we have arrived at. But just what it is might not yet be sufficiently determinate. So, the work of circumscribing it continues. But, from this point on I want to say, it continues under norms of fidelity. This means that we do not make the work easy for ourselves by bringing pre-conceived notions to bear on where the boundaries of the original lie, but cast a wide net and try to bring it into view to the fullest extent we can. Then we decide what, precisely, will be our original from which we translate, having paid full attention also to that which does not enter. And, of course, as our understanding deepens, we might have to revise earlier judgments and go back to translate differently.

With almost the complete concept of translational action before us, let us now look at three examples in more detail: the translational actions of the Apsáalooke, of Chen Kaige, and my own in this dissertation.

4.   Three Examples

Here are three examples, two indirect and one direct translational action, to illustrate the concept, with a particular focus on the translational trade-offs that govern the middle part of the action.

One. As I read it, the Apsáalooke's collective translation of their traditional concepts of courage and the good (life) began with a medicinal dream that their last war-chief, Plenty Coups, had at a young age. It showed the buffalo disappearing, being replaced by cattle, and a storm devastating the land. Interpreting this dream collectively, as was established practice among them, over time the Apsáalooke came to take it to mean that their old world would end. The dream also held out a message of hope. The only tree to survive the storm was that in which the chickadee had built its nest. This bird held great cultural significance for the Apsáalooke. It copies songs from other birds, symbolizing the virtue of learning and adaptability.

Lear uses a catalogue of Aristotelian criteria to show how such willingness to learn could itself count as a form of courage. But how could the Apsáalooke, who in the 1850s presumably had no deep acquaintance with Aristotle, themselves come to see adaptation as expressive of courage? Besides its gift for learning, the chickadee was also known as an aggressive defender of its territory. And because the core of the traditional concept of courage and the coup-ritual, as Lear demonstrates, was the notion of protecting Apsáalooke boundaries, chickadee allowed them to hold such boundary defense and a willingness to adapt in one synoptic vision.

My argument is now that we can see this as a translational turn towards an original, taken as both translation-worthy in its givenness and as yet to be constructed. Traditional courage was a value to them, but they began to see it as detachable from its existent forms. They decided that, indeed, courage might have to be transformed in order to stay the value it had been to them. And this transformation took the form of translational trade-offs between letter and spirit. The outer form of the concept had to be given up because the practices that sustained it (buffalo hunting, warfare, counting coup) were being lost. But the spirit of the concept—boundary protection, including now also through adaptive learning—had been preserved, and preserved precisely because it had been expanded.

Once they were able to see adaptive learning (or "chickadee-virtue") as itself a form of courageously protecting the possibility of Apsáalooke good, yet further transformations of their notion of the good became thinkable, for example, to adopt farming practices, which some of their own historians saw as a return to the nation's sedentary origins, or learning US law to fight against further encroachments on their land in the courts ("chickadee-virtue of the second generation"). In the old days, courage and the good had been interdependent: courage aimed at protecting the good, and the good life could not but be a courageous one. That interdependence, if Lear's reconstruction is right, was retained in the post-nomadic world. The two concepts, as I read them, had to be translated together, the translation of each further enabling the translatability of the other.

Potential failures or shortcomings, too, point towards the translational shape of their course of action, which was beset by all the same ethical challenges translator's typically face, when cultural and political boundaries between self and other are crossed. The Apsáalooke allied themselves with the US Army in the wars against the Sioux. The deal guaranteed that the Apsáalooke got to settle on their very own homelands, which before they used to traverse as nomads. Sioux leaders, unsurprisingly, saw in the Apsáalooke's willingness to learn and adapt simply a sell-out. The case is complicated, and my point as an outsider is not to judge, but merely to argue that translation names the shape of what they achieved as a whole, for better or worse: a way of working-through the loss of their world that at once acknowledges this loss as loss—Lear relates how Chief Plenty Coups symbolically buried his coups stick; we shall return to this dimension—while also creatively transforming key concepts and practices in ways that to them themselves retained intelligibility and integrity. And, of course, if the practice of translation is as open-ended as I suggested it is, no one is in a position to rule out future, yet better translational actions.

Two. Chen's film tells a story of the end of Beijing Opera, at least in its traditional form and social significance as living artistic mirror to its world. As the film portrays it, the art-form dies a protracted death. Born during the last imperial dynasty, the Qing, it is still well and alive during the fledgling Chinese Republic, in the early 1920s, when the story sets it, but shaken then by the invasion of fascist Japan, the civil war between Nationalists and Communists, the 1949 Communist Revolution and finally Mao's Cultural Revolution starting in the late 1960s. The film tells its story through the lens of two opera actors who specialize in the titular opera *Farewell, My Concubine*, which historically premiered in 1918. But at the level of overall plot, main characters, individual scenes, and even the more fine-grained level of dialogue the film uses that very opera, *Farewell, My Concubine*, as a template for telling its story, such that it is, in the end, that opera, which is also a stand-in for the form as a whole, that is told, by the film that shares its name, in that film's telling how there can no longer be such opera.

To boot, at the level of plot, the opera and the film share the sense of an unstoppable downwards trend. Things start bad and they only get worse from there. The opera tells the story of the King of Chu and his Consort Sun in their fight against the Han. The Han win out over the Chu and establish the Han Dynasty (202 BCE to 220 CE). Though not the first of the imperial dynasties it certainly marked a glorious early peak in Chinese history and in this regard is often compared to the roughly contemporaneous Roman Empire in the West. The opera tells this story from the perspective of the vanquished Chu, their King and his concubine, performed by the film's two protagonists, Xiaolou and Dieyi. In the opera the army of the King is encircled and defeated, the survivors desert, while king and concubine commit suicide. In the film, both actors play out their opera-roles in life, too. Xiaolou, who plays the King, is effectively the king of the acting troupe, rallying them in every crisis and saving them with his bravery. Beijing opera made heavy use of standardized gestures to convey character's states of mind and virtues; in the film, Xiaolou has a signature gesture, too: his ability to break bricks with his head, which repeatedly saves the day, when the actors are in trouble.[280]

The figure of the Consort Yu is split between two characters in the film: Dieyi, who plays her on stage and who is in love with Xiaolou, and Xiaolou's wife off-stage, Juxian. Like Consort Yu in the opera, both end up committing suicide. In the case of Juxian this is preceded by a final night of drinks and love-making as in the opera, while Dieyi's suicide, in the final scene of the film, takes the same form as Consort Yu's death in the opera, and occurs while he is in character, performing their most famous scene one last time with Xiaolou, years after the main events of the film in an empty space with no audience but the film's viewers. Off the state, throughout his life, Dieyi's love is unrequited; on the stage and in death, he can be Xiaolou's lover.[281]

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[280] Dolby, 182.
[281] Chen's choice of this ending is all the more noteworthy and deliberate given the fact film is also based on part on a novel, and the novel's author, Lilian Lee, co-authored the screenplay, but the final scene is unique to the film and not in the novel.

Besides these adaptations of overall plot, characters, and individual scenes, the translation of the opera also works at the even more granular level of what I would like to call, for lack of a better term, diegetic voice-over. Again and again, we see actors rehearse or perform scenes from the opera, singing lines from it that function as diegetic commentary on what is happening, or about to happen, off stage: for example, they sing about a horse that refuses to escape in loyalty to his master, right before two students try to escape the harsh discipline of the training grounds, or they sing about how all has fallen into ruin, right after the Japanese have invaded, etc.

Thus, on the level of content, the specific opera and Beijing opera in general are depicted and, as the film tells it, come to an end, while on the level of form, the opera is deconstructed into its elements—of plot, scenes, gestures, lyrics, motifs—, those elements are reconstructed in the form of a film to save something of the spirit of the opera, its tragic sense of beauty and goodness as an art form worth sacrificing for. Opera and film are different media, but they are alike in being performance-based art-forms with both popular and elite appeal.

Three. I hope the previous two examples have given an idea of what indirect translation action can look like, but I understand that what I have said so far is not enough to establish that translational action is a uniquely fitting concept to describe these two cases. Part of what would be needed in this regard is to show that the reasoning which the agents in question employed entailed a recognizable translational intent. It is possible to do so, and in the next chapter I will argue that Rilke had such intent. The case is easier also with my third example here, since it is my own translational action, performed on the very concept of translation, where I am in the fortunate position of being able to straightforwardly profess translational intent to the reader.

According to our own classification of translational actions, this one entails both diachronic and synchronic dimensions (from the *Goethezeit* into the present, from a Germanophone into an Anglophone context). It is quite easy to see, I hope, that the condition of separate contexts is observed

here. Practice-immanent translation theory ca. 1800 and a pragmatist philosophy of history in the early 21st century seem sufficiently discontinuous. And we already dealt with the question of genre-likeness, or: the directness of the translational action, above.

The third chapter has begun the translational action proper, turning to what we came to take to be our original: the B-concept. Here we can now read our own practice as an example of what it means to construct the original on the basis of what it is, extending the logic of letter and spirit from the middle of translation into its very beginnings. I turned to the practice's self-theorization, striving to take it as I found it, in its fullest extent. The sample included nearly a century of translations, from sixteen source languages and a wide range of source-text genres. I did not, initially, limit it off-hand to a certain kind of translation only. But, of course, from the beginning, there was also an element of construction. For example, the decisions to focus on Germanophone translations and to make a cut-off prior to 1750 and after 1830. I had reasons for it: prior research had established this as a particularly decisive moment in the history of translation practice, and, of course, it coincided with the developments in the philosophy of history that we are most concerned with. But one could have done differently.

From there, I narrowed it down. Reading through the corpus in hermeneutic circles led a list of genre-moves and sociological markers, like translator class, to be examined for identifying distinct strands of the practice. I was able to determine which strands' concepts are the most reflexive, sophisticated and, thus, the worthiest of translation? The B-concept became the original proper. But it still contained a tremendous amount to inner variety. One could have made a quick decision here and pick one of the era's canonical theorists as representative. By contrast, I tried to show theorists' debates as reflecting differences between sub-strands of the practice (for instance, philological-academic vs. non-academic translations). I focused on Wieland's preface, but I had previously shown it to be formally paradigmatic for the practice at large and complemented his examples with others.

Once the original had been established, at the close of the previous chapter, the middle of the action begins. That is what I am doing now, in this chapter. It gave us an example of a letter/spirit trade-off from the middle part, too: *the very extension of the logic of letter and spirit from the middle to the beginning.* A more literalist approach to translational action would not have done that. But it was important to me to make this modification, to address the problem of prior exclusions. One might call it a concession to target-context sensibilities. That is fair. But it is, arguably, in the spirit of the concept. I resolved an immanent contradiction in the concept by expanding the one part of it which I consider to be its heart, namely: the logic of letter and spirit governing the middle of the action on the B-concept. I expanded it to govern the construction of the original from the beginning. And then I tried to demonstrate what this looks like. I hope this self-reflection makes plausible that the kind of care and reasoning shown in constructing the original (in the previous chapter) and in modifying it by expanding the middle-part logic to the beginning (in this chapter) follow the same logic.

We are now near the end of our translational action. What remains to be translated is precisely what happens at the end of a textual translation on the B-concept. Recall that the B-concept here points beyond individual translation which, in our shorthand, can be finished, but never final. B-concept translations point to future iterations of themselves. In this way, the B-concept entails a distinct understanding of translational progress across multiple translations. To translate this remaining part, we need to enter historical terrain and turn to the second main question of the chapter: under what conditions would translational action count as historical action?

5. Translational Mourning

We turned to translation in search of models for historical agency, specifically forms of responses to historical crises that allow us to think what it would mean to mourn the loss of a world, its practices and concepts. Under what conditions would translational action, as we have now defined it, count as historical action at all? Formally, the case is easy: if a particular translational action happened to retain a link to an historical crisis, such that historians felt compelled to include it in their accounts of the crisis, then it counts. But is there any reason to think that translational action would be relevant in this way *systematically*? I believe this is the case for certain kinds of *translata*.

The basic argument is this. The meaning of a historical crisis is partly defined by what was lost in it: a world and the practices and concepts central to that world. Those who suffered the crisis cannot be indifferent to this loss, because it was constitutive of their very sense of self. It is the kind of loss that calls for a work of mourning, on pain of mental illness, as argued in the first chapter. I now want to argue that translational action, when performed on those kinds of *translata*, entails the needed work of mourning. It thereby shapes the meaning of the loss and thus also the meaning of the historical crisis. Therefore, it will plausibly be salient to historians of the crisis in the relevant ways to count as historical action.

I will continue working with our examples here as I proceed to make my case. That the Apsáalooke and Chen's film respond to historical crises is relatively easy: the Apsáalooke to the end of the world of Great Plains equestrian nomadism beginning around the middle of the 19th century, Chen is looking at the pre-Cultural Revolution world from the early 90s, when a new assessment of that historical crisis had become possible, post-Tiananmen. The preceding world-loss in each case is fundamental and comprehensive, involving many domains of practice including some of the most basic ones, especially in the case of the Apsáalooke, which present us with what sociologists call a highly integrated society, as opposed to the more differentiated world of late Qing and early modern China. The time-scales are

comparable, too, each case involving combinations of slower processes of gradual loss through erosion with more rapid and sudden moments of collectively felt historical rupture.

Re-cap on mourning and agency. To briefly recapitulate the psychoanalytic concept of mourning, we found it to entail two moments which we referred to as de-cathexis and internalization. De-cathexis meant the relaxation or reduction of our affective investments in the lost object, including both positive-libidinal and negative-aggressive cathexes. Internalization meant the setting-up of internal representations of formative alterities such that we can continue to recognize them as recognizers constitutive of ourselves. We still constitute ourselves under their gazes and voices, and the recognitive demands that issue from them. These internalizations can be integrated well or poorly into existing psychic structures. In the latter case, their recognitive demands are felt to be impossible to meet, for example, or enigmatic, or in contradiction with other demands, leading to mental pain, compartmentalization, or various kinds of pathologies.

I also proposed the idea of structural mourning, in addition to personal mourning. Personal mourning is here understood to operate at the level of individual psyches, albeit in parallel ways where it is shared, public, collective even. Structural mourning, on the other hand, operates on the extra-psychic worldly grounds of value and subject-formation, the practices that allow the inhabitants of a world to become who they are, through socialization. Historical crises lead to world-loss which is precisely a loss of those structures. That loss needs to be processed not only by individuals, not even by the sum of all individuals, but at a structural level. Grounds of value and subject-formation whose recognitive demands have been internalized but then also become practically intelligible, need either to be de-cathected and transformed to be either let go off sustainably or to become practically intelligible again, however transformed, and most likely it will be combination of both. We would expect failure to achieve this to result in forms of collective personal and social pathologies.

The first chapter suggested that plausibly we lack adequate concepts of mourning, both at a personal level possibly (where the theoretical intelligibility of our psychoanalytic concept of mourning does not in any way guarantee its widespread practical intelligibility, through social, artistic, religious forms of practice), but also at the structural level. The second chapter argued that a prominent concept of historical agency, the poetic paradigm, does not help in this regard. Now I want to show that translational action can do better. It is worth noting that, even adequate concepts of mourning and practices to sustain them will not do away with mourning being difficult. Understanding such difficulties will help us understand what exactly would be required for adequacy in concepts and practices.

There are difficulties related to the beginning and the end of mourning, because, although it is not entirely arbitrary, it is also rarely entirely obvious when to begin and when to end a work of mourning. When we cease holding onto what is lost and begin to let it go; when we have mourned enough and let go of our letting go: these are decisions for which we cannot help but accept a degree of responsibility. We might find ourselves reluctant to begin to let go, perhaps because we are afraid of censorship for having given up on a relationship too soon, or fantasies of sovereign self-sufficiency that are shattered by the relationality revealed in mourning, or we simply fear the pain of loss. We might then deny that there was a loss ("it's not a breakup; we are just on a break"), or that it was a genuine *loss* ("we were not particularly close…"), or that this genuine loss was *ours* ("my father's death was so hard on my mother…"). Conversely, we might fail at the end of the mourning process, drawing it out beyond its allotted time. Perhaps, again, for fears of censorship of not having shown enough mourning, or because we find withdrawal from the world a welcome excuse for present passivity, much as hopelessness can assuage guilt over past passivity.

The greatest difficulty, I believe, lies in the middle of the process. Most love-objects are ambivalently cathected, sometimes strongly so. Conflicting affective investments can tempt us to

resolve them quickly in one direction or another, denying either our positive or negative investments. Out of love, we might feel guilty about the hatred and deny it. Inversely, hatred might lead us to deny that there was anything good about the lost love-object, covering up the pain of its loss. In either case, we mourn incompletely and, thus, remain unfree in our relationship towards the mourned. Successful mourning will involve a disentangling of affective investments—but, crucially, only after we first learning to hold the ambivalences in tension. Only by first facing the ambivalent cathexis can we begin to de-cathect both our love and our hatred. Only then will we be able to gain a free relationship to the object, in which we then decide, in a second step and in as self-determined a manner as is possible, which aspects of what was lost should have what kind of living presence for us going forward.

Translational action as de-cathexis. How can translational action help us work through loss of cathected *translata* towards positively free relations with these elements of the past? The basic idea is that we can see translation as a series of reality tests in the Freudian sense. For each part of the *translatum* translators have to reckon with what is lost there: whether something is lost, and, if so, what the loss consists in, its scope and meaning. Every translation decision thus becomes the occasion to dissolve a cathexis. Having reckoned with the loss we need to decide, for each instance, that although something was lost, we go on translating, until the work is complete. Then the full measure of the loss will have been taken at least one time.

There is reason to think that the cathexes dissolved here will not merely be the translator's own, private cathexes. Consider the fact that, in a sense, translators are usually the people who least need a translation. Do they not have access to the original after all, more so than others at least? It is tempting to say that translation is always for others. That might overstate the implicit altruism. More accurately, we might say that translation is for more than oneself: it is for some target-context audience, the translator included. We translate, because we want to have some text (or concept, or practice) *qua* members of that audience, in that language. We are invested in that text as members of that collective.

But if the investment is on the part of a we that is larger than the translator's I, then, arguably, the de-cathexis that happens in translation can be, too. It all depends on the translator's capacity to make both the loss transparent to the target-context audience and to reconcile them to that loss in the same gesture.

As we have seen, B-concept translation has made such transparency one of its primary goals. On the B-concept, translation ought to measure distance, rather than efface it, whether it thinks of that task as preserving the text's foreignness or its singularity. It has many means available to do this on the textual level: self-commentary in prefaces or footnotes, leaving terms untranslated, bending the target-language conventions, etc., These can all serve as ways of communicating to the target-audience the distance to the original and its context. Translational action, too, can inscribe the distance to the original itself into the translation produced. In the next chapter, we shall see, for example, how Rilke's translation of certain poetic forms exhibits the brokenness of those forms, the disjointed quality of some of its constitutive features, even as it welds the shards into a new whole. Chen inscribes the distance to traditional opera-form into his film, by simultaneously telling the story of its end, on the level of content, while holding on to elements of traditional opera-form, and of *Farewell, My Concubine* in particular.[282]

At the extreme, translation might convey the loss more than it remedies it. Translators might aim to get us invested into the original they translate, while also translating in such a way as to deny the target-audience any sense of "having it."[283] In this way, translation can become one manner in which

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[282] In the case of the Apsáalooke, making the distance to the original visible, facing it collectively, was part of the process, for example in Plenty Coup's symbolic burying of his coup-stick (Lear 2006, 33). But, as far as I can tell, this acknowledged distance is not inscribed into the translation itself, in the sense of the product resulting from the act. There was perhaps even an element of covering one's traces involved in casting certain practices of sedentary life, like farming, as in fact a return to sedentary, pre-nomadic origins, however factually correct the claim may also be (99).

[283] While we are here looking at cases where a priori cathexis is presumed, it is worth noting that this is one way in which translation might get us invested in the first place, and not just in the translation produced, but in the original shining through. That might be one way for a literary tradition to adopt

loss is passed on and inherited.[284] If the translation is successful, wound and remedy are passed on together, in roughly equal measure. But depending on the demands of the situation the emphasis might fall on one side or the other. First attempts at a given translation or translational action, in particular, might hope to inspire future attempts, more than to achieve a definite result. One important consequence of this fact is that we cannot rule out that translational actions undertaken at a greater historical distance, by translators and for target-audiences who have no living memory of the world lost in a historical crisis, could still count as shaping the meaning of that crisis and, thus, as historical actions: if the loss itself has been passed on to them, including by previous translations.

Translational action as internalization. Psychoanalysis helped us make sense of the idea that, at the personal level, successful mourning entails internalization, whereby one subject-like alterity comes to inhere in another subject. At the historical level, it is not subjects but the *grounds* of subject-formation that are internalized from one context into another.[285] This means that, on the personal level, mourning involved a de-materialization. What had an extra-psychic reality takes on an intra-psychic life, which implies also a degree of abstraction. What survives of their outer bodies is subjects' address to us, their voice or gaze. By contrast, when mourning takes the form of a translational action, the translation produced has to have a comparable degree of concrete, material, extra-psychic and embodied existence as the *translatum* had in the source-context. This follows from the adapted

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a text as a classic of its own, or for a philosophical tradition to adopt a concept as one of its untranslatables in Barbara Cassin's (2014) sense: concepts which one never ceases translating, just as classics are texts that we retranslate over and over again.

[284] This is the connection between translation and mourning that Rebecca Comay and E. J. Bellamy have stressed, drawing on the work of Jean Laplanche and Jacques Lacan respectively (see also footnote 241 above). I share their sense that translation is a way of passing on loss, even traumatic loss, but they do seem to me to understate the agency translation affords in also making this loss productive, certainly over the course of several repetitions (especially, when we learn to see repetition in a positive light, as Lear 2022 suggests, 37-40, 51-58, and *passim.*)

[285] As always, we need to be careful not to take the translational root metaphor of carrying over in a substantialist sense. Strictly speaking we should say that a translation is created in the target-context through an operation performed on the original.

requirement of genre-likeness for translational actions: a practice for a practice, theory for theory.

It follows from this, and it is important to note, that there can be cases when we have a need to mourn, but no reason to translate. Translational action creates something in the place of what was lost. We might have independent reasons for seeing something not as worthy of translation, even where it had been a ground of our subject-becoming, for example, because those practices were harshly oppressive. Even for practices that we would rather lose sooner than later, there would still be a need for mourning. Mourning needs to dissolve both positive *and* negative cathexes. Otherwise, we remain unfree from these oppressive structures in that they determine us negatively, in our hatred for them. When we manage to dismantle them, bury and mourn them, then we can be truly done with them. We might remember them as no more than an old warning; perhaps it could even be safe to forget them entirely. That would be negative freedom from the past. The cases where translational action will be relevant are those where a more positive "freedom with" is conceivable, a continued, deepening, and overall supportive relationship with the past going forward—a meaningfulness of the past that does not preclude strong disagreement.

The relevant *translata* are thus those who are either primarily positively cathected or, and I believe this will be the vast majority, the cathexes are ambivalent, especially if we consider that affective investments into worldly-practice will be asymmetrical among inhabitants of any given world, including along dividing lines of power and oppression, complicated by distortions of ideology, which has people running for their chains (Rousseau). What does working-through ambivalently cathected loss require? First of all, that the ambivalence be recognized, the positive *and* the negative cathexes. Eventually, we would hopefully be able to disentangle the good from the bad, hold on to the former, perhaps at the price of some acceptable transformations, and let go of the latter, as best we can, knowing that some practices are hard to shake. But the transformative work and trade-offs are premised on a prior recognition of the claim the loss has on us in its ambivalent entirety. The reader

will be able to guess the next step: I see a strict structural equivalence here to the logic of letter and spirit, which we have identified as a hallmark of the B-concept of translation and expanded to cover the entire range of translational action from beginning to end. Trade-offs are possible, on this view, necessary even, on the understanding that we first take in the original in all its parts, including what will eventually come to be seen as the letter (or that which we sacrifice) and the spirit (for the sake of which we sacrifice it).

As an example of a translational action working-through ambivalence, I return for a moment to *Farewell, My Concubine*. In the next chapter, we will find another one in Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. A denial of the need to mourn is thematized in the movie in the figure of a young opera actor, Xiao Si, who is initially raised by the protagonists in the old style and then becomes an enthusiastic young Maoist, turning against the old.[286] He seeks to perform an *Aufhebung* in which all that was great about the traditional form (its beauty, its popular appeal, its artistic excellence) is preserved, and all that was bad is given up (the aristocratic content swapped out for socialist realism, the violent pedagogies of old replaced by egalitarian modes of production). Nothing would need to be mourned then: what was lost was not of value, and what was of value was not lost. If possible, this would entail a structural transformation of the old artform, integrating it into the new society, but without mourning.

The movie is pessimistic about this possibility. The revolutionary world turns out to be as violent as the old one, except that now the violence is no longer sublimated into art. Moreover, the revolution eats its children: the persecutor Xiao Si becomes the persecuted. In another example of diegetic voiceover we see him singing lines from the opera about the approaching Han soldiers, as he is getting into dress, right before Mao's soldiers approach to arrest him: as the Chu were to the Han, so were, in 1918, the Qing to the Republic, so are now the young Maoists of one day to that of the next. But

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[286] There are elements of autobiography here. Chen was himself a Red Guard in his youth, who to his later regret denounced his father, and was also himself sent to do labor in the country-side.

the movie does not just engage in moralizing against revolutionary excess, and much less does it engage in any nostalgia about the old ways. It shows the violence of the old system clearly. At the start of the film, we see Dieyi's mother chop off her son's sixth finger before abandoning him to the opera troupe, so he can become an actor and escape absolute misery. But the pedagogies there are ripe with sexual abuse on the part of rich patrons and physical and emotional abuse on the part of teachers, leading to the suicide of one student. The young Maoists, we are given to understand, are not wrong to say: no more beatings!

The film resolves these tensions, I think, by not resolving them at first. Holding them in a deliberate irresolution, the viewer comes away without a clear sense of old or new being simply better. But that refusal of an easy solution, paradoxically, does feel like a resolution. In this way, the film in translating various not only mourns various elements, shows their loss while transforming them and integrating them into its own formal vocabulary, but also works-through ambivalences around the old art-form and, through this form, ambivalences about the world from which it grew and which it reflected on in turn.

More would need to be said about each case study, but I hope that together they served their illustrative purpose, to show us what translational action might be like as a form of historical action, as a form of response to historical crisis, taking stick of what was lost and re-working it, even restoring to some concepts and forms (or, to be perfectly precise: to their translations) a practical intelligibility. The next chapter will look at a single case study in greater depth, which concerns the very concept of mourning, in a Western, modern context. Before I turn there, I want to consider the one element of the B-concept that we have not yet translated, the notion of progress immanent to this concept.

6. Translational Progress

The concept of progress has been of central concern to modern Western philosophy of history, particularly the rationalist strand of which Kant was an early and influential representative. If there was a distinct notion of translational progress immanent to B-concept textual translational, what forms of historical progress become thinkable when we make that concept the basis on which to theorize historical agency? That is, what kind of historical progress would translational action *qua* historical action systematically aim at? In this concluding section to the chapter, I want to at least adumbrate what I believe an answer would look like.

B-concept progress. On the B-concept, translations can be finished, but not final. They point beyond themselves, to future translations. This means that there are two kinds of relations to be considered here as far as the specific notion of progress immanent to the B-concept is concerned: first, the progress any one translation of the same original might make over an older translation; secondly, the progress a translation might achieve vis-à-vis its original.

Regarding the former, we might, on the B-concept, certainly speak of one translation as better than a previous one, for example, if it required fewer trade-offs or struck better trade-offs. What counts as better here will always be at least somewhat context-relative. Target languages change, such that even the best translation will only ever be the best for now and might be outdated a generation later. And at any given time, different translations might have different priorities, based on different, yet equally reasonable judgments of just what makes the original translation-worthy. Thus, as far as relations between successive translations are concerned, on the B-concept, sometimes progress might mean better in comparable regards, and sometimes it might mean different in a complementary way.

More interesting for our purposes in the philosophy of history is the question of the second kind of progress: progress made by a translation with regards to its original. On the B-concept, terms like better or different do not quite capture it. The point is never for the translation to be better than the

original *tout court*, to simply replace it. Translation and original are, of course, different in some way, but that does not capture what is distinctive about their relation. A better term, I want to suggest, is that translation leads to a deepening of the relationship between the two. It both measures the distance and makes it fruitful. Each new translation reveals potentialities in the original that had remained latent, gradually uncovering new layers of meaning, new potentials for cross-cultural fertilization in the original with each translation. George Steiner once referred to this as "mutual illumination," in which the "arrows of benefaction" point both ways.[287]

Translational historical progress. What would it mean to think of historical progress on this model? The *translata* of translational action are concepts and the forms of practices they are embedded in. Now, we are looking at the relationships between two entire worlds, one being in the historical past of the other. If we take the B-concept as our model, we will think of this historical world-world relationship as akin to the relationship between original and translation—as far as the question of progress is concerned, and only in that regard. I do not think it makes sense to think of one world as the translation of another in any rigorous sense (much as it does not make sense to think of one language, for example, as the translation of another). That has to be reserved for individual *translata*. But it does make sense to say that individual translational actions—several of them performed successively on one or several related *translata* from that past world—will cumulatively contribute to free relations between a world and its past.

As in the individual case, this can be mostly negative "freedom from" or positive "freedom with," and translational action will be helpful for achieving the latter primarily. We can again make sense of this freedom in terms of recognitive relations again—not because we are psychologically integrating subject-like alterity into subjects coming into being, of course. But because grounds of subject-formation from one context are being re-created in, or internalized into, another. Such grounds offer

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[287] George Steiner, *After Babel*, 318.

vantage points from which recognition can be extended or withheld, making them, in this regard, subject-like. In a slogan, we might say that, on this picture, the past is a subject-teacher, rather than an object-lesson. What I mean by this is that the deepening of relations is not merely a deepening of our theoretical understanding of the past, nor is it an ever more comprehensive, practical ingestion or incorporation of the past. These would be objectifying mischaracterizations. The past is reduced to an object to be mastered by present subjects, either theoretically or practically or both.[288]

By contrast, on the translational picture the past is not material to be subsumed. Rather, it offers grounds of a recognitive vantage point which, if it is indeed *our* past, we have already recognized on our part, under whose gaze, however fantasized and mediated, we constitute ourselves. Translational action, concept by concept and practice by practice, and over repeated iterations, works-through elements of past worlds to set up positive internalizations in the present context that are beneficially integrated into the target context-side web of recognitive relations, at least for those elements that are primarily positively or ambivalently cathected, the elements that appear translation-worthy at all.

Such a conception of progress would be what Rahel Jaeggi recently has called a proceduralist account of progress.[289] The procedural, on this picture, contrasts with the substantive. Substantivist accounts of progress are called thus because they propose a substantive notion of the good as a *telos* baked into the account. This leads to all kinds of well-known problems: from an incapacity to think radical change in our very conceptions of the good (since the good is antecedently known, supposedly), to ideological impositions of hierarchical, teleological schemata between some allegedly more progressive worlds over others.

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[288] I believe that this sets the translational option apart from the left-Hegelian program. Or perhaps: translational mourning is what *Aufhebung* should always have meant. I hope to argue this at greater length in future work.

[289] Rahel Jaeggi (2023), whose social ontology and general approach—Hegel pragmatized, with healthy doses of Marx and Freud in the mix—is generally close to mine and to Alasdair MacIntyre's thought from which we both draw (see also Jaeggi 2014). Remaining differences, I believe, turn on the issue of mourning and the mournability of the past.

By contrast, proceduralism separates questions about the goodness of historical change from questions about the (substantive) goodness of outcomes. This is not to say that such questions do not present themselves. On our picture, they present themselves in the form of questions about the translation-worthiness of *translata*, which are, we said, grounds of valuation and, thus, bound up with substantive notions of the good. But the concept itself does not prescribe which are worthy of translation and which are not. That is to be decided by the translators in question and case by case. It proposes that for any given case the questions of whether some concept or form of practice is translation-worthy will make sense. Progress then consists in dealing with them such that freer relations are enabled.

Finally, such a conception of progress would also be distinctly *historical* in that the freedom aspired to is freedom from or free relations with the past. For better or worse, the account thereby remains agnostic about what that means for other kinds of freedom, such as political or moral freedom, and of course also about all other kinds of progress one might aspire to: technological, scientific, economic, aesthetic, social, religious, etc. Arguably, free and healthy relationships with the past will be conducive to some of these also, and they seem unlikely to be contrary to them. It is easy to see how a lot of social pathologies and politically regressive projects result from unmourned historical loss, for example (fascist nostalgia for the past, bourgeois self-hatred, but also left-wing melancholia, and so on). But our proceduralist picture holds on to the historical as a category *sui generis*, which does not reduce to one of the other categories and should be analytically kept distinct.

Mourning progress. The foregoing evidently stands in need of elaboration, but it does conclude our own translation of the concept of translation from translation theory into philosophy of history. One question that I have not yet answered, but which we are in a position of considering now, is whether this diachronic translational action is one carried out for instrumental or non-instrumental reasons? Both readings are possible. To readers who are not invested in modern Western historical

thought and the concept of progress in any way—be that positively *or* negatively!—the first chapter introduced a problem (world-loss), the second chapter a functionally inadequate solution (the poetic paradigm). If this chapter was at all convincing, we now have a more adequate solution on offer.

But a different way of looking at it, for those who feel strongly, but ambivalently about the concept of progress—myself included—and the rationalist-historicist tradition of modern Western philosophy, anticipated by Kant and Herder, developed by Hegel, Marx, and their heirs, a different reading seems possible. The translational action proposed over the course of this dissertation would then appear as a proposal, first, to attend to the form of historical agency which that tradition thought brings about progress, the poetic paradigm, in its splendor and its weaknesses, and *then* to find an alternative, translational action, that holds on to some of what was appealing about that concept (its link to the possibility of a growth in freedom, to emancipatory politics), by reconceptualizing what that would mean and how it could be brought on the model of translation. We would be holding on to a quintessentially modern, broadly Hegelian conception of freedom as grounded in relations of mutual recognition, but we extend it diachronically to think about recognitive relations with the past, drawing on psychoanalysis to give a secular sense to the normativity of the ancestral.

Evidently, there is some circularity here. The ambition would be, on the one hand, to mourn an ambivalently cathected, deeply modern notion of historical progress, while the modern is also understood to imply precisely the impossibility of mourning, including personal, but especially structural mourning of world, practices, and their concepts. Translational mourning is supposed to be a remedy to that which, by its on lights, precludes precisely that remedy. This is why in the next and final chapter I turn again at greater length to the question of mourning in modernity, on the example of an extended case study: Rilke's translation of the concept of mourning, in response to World War One, which he understood as the culmination of earlier dynamics of rapid modernization.

Chapter Five.

Rilke's Translational Action

The last chapter proposed a concept of translational action, the action of translating concepts, making them practically intelligible (again) in a context in which they previously had not been (anymore), either by working on those concepts directly, as theory has made them explicit, or indirectly, working on the practices in which these concepts find their initial intelligibility-contexts. I also argued that translational action will plausibly count as historical action where it allows us to mourn what was lost in historical crises. As such, it stands to address a phenomenon I have been calling radical conceptual loss: loss of the very capacity to process loss. Such incapacity results from the loss of those practices which hitherto sustained concepts of mourning—or when a new kind of loss arises for the processing of which there never had been adequate concepts and practices in the first place.

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) thought that such loss characterizes Western modernity and had become acutely felt after World War One and the "poly-crisis" in its aftermath: the 1918-1920 pandemic, commonly known as the Spanish flu, the post-war German Revolution, runaway inflation, and generally widespread hunger, destruction, and misery that had left millions dead.[290] I will argue that two late cycles of poems, the *Duino Elegies* and the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, both completed in 1922, are Rilke's translational response to these losses. Together, the cycles effect a translation, and not just of any concept, but of the concept of mourning itself. Elegiac form, Rilke wagered, had previously enabled the practical intelligibility of a concept of mourning. In the *Duino Elegies*, he reworked that form and restored to it this capacity. As we will see, this required a complementary work on sonnet form, too, in the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, such that the concept of mourning becomes intelligible again only from two cycles taken together.

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[290] Adam Tooze has popularized Edgar Morin's term poly-crisis in recent work (Tooze 2021, 6).

The concept of mourning thus translated, I will argue was, first of all, that of personal mourning: the work of de-cathexis and internalization that allows individuals to process the loss of what they had been attached to. But through his translational action, Rilke also models what structural mourning could look like: the transformation not just of intra-psychic structures but of their extra-psychic worldly grounds (such as forms of poetic practice) in the wake of world-loss loss. Through his example, Rilke contributes to the continued practically intelligibility of structural mourning. Insofar as the intelligibility of *that* is crucial for translational action to be an attractive form of historical action, we may say that Rilke translated towards the future possibility of translational action as such.

1. Poetry of the Aftermath

To see his work on poetic form, in *Elegies* and *Sonnets* jointly, as a translational historical action, we need to see it as responding to a historical crisis, or set of related crises, and to the conceptual loss brought about by these. The crises in question are World War One and its aftermath. I will show that Rilke understood these also as the culmination of long-standing dynamics of modernization, and he took both those and their provisional culmination in the late 1910s as instances of world-loss and conceptual loss. Conceptual loss marks the dimension of those crises which he sought to respond to in particular. Let me be clear at the outset that this is not to make the poetry occasional. Rilke's highly intentional response to his historical moment remains context-transcendingly exemplary today, in taking translational shape generally, and in translating a concept of mourning specifically, which I contend remains as needful now as it did then.

Elegies and *Sonnets* recurrently thematize modernity. It could easily seem they do so only in passing, and neither cycle mentions the war.[291] Of course, neither does Eliot's *The Waste Land* (also from 1922), nor does Hegel's *Phenomenology*, say, mention the French Revolution by name. They do not have to,

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[291] For example, DE10.16-37, SOI.18, I.23, II.9, II.10, II.19, II.22.

and no one disputes that these two respond to historical crises from opposite ends of the long 19ᵗʰ

century. But in Rilke's case a tendency persists, from the older Germanophone scholarship to more

recent Anglophone work, to read him as offering ahistorical, existential or phenomenological

insight.[292] Of course, many cite the war, or modernity generally, as important backgrounds. Hans Urs

von Balthasar, writing in 1939, sums up this consensus when he claims that these merely "provide the

colors for the poems' timeless interpretation of our existence (*Daseinsschau*)."[293] And contemporary

Germanophone scholarship has mostly moved on from any interest whatsoever in the poems'

Daseinsschau.[294]

    Rilke and WWI. It is generally agreed that Rilke had a poetic *Auseinandersetzung* with modernity

before the war, namely in his *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910).[295] Rilke came to think of this

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[292] Representative are Romano Guardini ([1953] 1996), Käte Hamburger (1971), and before them, of course, Martin Heidegger (1946). More recent Anglophone scholarship in this vein includes Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (2010), Robert Pippin (2024, 205–20, and Charles Taylor (2024, 191–248). W. S. Burrows (2015) and Kathleen L. Komar (2010) *mention* the context and its significance but, as soon as it comes to interpretating the poems, revert to reading them as timeless philosophy, or perhaps theology, seemingly without any awareness of a methodological tension here.

[293] Hans Urs von Balthasar (1939, 248). More radically, Ulrich Fülleborn: "Thus, one must not overlook the fact that Rilke did not include (*einbezogen*) his political experiences of the years 1914 to 1919 in the poetic onto-dicy (*Ontodizee*) of the Elegies; that the cycle was completed at the price of its bracketing" (1980, 14–15). Fülleborn's use of the term "bracketing" (*Ausklammerung*) suggests he might have had Rilke's letter to Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe from Apr 4, 1918 in mind, where the poet speaks of "life *en parenthese*." I want to argue the exact opposite. When Rilke closes the parentheses in 1922 by completing the cycle, the result is not an *Ausklammerung* but an *Einklammerung*, the achievement of a closure, however fraught, around the rupture in life-worldly continuity. – All citations from the letters are taken from Rilke (1937; 1935), translations my own.

[294] Which is not to say that there is not a lot to learn from the rigorously philological studies it has produced. Paradigmatic are Manfred Engel (1993; 2013) and Christoph König (2014; 2023), for the *Sonnets* also Annette Gerok-Reiter (1996), as well as Wolfgang Braungart (2016) and Wolfram Groddeck (1997). Manfred Engel, building on Gadamer's notion of "mytho-poetic inversion" is somewhat more open to philosophical readings, but largely works in a strictly philological vein, too. The summa of the old phenomenological style, but with more philological sensibility is Jacob Steiner (1969); among the philosophers who read with a sense for literary form we need to mention especially Hans-Georg Gadamer (1954; [1961] 1993; 1993) and Manfred Frank (1988). I have benefitted immensely from all of these. Excellent also is Charlie Louth (2023). W. H. Gass's (2000) essayistic reflections on a life of translating Rilke have much too teach as well.

[295] Eric Santner (2022, 91–95).

novel as writerly critique, a negative to which the *Elegies*, begun in 1912, would one day provide the positive counterpart: not just a literary document of modernity's conundrums, but a genuine response to these.

> [*Malte*] appears to myself sometimes as an empty form, a negative, whose every niche and crevice are pain, desolation, and lamentful insight; the cast of which, however, if it were possible to produce one (as when working with bronze, the positive figure won from it) would perhaps be happiness, affirmation;—most accurate and certain blessedness (Letter to Lotte Hepner, Munich, Nov 8, 1915)[296]

We will return to the metaphorics of sculpture at several points throughout this chapter. What we need to see now is how the First World War reconfigured this task. Of course, the events were on his mind—how could they not have been?—and most every war-time letter of his alludes to or directly reference the war. But the decisive point for us is that Rilke saw the war in deep continuity with modernity, even an intensification of the dynamics diagnosed in *Malte*, rather than as a regrettable regression or backsliding from the peak of modern civilization into barbarism. He did this from relatively early on, circa 1915.[297]

> … as man-made as the progress of the last decade, just as man-made also is this unforeseeable occurrence, this commercial drive transposed into lethal technicity (*ins Todestechnische verschlagener*

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[296] "… dass ich [Malte] selbst manchmal wie eine hohle Form, wie ein Negativ empfände, dessen alle Mulden und Vertiefungen Schmerz sind, Trostlosigkeit und weheste Einsicht, der Ausguss davon aber, wenn es möglich wäre einen herzustellen (wie bei der Bronze die positive Figur, die man daraus gewönne) wäre vielleicht Glück, Zustimmung; – genaueste und sicherste Seligkeit."

[297] After sharing, for a few weeks, in the wide-spread war-enthusiasm, in the fall of 1914, from which result his *Fünf Gesänge*, written under the influence of Hellingrath's Hölderlin rediscovery.

Geschäftstrieb), an enormous war experiment in which human curiosity, its rebellion and self-assertion, are driven to their extreme… (To Marianne Goldschmidt-Rothschild, Munich, Mar 5, 1915)[298]

And soon thereafter:

What is so disturbing, after all, is not the fact of the war, but that it is utilized and exploited in a commercialized world, an entirely human world… human doings, as everything these last decades has been human doing, bad work, for-profit work… (To Helene von Nostitz, Munich,   July 12, 1915)[299]

The accusations against boundless theoretical inquisitiveness ("human curiosity"), a techno-scientific worldview ("technicity," "war experiment"), the capitalist economy ("commercial drive," "for-profit work"), and secularization ("an entirely human world," "human self-assertion") are all standard fare of anti-modern critique, of course. As will become more clear, it would be too quick to dismiss Rilke, who was also a queer, cosmopolitan humanist, as a proto-fascist, Weimar-style conservative revolutionary.[300] For now, we note that Rilke took his work to retain an inner connection to the

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[298] "… so menschengemacht wie die Fortschritte der letzten Jahrzehnte, genauso menschengemacht ist auch dieses unabsehliche Geschehen, ein ins Todestechnische verschlagener Geschäftstrieb, ein enormes Kriegsexperiment, in dem die Neugier der Menschen, ihr Aufbegehren und Rechthabenwollen auf die Spitze getrieben scheint."

[299] „… das Verstörende ist ja nicht die Thatsache dieses Krieges, sondern daß er in einer vergeschäfteten, einer nichts als menschlichen Welt ausgenutzt und ausgebeutet wird… Menschenmache, wie schon alles die letzten Jahrzehnte Menschenmache war, schlechte Arbeit, Profitarbeit…"

[300] Rilke, famously, was raised as a girl, Sophie, for the first six years of his life. Below, I discuss how the *Elegies* repeatedly invite identification with female figures and deconstruct heroic-militarist notions of masculinity. Egon Schwarz (1981) argues the case for Rilke as a conservative revolutionary at book-length. But he can do so only by bracketing all questions of gender and sexuality entirely. I think that is just where Rilke decisively breaks with all forms of authoritarian, right-wing ideology (including,

historical crises of his day, rapid modernization and the world war, the latter taken as the radicalization of the former.

But how can the *Elegies* be read as a response to the war, if nearly half of them were written before the war even began and remained unaltered afterwards? All of the first four elegies, large parts of the Sixth, and the opening lines of the Tenth date from between 1912 and 1914, and Rilke did not subtract or change a single word of those after the war; while some ten lines of the Sixth, all of Fifth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and nearly all of the Tenth date from February 1922 (as do the *Sonnets*).[301] This obvious objection needs to be answered before looking into the way Rilke diagnosed the war and modernity as forms of world-loss and conceptual loss.

My contention is that to complete the Elegies, Rilke had to perform a Menardian translation of his earlier work.[302] Like Pierre Menard of Borges' fable, Rilke had to find a way *to mean the same words* of the early elegies also later, in 1922, even though the world was a different one and the semantics of the words on the page had not everywhere remained stable. An example from the First elegy explains what I mean by this.

incidentally, those strands of the historical gay movement which, in line with masculinist and misogynist gender-norms, at that time were on the Right, politically). T. W. Adorno (1964) has also expressed skepticism about Rilke's politics, but nevertheless, as Wolfram Groddeck aptly puts it, "in the end sides with the poetry against its [proto-fascist] exegetes (Groddeck, 142). See also Walter Benjamin's ([1927] 1972, 453–54) sharp rebuke of an early, left-wing critic of Rilke's, Franz Blei. Of course, when it comes to politics narrowly construed, Rilke was not ideologically settled. He was briefly involved with left-wing German revolutionaries after war, but also fond of the old aristocracy, and later expressed sympathy for both Rathenau and, near the very end of his life, Mussolini. But his poetry, and the vision expressed therein, with the possible exception of the *Fünf Gesänge*, are resolutely anti-fascist. We should take proper fascists' words for it: *völkisch*-phrenological critics, like the George-disciple Friedrich Gundolf, knew exactly that Rilke was not of their camp (1937)—precisely because of his radicalized and gendered queerness (pp). That Rilke was a child of 19th century humanism and cosmopolitanism was noted by another fascists, too, with the keen eye of enmity (Heidegger, GA95.200)."

[301] I will consider the order of composition in more detail in the next section. Proust's *Recherche* is the only other product of European high culture I can think of, comparable to Rilke's *Elegies* in stature though not quite in kind, which was begun before the First World War but achieved completion and formal integrity afterwards.

[302] Jorge Louis Borges ([1939] 1998).

Es rauscht jetzt von jenen jungen Toten zu dir.

Wo immer du eintratst, redete nicht in Kirchen

zu Rom und Neapel ruhig ihr Schicksal dich an?

Oder es trug eine Inschrift sich erhaben dir auf,

wie neulich die Tafel in Santa Maria Formosa. (61-5)[303]

This is a pivotal moment in the poem. The speaker, initially absorbed in pain and desolation, begins to attend to the death of others. But the young dead of 1912 are, quite literally, worlds apart from those of 1922. Ernst Zinn tell us the plaque in question in Santa Maria Formosa contains epitaphs for two 16th century aristocrats. On August 9, 1916, the church was bombed by Austrian war planes.[304] Rilke might have witness the destruction when he visited Venice in 1920, before he finished the *Elegies*, at a time when memorial plaques (*Inschriften*) for young men killed in the war were put up in churches all over the continent. We can only surmise what Rilke must have felt when he realized how uncannily true his lines from 1912 had come to be after 1918. In 1922, it would have been impossible to not hear in these young dead the fallen of the war. Rilke kept the line in full knowledge of that fact— which is as good as if he had written them then. If the *Elegies* could not, initially, have been intended as response to a war, they came to be about this war when Rilke completed them afterwards.

WWI *as world-loss.* That Rilke could intend for his poetry to respond to the war and surrounding crises, becomes plausible, considering that he thought of the war as an ontological-historical crisis: an instance of world-loss leading to conceptual loss, amounting also to an ontological incapacitation. As a poet, Rilke sought to response to this dimension of the crisis in particular (and throughout this book,

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[303] "It is murmuring toward you now from those who died young / Didn't their fate, whenever you stepped into a church / in Naples or Rome, quietly come to address you? / Or high up, some eulogy entrusted you with a mission, as, last year, on the plaque in Santa Maria Formosa." I quote Rilke's poetry in Stephen Mitchell's translation, occasionally modified.
[304] Ugo Ojetti (1917, 38).

we have not been concerned with other dimensions either). In a letter from 1915, he writes:

> What great bewilderment (*Ratlosigkeit*) will we have hereafter, when all the concepts (*Begriffe*) taken
> in good faith have been taken from the pedestals on which they had been placed, and the
> confused survivors will have to reconnect again with the abandoned laws of our innermost
> being.[305] (To Ellen Delp, Munich, Oct 10, 1915)

The old concepts might still be there, but—continuing the sculptural metaphorics—in ruined or fragmentary form, lacking all cohesion, expressed here as the lack of a stable foundation (*Sockel*) to rest on. Consequently, they are unable to provide normative guidance or laws (*Gesetze*), particularly concerning the most essential aspects of our being, our *innerstes Dasein*, by which he generally means: the place of love and death in our lives. Love and death, moreover, as the two dominant themes of the *Elegies*, are connected in the phenomenon of mourning, when we face the death of what we love. In the next sections, I will argue that *Elegies* and *Sonnets* have to be read together, as jointly enabling the practical intelligibility of a concept of mourning.[306]

Before turning to the two poetry cycles, note, as a final point, the term "reconnect" in the above quote. From the quote alone, we cannot tell whether this reconnection to the "laws of our innermost being" involves making *tabula rasa* with the old *Begriffe* and creating new concepts, or whether it involves rather some work on the old concepts, restoring while transforming them. But there are some

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[305] „Was wird das für eine Ratlosigkeit geben hernach, wenn all die gläubig hingenommenen Begriffe von den Sockeln, auf denen man sie aufgestellt hat, abgenommen sein werden, und die verwirrt Überlebenden an die verlassenen Gesetze des innersten Daseins sich wieder werden anschließen wollen." (An Ellen Delp, München 10.10.1915)

[306] Charlie Louth points to an early reviewer, who expresses surprise to see the word "elegy" in the title: had Rilke ever written anything else? (2020, 361). On the opposite end of the spectrum, one finds doubts expressed, by formalist-philological German scholar, whether the *Elegies* can genuinely be called elegies since they lack some requisite formal markers (see Frey 1995, 190). To anticipate, I believe that this ambiguity speaks precisely to their quality as a translation of elegiac form as such.

indications in the war-time letters that point towards the latter. In the context of the post-war German revolution (Rilke was briefly involved through his personal links to Kurt Eisner), he writes: "… we experience it constantly… that almost everything (and radically, from the roots up) would have to be changed … who would not wish for a great storm sometimes to tear down all that is obstacle and obsolete.[307]" Yet, immediately he goes on to clarify that this fantasy is to be resisted. Lasting change for the better will come slowly and quietly by "preparing in the hearts that quiet, hidden, trembling changes, from which alone the understanding and concord of a distant time, more resolved can rise.[308]"

Rilke thus sought to resist fantasies of *tabula rasa*, nor did he saw it as his task, poetically, to force the moment to its crisis (Eliot). He wants to pick up the life-thread which had been interrupted—the word *unterbrochen* and cognates proliferate in his letters starting around 1918[309]—and he looks for the time after the war when this will be possible again. That already indicates to us that, poet or not, he is up to something essentially different from what the (post-)Romantic poetic paradigm of historical agency envisions.[310]

2. The Unity of *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*

I now want to argue that *Elegies* and *Sonnets* together make practically intelligible again a concept of mourning that had been lost, or almost, according to Rilke, over decades of rapid modernization, culminating in the War and surrounding crises. *Qua* responses to historical crises, the two cycles reflect Rilke's complex understanding of historical crisis dynamics. Simply put, I will argue that *Elegies* are to

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[307] "… wir alle erleben es ja beständig, … dass fast alles (und zwar an der Wurzel) zu ändern wäre … wer wünschte da nicht oft einen großen Sturm, der alles Hinderliche und Hinfällige niederrisse." (Letter to Aline Dietrichstein, Aug 6, 1919)
[308] "… dass er in den Herzen jene leisen, heimlichen, zitternden Verwandlungen vorbereite, aus denen allein die Verständigung und Einigkeit einer geklärteren Ferne hervorgehen kann." Cf. 1 Kings 19:11-13.
[309] In Vol. 4, 214, 219, 230, 231 (1914-21); in Vol. 5, 44, 66, 79, 82 (1922-26).
[310] And in spite of the fact that his self-mythologization drew on many elements familiar from late 18th century genius discourse, like his strong focus on direct inspiration.

the war as the *Sonnets* are to modernity.

The *Elegies*, I argue, mourn what has been lost in the War: primarily, the young dead, as shown already, but also elements of the pre-war world. Their title and dedication point in this direction: "from the possession of Marie von Thurn und Taxis," the owner of Castle Duino, which had been partially destroyed in the war, had become a graveyard for young soldiers afterwards, and which Charlie Louth is therefore entirely right to read as a synecdoche for the world of yesterday, as Stefan Zweig called it.[311] As has often been remarked, one element of the mourned pre-war world is elegiac form itself, particularly in the Tenth elegy.[312] Below, I will argue that such mourning of elegiac form was part also of its translation, in the strict sense given to this term. Read thus, the *Elegies* teach forms of personal mourning, poetically guiding their readers through the stages of a mourning process, but also achieve structural mourning, working through the loss of a form of poetic practice at home in one world and internalizing it, translationally, into another.

The *Sonnets*, I argue, have absorbed the lessons of the *Elegies*. They initiate into a form of life that we can call by its Rilkean name of "being earthly." The *Sonnets* affirm life on the other side of loss where, nonetheless, the contradictions of (in this case) modernity and some consequences of the aftermath of (in this case) World War One remain. Within and against continued crises of modernity, they hold up a way of being that includes, centrally, a readiness to mourn ever anew, and yet to praise— *dennoch preisen*—where both the *praising* and the "in spite of it all" (*dennoch*) character are equally emphasized.[313]

But can the two cycles be read together at all? Contemporary German philology, in its criticism and editorial decisions, tends to emphasize strong differences between the two cycles' poetics,

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[311] Charlie Louth (2020, 360-1).
[312] For example, Louth (2020, 445), Judith Ryan (2004, 180).
[313] That the *Elegies* lament (*klagen*) while the *Sonnets* praise (*preisen*) or glorify (*rühmen*) is an old way of characterizing the difference between the cycles. That Rilke repeatedly qualifies the praising as happening "in spite of it all" (*dennoch*) is less often commented upon, cf. DE9.52, SO II.2.12, II.22.12.

sometimes counting the *Elegies* among Rilke's "late" phase and the *Sonnets* with his "latest" phase.[314] Older, more philosophical German scholarship and not a little of contemporary Anglophone literature quotes liberally from both *Elegies* and *Sonnets* as a matter of course, usually without much regard for systematic differences in poetics.[315] Against the former, I believe the two cycles have to be read together—as Rilke himself came to think when he saw the cycles as "everywhere supporting each other," revising his earlier judgment that the *Sonnets* were just a by-product of the *Elegies*.[316] But against the latter approach, I also believe that a solid philological and poetological basis for this hermeneutic needs to be established first. That is the task to which I turn now.

Orphic elegies. The cycles overlap in themes, motifs, and imagery, but that can hardly be decisive. These overlaps extend to much of Rilke's mature work. It matters that they originate from the same, month-long burst of inspiration, when, in February 1922, Rilke finished the *Elegies* and composed the *Sonnets*. But it would not count for much, if not for the subtle but all-decisive fact that Rilke text-immanently preserved one trace of their syngenesis: the fact that the *Sonnets* come in two parts. Rilke could have presented all fifty-five sonnets as one cycle. Instead, he arranged them into two numerically asymmetrical sections.[317] The first comprises 26 sonnets, the second 29. This arrangement exactly preserves the philological fact that the *Sonnets* were produced in two stages: the first part from Feb 2-5, the second from Feb 15-23. Into that gap falls the completion of the *Elegies*, from Feb 7-14.[318]

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[314] On this point, Manfred Engel and Christoph König, who otherwise do not agree on much, are entirely d'accord. See Engel and Lauterbach (2013, 405) and König's editorial decision to treat *Elegies* and *Sonnets* in separate volumes of the critical-historical edition currently in preparation.

[315] See footnotes 292 and 294 above.

[316] As Gerok-Reiter points out, he got there only after repeatedly reading out loud from the cycle to friends (Gerok-Reiter 1996, 2). We return to the question of sound in the Sonnets below.

[317] Wolfram Groddeck points out that Rilke decided to present the sonnets in two parts after having written sonnet II.8, which is now the thirty-fourth sonnet in a cycle of fifty-five; 34 and 55 are Fibonacci numbers in direct succession, which means their ratio approximates the Golden Ratio (Groddeck 1997, 151). In light of such symmetries, it seems all the more decisive that Rilke did *not* split the cycle here, preserving philological facts even over such suggestive aesthetic symmetries.

[318] For an even more detailed table see Gerok-Reiter, 18-9.

Date	Poem
Jan 12-16, 1912	DE 1
Jan-Feb, 1912	DE 2
	DE 10.1-12
Until autum 1913	DE 3, DE 6.1-31, 6.42-44
Nov 22-23, 1915	DE 4

Feb 1922

2nd-5th	SO Part I
7th	DE 7.1-86
7th-8th	DE 8
9th	DE 6.32-41; SO I.21
11th	DE 9, new version of DE 10
13th	SO I.23
14th	DE 5
15th-17th	SO II.2-15
17th-19th	SO II.16-18
19th-23rd	SO II.19-29, II.1
26th	DE 7.86b-92

The *Sonnets* prompt us to look back at the *Elegies* by the rarely commented upon fact that they come in two parts. They invite us to hold the reading order (*Elegies – Sonnets*, as published in 1923) against the order of composition (the post-war elegies between *Sonnets,* Part I & II). What do we see in the latter case that we would easily miss in the former?

For example, that it is not just the *Sonnets*, but also the *Elegies*, which stand under the sign of the Orpheus myth. Recall the basic outline of the myth as Ovid recounts it.[319] The myth involves three

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[319] Rilke had received a Latin-French edition of the Metamorphoses from Baladine Klossowska for Christmas 1920, and a reproduction of Giovanni Battista Cima da Concegliano's drawing of a scene from the Orpheus myth shortly before February 1922. Cf. Manfred Engel 2013, 406; Mark-Georg Dehrmann (2016).

central scenes, to which the Western visual imaginary has also returned again and again: Orpheus' fateful backwards glance at Eurydice (*Metamorphoses* 10.1-85), Orpheus singing to animals and trees (10.86-105), and Orpheus' death at the hands of the raging maenads (11.1-66), whose advances the mourning singer had refused. Two of these three scenes are obviously alluded to in the first and last sonnets of Part I, respectively: the first sonnet alludes to Orpheus signing to animals and trees; the last sonnet of Part I alludes to the death of Orpheus.

But the entire episode of Eurydice's death, Orpheus' descent to the underworld, and his fateful turn is conspicuously absent from the *Sonnets*, Part I. Do we have to wait for *Sonnets*, Part II to hear Rilke's take on it, for instance sonnet II.13? We do not. Looking back—but only looking back!—we realize that Rilke had already alluded to it in the *Elegies*.[320] Here is the ending of the eighth:

> Wer hat uns also *umgedreht*, daß wir,
>
> was wir auch tun, in jener Haltung sind
>
> von einem, welcher fortgeht? Wie er auf
>
> dem letzten Hügel, der ihm ganz sein Tal
>
> noch einmal zeigt, *sich wendet*, anhält, weilt –,
>
> so leben wir und nehmen immer Abschied.[321]
>
> (DE8.70-5, my emphases)

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[320] That the subtlety is deliberate is also suggested by the fact that Rilke removed the Counter-Strophes (*Gegenstrophen*), which were originally placed at the center of the *Elegies*, and which do mention Eurydice explicitly, to replace them with what is now the Fifth elegy, which does not.

[321] "Who has turned us around like this, so that / no matter what we do, we are in the posture / of someone going away? Just as, upon / the farthest hill, which shows him his whole valley / one last time, he turns, stops, lingers—, / so we live here, forever taking leave."

Coming from the *Sonnets*, in the order of composition, it is strikingly obvious that the structuring mythem at the end of the eighth is the Orpheus myth, specifically the (in more than one sense) pivotal scene of Orpheus turning around to see Eurydice, immediately prompting their parting (*Abschied*, l.75), so conspicuously absent from the first part of the *Sonnets*.[322] Once we see it there, we see it also in the opening of the Ninth.

> Aber dieses
>
> einmal gewesen zu sein, wenn auch nur einmal:
>
> irdisch gewesen zu sein, scheint nicht widerrufbar. (9.15-17)[323]

"Irrevocable" (*nicht widerrufbar*) is homophonous with irretrievable (*nicht wiederrufbar*). Eurydice's existence cannot be undone after she lived on this earth once (*einmal*), nor can she be called back. *Scheinen*, Heidegger reminds us, can be read as seems (*videtur*) or shines (*lucet*).[324] Both possibilities are operative in the Ninth. Our earthly existence seems both irrevocable and, once gone, irretrievable; but in its irrevocable, irretrievable singularity it also shines. Below, we look at the Ninth in more detail. Such light, casting the world in renewed meaningfulness, remains lost in the *Elegies* but yearned for, in keeping with their genre conventions. The same holds for the summers invoked in the opening of the Seventh, the first post-war elegy. Composed immediately after *Sonnets,* Part I, it shares with the *Sonnets*

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[322] Of course, once we see it, the centrality of animals in the Eighth also appear in a new light to us. It is a testament to the rigidity of our habit of reading *Sonnets* and *Elegies* separately that, as far as I am aware, this connection had gone unnoticed for decades. Having come to my own conclusions, I discovered afterwards that Charlie Louth, too, wonders in passing whether we may see Orpheus here (2020, 427). But he does not see how the Orphic myth, so apparent when looking back from the *Sonnets*, provides the post-war elegies with a unity they would otherwise seem to lack.

[323] "But to have been / this once, completely, even if only once: / to have been at earthly seems irrevocable."

[324] In his debate with Emil Staiger on Mörike's *To a Lamp* (GA13.93f).

the semantics of increase.[325] Orpheus' descent to the underworld, finally, also stands behind the journey through the Landscape of Laments in the Tenth elegy, as Judith Ryan has pointed out.[326]

What does it mean for *Elegies* and *Sonnets* to unite under the sign of Orpheus? The Orpheus myth is about mourning. On the reading I am pursuing, Rilke's late cycles exemplarily enact a work of mourning. They teach us to *look back well*. This might seem paradoxical. Is the Orpheus myth not warning us *not* to look back? That would indeed be the position of the mourning subject of the *Elegies*—hence the tone at DE8.70-5, half frustrated and half resigned. But, looking back from the *Sonnets*, a different reading of the myth is possible. From the *Sonnets'* point of view, the task is not *not* to look back, but rather to look back well: to let new song and life spring from such mourning, to look back without turning into a pillar of salt.[327] And, indeed, on a hermeneutic and on a formal level, the two cycles come alive insofar as they reciprocally look at each other in highly versatile play, which the reader is invited to trace.

Consider the de-stabilization of the reading order again. Initially, we read *Elegies* before *Sonnets*. Once we get to the *Sonnets*, we quickly recognize that what is achieved there is just what was longed for in the post-war elegies, for example, the summers of the Seventh. The Seventh, that is, looks both back (in the order of composition) and forward (in the reading order) to the *Sonnets*. The split between Parts I & II prompts us to re-read elegies Seven to Ten with the *Sonnets* again. Looking back at the

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[325] For instance, *aufhebt* and *steigende* (l.3), "wirft in die … Himmel," (l.5), *Auflaut* and *steigernde* again (l.12), "dann die Stufen hinan" (l.14). Compare this with the opening couplet of Sonnet I.1: "A tree arose! O pure transcendence! O Orpheus sings! O high tree in the ear!" (*Da stieg ein Baum. O reine Übersteigung! /O Orpheus singt! O hoher Baum im Ohr!*).

[326] She goes so far as to suggest that the Orpheus myth is present even in the first, via the related myth of Linos, and second elegy, because of the verb *nachschau* at l.78 (2004, 173). Of course, the Orphic myth is never far from elegiac poetry, and Rilke had dealt with the myth in an earlier poem also ("Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes" from the *Neue Gedichte* of 1907). But only after the war and overcoming much psychological difficulties did Rilke achieve the breakthrough, and by working on the Orphic myth explicitly. If we want to see references to the myth also in the pre-war elegies, I suggest these would have to be taken further instance of Menardian self-translation.

[327] Gen 19:26, the contrasting Biblical myth.

Elegies from *Sonnets,* Part I, we now recognize that Orphic looking back was part of the poems' work all along, in elegies Eight to Ten. In the next section, we will see how this dynamic interplay of echo and anticipation, looking forward and looking backward—to the point almost of blurring these categories—recurs, formally, at multiple scales: between the two cycles, but also between poems within the two cycles, and even at the level of individual poems. At several scales, I will argue, the poems' play enacts the very relation to time, and thus to finitude, which the next section will show the cycles as a whole seek to convey.

Formal integration. Considering the two cycles' unity further, we see that their interplay does not remain limited to hermeneutic questions of reading order either. Their poetics cross-pollinate, showing the cycles to be formally integrated. Take the very fact that the *Elegies* are a cycle at all. Cycles of elegies are almost unprecedented in the German tradition.[328] The sonnet by contrast is a paradigm case of a form that has been employed to form cycles, so-called crowns of sonnets. In a proper crown, the final line of each sonnet becomes the opening line of the subsequent sonnet. As shown, some echo of that principle obtains for the post-war elegies: the notion of the open links the end of the Seventh to the beginning of the Eighth, Orpheus' turn links the end of the Eighth to the opening of the Ninth, and the joyful heart at the end of the Ninth we find also at the opening of the Tenth. Thus, we are able to see the *Elegies'* cyclicality also as an anticipation (in the reading order) or echo (in the order of composition) of the *Sonnets.*

The *Sonnets*, on the other hand, are kept to a significant extent in dactylic meter. Traditionally, elegies were kept in dactylic meter exclusively, alternating dactylic hexameters and pentameters.[329] Dactylic sonnets, by contrast, are extremely unusual, certainly in the German tradition. Aside from a

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[328] Goethe's *Roman Elegies* would be worth examining under this aspect in particular as the only potential precedent.

[329] This is rarely remarked upon. Engel sees that there might be a connection to the *Elegies* here, but he does not pursue the thought further (Engel 2013, 422).

handful of experiments during the Baroque and one, unpublished sonnet by the young Hugo von Hofmannsthal—aptly titled "music of the future" (*Zukunftsmusik*)—there simply are no German dactylic sonnets, especially not after A. W. Schlegel and his allies won the so-called sonnet wars around 1800 and canonized the form in the German language.[330]

Rilke's metrical experiments in the sonnets are truly staggering. First introduced in sonnet I.6, from I.17 onwards, most are kept in predominantly dactylic meter; some even include anapests (I.20, I.23). Except the Eighth, the post-war elegies are dactylic, too. When Rilke begins Part II of the *Sonnets*, on February 15, he has fully immersed himself in its rhythm. He then begins to experiment with increasing line-lengths, going to the extremes not just of pentameters, but even hexameters and, at least once, a heptameter (II.17). Mixing anapestic and dactylic lines of similar length in II.19 can be said to mark the peak of his push against the limits of the form. From there, Rilke slowly descends towards more moderate meters again, on a gradual curve: from mixed hexameters and pentameters (II.20-1, 24), via dactylic pentameter (II.22-23), to mixed pentameters and tetrameters (II.25), to chiefly tetrameters and trimeters, briefly (II.26, 27), before he ends the cycle on a pair of pentametric sonnets: one dactylic (II.28) and, the final one, trochaic (II.29). The form has been stretched, but not, ultimately, exploded.

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[330] I claim this having gone through the over 900 German sonnets collected by Jörg-Ulrich Fechner (1969). In passing, I note that the formal cross-pollination between elegy and sonnet further corroborates the point made above that Rilke was no reactionary: sonnet and cycle are distinctly modern inventions, associated with such quintessentially modern figures as Petrarch and Shakespeare, while elegy is an ancient genre. (It can hardly surprise us that Hölderlin, by contrast, never wrote any sonnets.) The fact that Rilke actualizes the ancient genre of elegy in a distinctly modern key, and then continues with the quintessentially modern form of the sonnet clearly sets him apart, formally and before any question of content, from any kind of anti-modern reaction. On the history of the cycle form see Michael-Claus Ort ([1958] 2001, 1113f.), on the history of the sonnet in the German tradition see Thomas Borgstedt (2009), Fechner (1969), and Hans-Jürgen Schlütter, Raimund Borgmeier, and Heinz Wittschier (2017).

In the next section, I will suggest an interpretation of what these formal features mean in context, specifically what temporalities (or: ways of being in time) they encode, how those relate to human finitude and mourning. For now, I note in summary that *Elegies* and *Sonnets* are mourning poetry in virtue of their genre (*Elegies*) and dedication (both cycles) already, overlapping in themes, motifs, imagery. They were completed at the same historical moment when the need for collectively processing loss was intensely felt. Rilke inscribed this fact of their syngenesis into the *Sonnets* when he presented them in two parts. This prompts a text-immanent critique to hold the reading order against the order of composition, revealing how both cycles stand under the sign of Orpheus myth: the *Elegies* include just the scene that was missing from *Sonnets*, Part I. This corroborates our reading of certain, unusual formal features of each cycle, which are, however, strongly associated with the poetic of the other—cyclicality and dactylic meter, respectively—as a kind of formal interlinking. All this corroborates Rilke's own considered judgment that the two cycles work together, and we proceed further on this assumption.

3. Two Temporalities

So far, I argued that Rilke intends his late poetry to respond to the cumulated historical crises of his day, that this response involves both *Elegies* and *Sonnets*, as the two cycles ought to be read together, and finally, that it involves the concept of mourning. Mourning is what the Orpheus myth is about, which unites the cycles. Their dedications and the very genre of elegy all point in this direction, too, as do Rilke's remarks in his war-time letters.

Mourning can be considered a whole constituted by parts, a process made up of distinct moments. It can also be considered as itself a part of a larger whole, such as a form of life. My suggestion will be that the *Elegies* as a whole perform a work of mourning, enabling the practical intelligibility of the concept of mourning by instantiating it in an exemplary way, with individual poems of the cycle

reflecting on particular difficulties or aspects of that work. I will argue that this encompasses both personal and structural mourning. The *Sonnets*, on the other hand, initiate into a form of life of which mourning is a recurring part. I will call it by its Rilkean name of being earthly (*irdisch sein*, DE9.17).

What I mean by "initiation into a form of life" is that poetry, through the inextricable working of its form and content, produces effects in the reader that help to instill habits of mind, feeling, perception, attention, spatiotemporal and existential orientations. They disclose realities, of an inner or outer kind, insofar as that distinction applies, and attune us to values. These are conceptually articulated, and we can reconstruct those conceptual contents through careful description of the poetics of *Elegie* and *Sonnets*. In this chapter, I will at various turns analyze, for example, their use of meter, pace, sound-play (rhyme, assonance), enjambment, rhetorical tropes (metaphor and metonymy, injunction and rhetorical question), grammatical features (prefixes, pronominal deixis), focalization, plots, archetype, cyclicality, and so on, always considered against the poems' historical semantics and context.

Ultimately, I want to understand the concept of mourning Rilke's late poetry enables as a translation of another, older concept of mourning, enabled by older poetic forms, particularly traditional elegy, and Rilke's work on poetic form as translational in shape. This will be the work of the final section. First, I want to reconstruct Rilke's concept of mourning on its own terms. In my view, criticism cannot, by itself, make concepts practically intelligible, or initiate into forms of life—not quite the way poetry can, at least. It can aid the reader in seeing how the poetry does it, showing the poetry's lasting appeal.

Motion expressing temporality. If the concept of mourning plays any part in our lives, it is because we are finite beings who by necessity affectively attach to other finite beings, and such finitude concerns our own and others' being in time: no time, no change, no loss, no need for mourning. A reconstruction of Rilke's concept of mourning may thus begin with the question: what temporalities,

what ways of being in time, do *Elegies* and *Sonnets* jointly initiate into?

Temporalities readily find expression in the realm of motion, which, for poetry, means: the ways in which poems invite the reader to speed up and slow down, to linger and move on, its rhythms, and how it instills a sense of agility or paralysis. I now want to look at one form-element—common to both *Elegies* and *Sonnets*, though in slightly different ways—as conveying motions that, in turn, express temporalities into which the cycles as a whole initiate. This element is their very cyclicality, the fact that they are cycles of poetry (*Gedichtszyklen*). For the *Elegies* in particular, this fact is all the more significant in virtue of being almost unprecedented.

What defines a poetry cycle *qua* cycle? Claus-Michael Ort has proposed a convincing account of cyclicality as placed between two constitutive bounds.[331] On the one hand, a cycle is marked off from a poetry collection. In a collection, the poems might be connected by themes, motives, genesis, but their sequential ordering itself is either not at all or only minimally significant. The poems of a cycle, by contrast, form a unit in their sequential order—but they also each retain an independence that marks off the cycle from the single text with sub-parts. The cycle-form as such constitutively hovers between the limits of the poetry collection and the single text, such that the sequential order of the poems is semantically load-bearing, but not to the extreme that the poems lose their status as individual units. This opens up room for poets to modify that tension, tightening or loosening it.

My suggestion will be to read the two dimensions—sequential, horizontal relations of anticipation and succession and vertical resting-in-themselves—as formally encoding two temporalities: time passing and timelessness, or transience and eternity, respectively. Cyclicality is not the only form-element that encodes these temporalities. Once we see it there, we will see it on the level of individual poems also, expressed through other formal features. But this is where I start, because it allows us to also understand the difference between *Elegies* and *Sonnets* better. Both qualify as cycles in the above

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[331] Ort, 1108-9.

sense, and the tension between the two temporalities encoded in this cyclicality, we will see, is constitutive for both. Yet this constitutive tension carries different valences in each case. It is a serenely affirmed irresolvability in the *Sonnets*, but, until the very end, an anxious and hesitant irresolution in the *Elegies*, poetically reflecting the readiness to mourn ever anew in the *Sonnets*, and the precariousness of the mourning process enacted in the *Elegies*.

Valences of cyclicality. Ort's formal principles are operative in the *Sonnets* on the level of the cycle as a whole. That some sonnets stand in relation of anticipation and succession becomes clear at even a fast first reading. For example: II.1 ends with the notion of a "Blatt" (leaf/page, cf. foliage/folio); II.2 starts with that notion and ends with a mirror; II.3 starts with a mirror. II.6-8 successively elaborate on the question of praise. Some sonnets correspond at a distance: I.10 asks about a star constellation called "the Rider" (mentioned also at DE10.91), and sonnet I.20 provides the image. Each sonnet equally strikes us as also resting in itself, complete in its crystalline monadicity. They exist both on a horizontal axis in relations of before and after, as well as in static simultaneity. The effect of this is two-fold. On the one hand, in combination with their brevity, their galloping dactyls, the pleasing hyper-density of rhyme and assonance, the sequential connectors between sonnets carry the reader along on a swift current forward. On the other, in their compactness and density, they invite the reader to linger.

The same dynamics of forward motion and rest are operative at the level of individual sonnets, moreover. We can note a horizontal versatility and suppleness in terms of meter (trochaic, iambic initially, but as the cycle progresses increasingly also dactylic and occasional anapests), line-lengths (reaching the extremes of dactylic hexameters and heptameters), and enjambments that sometimes carry sentences even over stanza breaks, which for the German sonnet form is unprecedented. The heavy reliance on rhyme, assonance, and alliteration further accelerates the horizontal, forward flow of the verses. But this sheer boundless, speedy flow contrasts with an utter vertical rigidity: without

exception, the fifty five sonnets are kept in the classical, Petrarchan form of two quartets and two tercets, with a very limited number of rhyme schemes, and—which is very difficult to do in German—perfect numerical balance *and* alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes in each sonnet.[332] In this way, both on the level of the cycle and within individual poems, there is a pronounced formal tension between fast, horizontal motion and rigid, vertical rest.

It would be a mistake to think that the *Sonnets* ask us to choose between rest and motion or leave them in need of sublation into a higher unity. The *Sonnets* initiate into a life-form that rests in moving and moves in resting. This simultaneity of change and sameness, or: time and timelessness, is just where the very final lines of the cycle leave us:

zu der stillen Erde sag: Ich rinne.

Zu dem raschen Wasser sprich: Ich bin. (II.29.13-4)[333]

Each line ends with a full stop, rests in itself; chiastically, they also look forward and backward at each other, undecidable between motion (quick-flowing water) and rest (the still earth). From a philosophical point, this might seem unsatisfying, as an undialectical tension that refuses resolution. But when considering the poetry as an aesthetic action, the determinate indeterminacy or undecidability between these two opposites must not be seen as a lack, mistake, or vagueness.[334] Both motion and rest are now serenely affirmed. That simply *is* the position the poetry takes. Contrast it with these lines from the ending of the Second Elegy.

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[332] What few exceptions there are, are clearly deliberate: sonnets I.20, II.4, II.15 are kept in purely masculine rhyme, I.24 in only feminine rhymes.

[333] "tell the silent earth: I'm flowing. / To the flashing water say: I am."

[334] See Florian Klinger (2024) for an action-theoretical account of the aesthetic and the centrality of just such indeterminacy to such an account.

Fänden auch wir ein reines, verhaltenes, schmales

Menschliches, einen unseren Streifen Fruchtlands

zwischen Strom und Gestein. (74-6)[335]

To the subject of the *Elegies*, at this point, the possibility of human life seems infinitely precarious, possible only on the thinnest stripe of fertile borderland beset, on opposite sides, by stream (motion) and rock (rest), whose menacing, crunching powers are sonically underlined by the cluster of sh/shtr/sht-sounds.

The Third and Fourth elegy expand on either danger, which are gendered in Rilke's *Elegies*: the image of the rushing current (*Strom*) and riverbeds is consistently associated with mothers, rocks (*Gestein*) and mountain ranges with fathers.[336] The Third with its metaphorics of floods, rivers, and ravines focuses on the figure of the mother and is kept in uninterrupted dactylic flow; the Fourth, iambic and kept in short staccato sentences, thematizes paralysis and father figures. A similar, formal contrast obtains between the Eight, in short, iambic phrases, and the Seventh and Ninth.[337] In the *Elegies*, the two temporalities do not come together in rhythmic balance and simultaneity; one or the other predominates in each elegy. They all end aporetically, too.[338] They do not invite us to rest with individual poems, because they refuse a sense of closure or completion; but neither do they leave us with a sense of direction or forward impetus. We are left suspended between motion and rest. It will take the entire cycle to work through these multi-valence tensions and opposites.

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[335] "If only we too could discover a pure, contained, / human place, our own strip of fruit-bearing soil / between river and rock."

[336] For instance, DE3.58, 70-4, DE6.39, DE10.57-8.

[337] To many the Eight has seemed out of place, between the Seventh and Ninth. This impression is dispelled when considering how the Orpheus myth structures the post-war elegies.

[338] With the exception of the Tenth, perhaps, as discussed below. The happy ending of the Fifth is clearly presented as a hypothetical.

Nature and history. The meaning of these formal features—indeed, whether they have any meaning at all—cannot be read off those features in isolation. In the *Sonnets*, they are clearly semantically charged to encode temporalities, also because, at the level of content, the poems recurrently thematize a temporal model for such motion-in-rest: natural cyclicality (of birth and death, growth and decay, of the seasons).[339] In the cycles of nature, temporal forward motion, the passing of time and the transience of all in time, comes together with temporal repetition, or timelessness, in a non-contradictory way.

This could easily give the impression that Rilke aims at a re-enchantment of nature in the sense also of an exit from history, either "back to" natural innocence or forward to some kind of higher, second nature, waiting at the end of history. Such projects have a long pedigree in German thought and literature. Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education* postulate a historical transition from first nature to freedom to a second nature that includes freedom within it, where art both helps humanity to move towards that ideal and realizes it in a prefigurative way; his essay on *Naive and Sentimental Poetry* links that possibility with the poetic form of the utopian idyll, against its reactionary, first-nature counterpart, the pastoral idyll.[340] Kleist, famously, has one of his characters offer the thought that the "last chapter of history" will see us eat from the Tree of Knowledge a second time to "revert to a state of innocence.[341]" Nietzsche's eternal return has been read in that vein, for example by Karl Löwith, who himself avidly sought for an exit from historical consciousness.[342] Even Walter Benjamin's heterodox, theologically-inflected historical materialism posits a messianic horizon to history in the form of revolutionary moments where the "empty and homogenous" time of the moderns re-acquires the ontological fullness of the Medieval mystic's *nunc stans* and all of history becomes available again to

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[339] For example, I.12, I.23, I.14, I.19, I.21, II.12, II.13, II.14, II.17, II.25.
[340] Friedrich Schiller, *Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung*, 66f. That this essay deals with question in the philosophy of history, has been shown by Peter Szondi in a canonical essay (1972).
[341] Heinrich von Kleist, *Über das Marionettentheater*, 5-15.
[342] Karl Löwith ([1939] 1995, 59-60).

humanity, without loss.[343]

Rilke seems to me to be up to something markedly different. There is no impulse to move outside of modernity and, since being modern is essentially a form of historical consciousness, to move beyond history—wherever that would be. This holds true on the level of content. The final elegy takes its readers on a journey past modern city life, but what we find outside the City of Sufferings are only ruins.[344] The *Sonnets*, for all their valorization of nature, do not avert their gaze from modernity's conundrums: I.18, I.24, II.10 deal with industrialization, I.19 and II.23 with accelerating time, the former also with dynamics of de- and re-sacralization; II.9 reads as if Rilke had read Foucault on modern regimes of criminal justice; II.19 deals with banking, and II.22 with light pollution, a novel phenomenon then—to mention just the obvious examples.

More decisively yet, it holds true formally. Neither *Elegies* nor *Sonnets* offer idylls, pastoral or otherwise. Elegy is an ancient genre, but in Rilke's double-cycle the form's leans on support from the quintessentially modern sonnet form. This alone shows us that Rilke is up to something very different from, say, Hölderlin, who never wrote a sonnet but in his late hymns sought to bring Biblical narratives into Pindaric shape. All the philosophical-literary grand narratives of history just mentioned retain a distinctly post-Christian shape, and many participate, in one form or other, in Romantic programs of art as ersatz religion. In the next section, I will show that Rilke was not only highly conscious of the historical and philosophical stakes in turning to the sonnet form, but also draw out what being earthly meant to him, especially as regards the place of mourning in an earthly life, in a post-Babelian, irreducibly plural world, and in contradistinction to Romantic, post-Christian forms of faith in art.[345]

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[343] "Freilich fällt erst der erlösten Menschheit ihre Vergangenheit vollauf zu" (1940, iii). Benjamin's case, admittedly, is the most complicated and would reward further exegesis.

[344] More on the Tenth Elegy below.

[345] I note in passing that, as in his philosophy of history, so in his theory of translation, Benjamin remains committed to a religious horizon, however creatively transformed, that aims at an overcoming of Babelian pluralism (Benjamin [1923] 1972, 14f).

4. Being Earthly

This section elucidates what being earthly, as the way of life into which the *Sonnets* initiate, means for Rilke. I contrast it with the standard reading that sees Rilke's thoughts on the nexus of poetry, human finitude, and mourning as culminating in the Ninth, particularly its Invisibilization Doctrine, outlined in the fourth stanza, and often portrayed, or even simply quoted, as Rilke's final word on these matters.[346]

According to this standard reading, both human beings and things are by nature transient (*Dinge… vergänglich*, l.63), but poetry can rescue these transient things such that in our "invisible hearts" (l.65) they are invisibly resurrected (l.66-9). This resurrection becomes the human, and particularly the poets', most urgent task. This reading stresses the proximity between the Ninth and the Seventh—based on topic, tone, and primarily dactylic-trochaic meter—, where it is said that "nowhere, beloved, will there be world, but inside us" (l.50), in the invisible realm of our hearts, to which poetry holds the key. Rilke would then participate in a long tradition of placing nature and art, transience and eternity, mourned and mourner, feminine-coded love-object (Eurydice) and masculine-coded poet-subject (Orpheus) in stark opposition. The dichotomies line up, and abyss between them, and from that very gap springs poetry, seeking to bridge it while also presupposing it.[347]

I claim that this is at most the standpoint of the *Elegies*, whose subject is a world-withdrawn subject in mourning. The *Sonnets* incorporate it as a moment but also go beyond it. Where the *Elegies* merely

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[346] This reading is rarely explicitly argued and more often just assumed as "common knowledge," but Charles Taylor (2024, 222f), precisely because he does not approach the poetry as poetry, provides an exceptionally clear, stripped-down statement of it.

[347] Part of what is at stake here, is the coherence of the post-war elegies. If the *Elegies* were to culminate in the Seventh and Ninth, that would leave the iambic Eight with its apparently philosophical concerns oddly placed. The Tenth would appear as merely an epilogue, adding nothing of philosophical or poetic substance to the Ninth. But we have already seen how, coming from the *Sonnets*, Seven to Ten are connected by such notions as the open, the Orpheus myth (particularly the missing scene from Sonnets, Part I), and the joyful heart. In this section, I continue building the case for the unity of the *Elegies* by drawing out more precisely the complementarity with the *Sonnets*, particularly the cycles' respective views on mourning.

assert the singularity of human life and performatively undercut it, the *Sonnets* show how singularity arises from the irreducible, qualitative (and not just numerical) plurality of human lives on earth, individuals connected through shared mortality. Shared mortality puts mourner and mourned on the same plane, and from this recognition spring both practices of mourning and a reconciliation to our own finitude. Life as the *Sonnets* teach it is ready ever to mourn anew, but also always ready to return to life at the end of mourning, to the world in its meaningful exteriority. Contrary to what is said in the Seventh, *there very much is world outside us*. In contrast to the *Elegies* generally, this exteriority may further be described as non-monumental, eternal only in cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. The *Sonnets*, in joyful affirmation, except neither themselves, nor their creator or readers from those cycles.[348]

World outside us. As a first indication consider the following. From early on it was clear that the *Elegies* would lead to the question of praise. Its opening lines, like the first two elegies, date back to February 1912.

> DASS ich dereinst, an dem Ausgang der grimmigen Einsicht,
>
> Jubel und Ruhm aufsinge zustimmenden Engeln. (1-2)[349]

Just a few days later, in a letter from March 5, 1912, Rilke discusses the notion of "praise" (*Ruhm*, l.2), in a rare moment of philosophico-historical speculation, which is worth quoting at length:

> Back then [in the 16th century] began perhaps, what we already see so strangely completed around us, the recoil of a world so overfilled on the outside into interiority. You will understand what I

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[348] The old distinction between *Elegies* as lamenting (*klagen*) and *Sonnets* as praising (*rühmen*) does not quite capture it then, on my reading. Both cycles know of lament and praise but differently.
[349] "That emerging at last from the violent insight / I sing out jubilation and praise to assenting angels."

mean: in the 16th century, inner experiences had outwardly grown to such glory (*Herrlichkeit*), in the visible realm, that further increase became impossible. Love and longing, revenge and hatred constantly found immediate, shining realities, which expressed and represented them outwardly, and immediately surpassed them.

This glorious plenitude of the outer world and its capacity to provide concrete equivalents for inner realities was lost at some point, and Rilke dates this loss roughly to the time of Torquato Tasso in the 16th century.

> … and this inflection (*Umschlag*) somehow started with Tasso and destroyed him. … You see, Petrarch could still be crowned on the Capitol Hill with the laurel—if the crowning of Tasso had happened [Tasso died a few days before he was supposed to be crowned poet laureate, D.K.], it would have caused him unspeakable pain, for already then there was no outer equivalent to glory (*Ruhm*).

The details of Rilke's speculative sketch are not the question here. That modernity has meant a loss of the thing-character of the world is a thought common to many thinkers, from Marx to Arendt. As we have seen, the metaphorics of ruins, of sculptures taken off their pedestals, continue in Rilke's thought during and after the war. In the context of post-war destructions, they have their plausibility even, if the larger narrative about modernity, ultimately, were not tenable in all detail.

Two points are important here for us. First, withdrawal into the interior, which Rilke paints on a large historical canvas, is presented as a problem. It is a lamentable state. In the rest of the letter, Rilke appears both quietly resigned to this state, while also holding out some hope for its potential reversal. Referring to a picture which his correspondent had sent him, he concludes: "Your carnival picture

somewhat contradicts what I have been saying: as if the outer could after all be brought to level of strength of the inner if one tries at the right moment." There is an element of playful politeness towards his interlocutor here. After the war, the question of whether outer realities would forever remain ruins had taken on a new urgency and an uncanny literalness.

Secondly, the world in which outer reality was still ontologically full is associated specifically with Petrarch. What poetic form do we associate with Petrarch more than with anyone? The sonnet. What form did Rilke repeatedly turn to in subsequent years, as a translator, when his own writing block was at its most intense? The sonnet. In 1908, he had already translated the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* by Elisabeth Barren-Browning.[350] The *Sonnets of Louise Labé* appeared in 1917, and all throughout the war-years Rilke translated from Michelangelo's sonnets. The arrival of the *Sonnets to Orpheus* in February 1922 had thus long been prepared. In light of the 1912 letter, it seems plausible that this long-standing attention to the sonnet form was motivated by a deeply felt intuition that this quintessentially modern form, properly reworked, would be able to answer the modern sense of a loss of glorious, praiseworthy outer realities, which *Malte* and the *Elegies* lament. Can the *Sonnets* be shown to do this and if so, how?

Shared mortality. I will refer to the form of life Rilke's *Sonnets* initiate into as being earthly (*irdisch sein*). As the Ninth tells it, having been earthly, if only once, "seems irrevocable" (*scheint nicht widerrufbar,* l.17). I have argued this could equally be read as "shines in its irretrievability." The focus appears to be on the singularity of each mortal life. But the *Elegies* also speak of the dead as nameless (1.74), and in the Ninth it is, in fact, not just the poet who appears "nameless" (l.74): we are said to be singular, only "once" (*einmal*, ll.13-6), a full six-times in a row, with the "one" (*ein*) in "once"(*einmal*) italicized each time by Rilke—as if to hammer home the point that generic, unnamed one-ness is abstract, infinitely repeatable and can, in fact, be re-called, is re-vocable if, moving from page to sound, eye to

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[350] Despite what the title suggests, these were originally written in English. Barren-Browning presented them as translations to hide autobiographical allusions.

ear, we hear the homophony of *widerrufbar* and *wiederrufbar*.

Ein mal

jedes, nur *ein*mal. *Ein*mal und nicht mehr. Und wir auch

*ein*mal. Nie wieder. Aber dieses

*ein*mal gewesen zu sein, wenn auch nur *ein*mal:

irdisch gewesen zu sein, scheint nicht widerrufbar. (9.13-6)[351]

By contrast, the *Sonnets* mourn a singular person who *is* named—precisely once, in the dedication, as the young dancer Vera Oukama Knoop. Eurydice, a mythical stand-in for Vera and all the mourned dead, admittedly is a somewhat more generic figure, but she, too, is named, and only once, in the entire cycle, in sonnet II.13. Rilke himself thought of it, in the diction of his day, as the "most valid" poem in the *Sonnets*.[352] We will turn to it in a moment. Note for now that, already at the level of names, the *Elegies* both assert our singularity and performatively undercut it, while in the *Sonnets* the turn to a concrete individual person illuminates the general concept of an earthly, Eurydicean life.

The second important point is that the *Sonnets*, Part II, put mourner and mourned, Orpheus and Eurydice on the same plane. In this they go against a basic conceit of poetry that we may call Romantic in the broad sense that connects Petrarch, with Schlegel and Hollywood: the premise of a fundamental gap between mourning poet-subject and mourned love-object, from which springs yearning and poetry. The tendency there is to portray poetry, or art in general, as a realm of timelessness, such that the mourned, though part of transient nature, by virtue of the poet's powers, are resurrected in art for eternity, often with the further implication that the poet, as the creator of the immortalizing art piece,

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[351] "Once for each thing. Just once; no more. And we too, / just once. And never again. But to have been / this once, completely, even if only once: / to have been earthly seems beyond undoing."

[352] Rilke to Katharina Kippenberg, cited in Michael Woll (2016, 210).

too, partakes in its immortality, and so do the readers.[353] Such poetry upholds a number of dualisms: between mourner and mourned, poet-subject and love-object, nature and art, mortal and immortal existence, life and death. Its pathos feeds off the infinite tension between those dualisms.

The Ninth very much belongs to this paradigm. It is shot through with post-Christian and, even in a narrower sense, Romantic tropes: the wanderer returning from the mountains with a blue flower as an image of the poet (ll.29-31), the idea that we can be the saviors of the things of this earth (*ein Rettendes*, l.65), that they can be "resurrected in us" (*in uns erstehen*, l.79) and the allusion to John 14:19 at the very end: "See, I live" (*Siehe, ich lebe*, l.79), figuring the poet as Christ. Although we humans are *said* to be as transient as the things we ought to save, the intertextual echoes performatively counteract the statement. An invisible, interior realm is posited as the only locus of "infinite" (l.66), eternal existence for the things of this world. The merely stated intention to bridge the above-mentioned dualisms works, tacitly, to reinforce them, as the poem's basic premise.

In the *Sonnets*, Part II, these dualisms are not even the starting point anymore; they are not to be come overcome, because they have already been overcome.[354] Here is sonnet II.13:

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[353] A good comparison, also in the form of an Eurydice sonnet, is A. W. Schlegel's "Geliebte Spuren" (Schlegel 1846, 133).

[354] Sonnet I.26 is already a step beyond the Romantic dualisms, in that it now figures Orpheus in the position of the lost individual to be mourned for by the poem, not Eurydice. But the reversal leaves the basic dualisms intact. Michael Dehrmann has pointed out that Ovid's telling of the myth provides a present tense frame around a past tense core and how this contrast of tenses is preserved I.26 (320f). The first and final line are kept in present tense, while the myth itself is told in the past tense, thereby providing a frame around it and, in virtue of its position at the end of part one, I.26 as a whole also provides a frame to the first part of the cycle as a whole, together with I.1, the only other poem in the first part to allude directly to the Orpheus myth. Orpheus' death, read as a sacrifice, is said to remain effective even today (l.14), but the switch in tenses creates rather a spectatorial distance between poet-subject and reader, on the one hand, and the mourned for mythical singer, on the other. The subject, present now, addresses itself to the past singer; his example is conjured up for the present reader to behold. Death becomes the occasion for poetry; art is said to be immune to destruction (ll.3-6).

Sei allem Abschied voran, als wäre er hinter

dir, wie der Winter, der eben geht.

Denn unter Wintern ist einer so endlos Winter,

daß, überwinternd, dein Herz überhaupt übersteht.

Sei immer tot in Eurydike –, singender steige,

preisender steige zurück in den reinen Bezug.

Hier, unter Schwindenden, sei, im Reiche der Neige,

sei ein klingendes Glas, das sich im Klang schon zerschlug.

Sei – und wisse zugleich des Nicht-Seins Bedingung,

den unendlichen Grund deiner innigen Schwingung,

daß du sie völlig vollziehst dieses einzige Mal.

Zu dem gebrauchten sowohl, wie zum dumpfen und stummen

Vorrat der vollen Natur, den unsäglichen Summen,

zähle dich jubelnd hinzu und vernichte die Zahl.[355]

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[355] Be ahead of all parting, as though it already were
behind you, like the winter that has just gone by.
For among these winters there is one so endlessly winter
that only by wintering through it will your heart survive.

Be forever dead in Eurydice—more gladly arise
into the seamless life proclaimed in your song.
Here, in the realm of decline, among momentary days,
be the crystal cup that shattered even as it rang.

Be—and yet know the great void where all things begin,
the infinite source of your own most intense vibration,
so that, this once, you may give it your perfect assent.

To all that is used-up, and to all the muffled and dumb
creatures in the world's full reserve, the unsayable sums,
joyfully add yourself, and cancel the count.

It is the only sonnet to mention Eurydice, so conspicuously absent from Part I; and it alludes to Orpheus' death (l.8, and especially ll.13-4). Poet and muse, Orpheus and Eurydice, mourner and mourned are co-present here, on one plane. And so are the readers. The poem is kept in the imperative mode; its injunctions form of poetic self-address and reader-address equally. Both are called now to be like Orpheus, and Orpheus is called to be "always dead in Eurydice"—but also to be "arising more singing-ly" (l.5). Orphic existence is understood here as joyously affirmed paradoxical form of being: ahead of winter (l.1), but also among winters (l.3), singing while broken (l.8), humming while mute (ll.12-13), rising while dead (ll.5-6). I want to read these as expressing in so many ways the same, joyously affirmed irresolvability of transience and eternity that we saw formally encoded on multiple levels in the previous section. In this particular sonnet II.13, they come together, for example, through the play of tense and pacing.

The first line is among Rilke's most quoted. At first, its meaning seems plain enough. Winter is a season of the heart, the time of mourning. We are called to be ahead of partings and winters, to have always already mourned, and treat each winter/parting as already past. On that reading, we would expect a verb in passive voice and past-tense in l.2: to be ahead of all parting as we are ahead of the winter, which has just "been left" behind. But we get an active present tense verb, and the grammatical subject is not us, but the winter. The adverbial qualifier "just" (*eben*, l.2) does the trick here. It sets us up to expect a past tense, because we are inclined to hear it temporally: the winter which (has been) left "just now." But then we get the present tense and the winter as subject. Suddenly, it seems possible to hear *eben* as indicating habitual action: the winter is just going, as it always goes, that is just (*eben*) what it does. Transience is made recurrent—having "been left" becomes "always leaving."

In the final lines of the second stanza, the same idea is expressed in the image of a glass that sounds although it is already broken (ll.7-8), where the clash of contradictory tenses underlines the paradoxical nature: "be" in the present tense, "already broke" in the past tense (l.8). Logically, there

would seem to be a contradiction here, but poetically, it is all resolved, sonically: though said to be broken, the glass *is* sounding in the dense, pleasing assonance of *kling-Klang, Glas-das*, and, slightly more muted, *zerschlug*.

Rhythm and pacing, too, convey the temporality in question. The first line hits the ground running: galloping dactyls have us storming forward (*voran*, l.1), reminiscent of Sixth's hero, constitutively always ahead of (*voran*) himself (DE6.18). But, as in the Sixth (more on which below), our perspective is immediately turned around: not looking forward-ahead, but what is behind us (*hinter,* l.1) comes into view: winter, which "just goes/leaves" (*eben geht*, l.2). Mörchen wants to read the "endless Winter" of l.3 as death and the entire first stanza as a call to Heideggerian *vorlaufende Entschlossenheit zum Tode,* beginning with the forward-storming first line.[356] But there is no more running here in the second and third line. *Eben*, which also means flat or smooth, slows us down and draws out the line in combination with the flat e-sound of "going" (*eben geht,* l.2). The line ends with a full stop.

The third line picks up the pace again—adagio after the first line's presto and the second's andante. We can hear "one" (*einer*, l.3) as referring to one of the winters, and endless winter, metaphorically, as death. Strictly speaking it just says "there is one" and could also be read to mean something like "there (some)one is" or "there any one would be." Being amongst winters, moving with the winters, we are in danger of ourselves becoming endlessly winter, of sinking into an endless night of mourning. This danger of going under (*unter*, l.3) amongst the winters of life and history, is met in the fourth line.

It picks up the speed of the first, offering a glorious finale the miniature symphony of the first stanza. Built around a threefold repetition of the prefix *über* (over, above, trans-)—*überwintern, überhaupt, übersteht*—it rings triumphantly.[357] A literal translation of *überwintern* would be hibernating, but that

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[356] Hermann Mörchen (1958, 297–99).

[357] It would be interesting here to explore how the *Elegies* strongly vertical spatial orientations, their tense articulation of High and Low, have been relaxed into a both/and of horizontality and verticality: under (*unter*) winters, vertically, we are also among them horizontally, over (*über*) the winters, we above them, vertically, and beyond them, horizontally (as in *über… hinaus*, also for example at I.5.11-14).

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would sound rather comical in English. We have to preserve the contrast with *unter* (l.3), the antonym of *über*. Amongst winters, we need to "over-winter," to be during-the-winter-above-the-winter. Then our heart (*Herz*) can endure (*übersteht*). *Überstehen* has a long history in Rilke. His requiem poem for Wolf Count of Kalckreuth (1909) ends with the oft quoted line "Who speaks of victory? To endure is all" (*Wer spricht von Siegen? Überstehn ist alles*). In the *Sonnets* the is no such resignation. *Überstehen* here is not mere endurance, but to "over-stand," to stand tall and above.

In their play of tense and pacing, the *Sonnets* seek to convey a joyous, affirmative stance towards the cycles of becoming and decaying, birth and death. It is a dance with the winters, who are ahead of us as much as we are ahead of them. To leave one behind, in the cycle of seasons, is to move towards the next—and then on to spring and summer again. Past becomes present and present past. This gives us an idea of what is meant by the cryptic injunction for Orphic mourners to "always be dead in Eurydice" (l.5). Mourners know themselves to be on the same plane as the mourned, sharing in the same mortality. Ephemeral song holds the dead in being, "for a few days" (I.5.8). It connects mourning poet and reader to the mourned dead. Without ascribing to them immortality or to us immortalizing powers, it is through mourning others that Orphic poetry reconciles to us our own mortality, knowing that, as we mourn, so too we shall be mourned; as we hold others in existence, so we shall be held in existence by others. There is an eternity to serial transience, at least in principle, but is not the stating eternity of Romantic art, but the endless recurrence of the cycles of earthly life projected forward and backward in time.

Material plurality. What remains to be seen now is how this life, shared between a plurality of singulars, remains earth-bound, in the sense of invested in the meaningfulness of concrete, material exteriority: world outside, rather than just inside us. An argument to the contrary would start from the centrality of sonic play to the *Sonnets*, which is unsurprising, of course, for a genre whose very etymology, from Latin *sonare*, ties it back to sound. Sound is usually invisible. Are the poetics of the

Sonnets then everywhere geared towards leaving the visible, material page behind, dissolving the letter into sound, breath, *pneuma*, spirit? Arguably, breath (*Atem*, II.1.1), through a series of metonymic substitutions, is linked across the cycle with vibration (*Schwingung*), song (*Gesang*), jubilation (*Jubel*), even existence itself ("Gesang ist Dasein," I.3.7). This makes it seem as if the *Sonnets* would share in the *Elegies*' Invisibilization Doctrine. Sonnet II.1 offers the strongest support. The last to be written, Rilke placed it at the opening of the second part, where it can claim a programmatic quality.

ATMEN, du unsichtbares Gedicht!
Immerfort um das eigne
Sein rein eingetauschter Weltraum. Gegengewicht,
in dem ich mich rhythmisch ereigne.

Einzige Welle, deren
allmähliches Meerich bin;
sparsamstes du von allen möglichen Meeren, –
Raumgewinn.

Wie viele von diesen Stellen der Räume waren schon
innen in mir. Manche Winde
sind wie mein Sohn.

Erkennst du mich, Luft, du, voll noch einst meiniger Orte?
Du, einmal glatte Rinde,
Rundung und Blatt meiner Worte.[358]

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[358] Breathing: you invisible poem! Complete
         interchange of our own
         essence with world-space. You counterweight
         in which I rhythmically happen.

Sonnet form almost melts into air here with Rilke's irregular line lengths and elliptic pronouncements. But the poem ends, II.2 starts, with a *Blatt*. Although it has become somewhat trite to point out, there can be no doubt that the double meaning of *Blatt* as both leaf and page (cf. folio and foliage) is operative: leaf more proximately, coming from "bark" in l.13, but page, too, since the question is precisely one of inscription (of breath into air), and then explicitly in the opening of the next sonnet (II.2.2). The whole twist at the end of II.1—whose placement is entirely in keeping with traditional sonnet form, which often builds to a surprising, yet harmonious reversal at the end—is precisely that even though poetry, and even being (*Dasein*) is all breath, air, song, vibration—invisible, in short, nevertheless it does *not* escape its materiality: the air just becomes another page (l.14).[359] Sonnet II.13 in many ways takes the sound-play to an extreme, even for Rilke and even for the *Sonnets*. But even here the idea is precisely *not* to leave the poem's materiality behind, but rather to make the material sing, to make the earth sound, as the Orpheus myth has it, as the site in which the dead lie buried.[360]

The injunction to "always be dead in Eurydice" is the only part of the poem that does not follow any obvious meter.[361] My sense is that we are meant to read it as prose, effectively: marking the nadir,

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Single wave-motion whose
gradual sea I am;
you, most inclusive of all our possible seas—
space grown warm.

How many regions in space have already been
inside me. There are winds that seem like
my wandering son.

Do you recognize me, air, full of places I once absorbed?
You who were the smooth bark,
roundness, and leaf of my words.

[359] Margareta Ingrid Christian (2020; 2021, 71–109) has shown how Rilke's poetics of space participated in the aesthetic and scientific discourse of their times, responding also to worries around world-loss in the sense also of a modern dematerialization of life (18-20).
[360] Sonnet I.14.7-8.
[361] If we stressed the first and third syllable in "Eurydice" (EU-ry-DI-ke) it could seem *almost* iambic.

the death of poetry in the poem. But only for a moment. "More singing arise / more praising arise …" (l.6). Dactylic meter picks up again, song starts anew. The final stanza alludes to the death of Orpheus, who adds himself to nature, its "unsayable sums" (*unsäglichen Summen*, l.13) – unsayable, but singable, when the sums (*Summen*) rhyme with "mute" (*stummen*) and thereby become humming (*summend*). The last line is a consummate crescendo of alliterations on Z, the final letter of the alphabet, that has been building up since the beginning: "heart" (*Herz*) in l.4 introduces the sound; in ll.6-8 it tacks onto the rhyme (*Bezug - zerschlug*); in l.11 we find it in the assonance of *vollziehst* and *einzige*; it opens the final stanza, capitalized in *Zu* (l.12), and then we get the sums of all that in l.14: *zähle, hinzu, Zahl*, metrically stressed in each instance. The result is so acoustically pleasing that we are almost inclined to forego any questions about the sense.

But between the final tercet and the quartets, the third stanza stands out in its prosaic quality: hardly an image here, and hardly any sound-play aside from the mandatory rhyme (ll.9-10) and some assonance in l.11. On the other hand, we do get such abstract concepts as "the condition of non-being" (l.9) and the "infinite ground" (l.10). It is not untypical for the sonnet form that the tercets initiate a reflection on what was proposed in the quartets, and for this self-reflection to be poetological.[362] My suggestion is to read the knowledge of the "infinite ground of your innermost vibration" (l.10) as calling also for knowledge of the sound's material substrate, the spirit (*pneuma, breath, vibration…*) as embedded in the letter.

If we then look for traces of the material that do not melt into air here, we note that in the second stanza we can read—but only read, and never hear!—"incline" (*Neige*, l.7) as the French *neige*, snow, given how deeply immersed Rilke was in the French language, and given the fact that winter has just been mentioned four times. Once we see this, we can also hear—but only hear, and not read—"glass"

But such pronunciation would be grotesque in German.

[362] See A. W. Schlegel's famous sonnet about the sonnet form, cited in Frank (1988).

(*Glas*, l.8) as near-homophonous with the French *glace*, ice. The elements of winter, snow and ice, have been sonically transformed, but their trace remains legible on the page. To be with and among winters, ahead and above of them, sounding while broken, is not to forget about winter or brokenness. Quite the contrary. One has to reach for participles here rather than nouns: the letter is the material that is made to be sounding: for example, the letter Z, whose significance, I submit, is simply to be a letter, synecdoche for literality as such.

That the trace of the poem's materiality, or literality, is precisely the point where it also transcends its monolingualism is significant. Rilke had mastered the sonnet form through translation from the French, English, and Italian, and in the final four years of his life, between 1922 and 1926, he will turn to writing mostly in French himself, while continuing to translate, for example, Paul Valéry. Choice of language is never accidental for a poet, and choice of French, in the immediate aftermath of the deadliest escalation of a centuries-old political rivalry between France and Germany, it is even a political statement, an affirmation of a cosmopolitan existence. Its precise contours remain, of course, undetermined here. But as far as the nature of earthly life is concerned, we note that for Rilke as for Arendt, it is "men, in the plural, not man" who inhabit the earth. The linguistic difference marks this irreducible plurality as qualitative, and not just numerical, and Rilke's poetics as affirmatively post-Babelian, refusing all fantasies of a Pentecostal fusion of tongues.[363]

I want to offer one more suggestion in conclusion: meaningful exteriority of world in the *Sonnets*,

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[363] In 1794, Herder attempted a deconstruction of the Pentecostal story of sudden "enthusiasm," in response to the French Revolution. In the preceding chapter, I suggested that Herder would have felt affinities with translational action as a concept of historical action, if theological concerns and a certain antipathy towards Kantian rationalism had not kept him from theorizing secular concepts of human historical agency. I use the opportunity to remark on a number of similarities that connect the philosophical poet Rilke with the poetic philosopher Herder: both write for the ear; both combine a nomadic, yet rooted cosmopolitanism and humanism with a skeptical but not outright hostile attitude towards liberal modernity; both were polyglots and avid translators; both looked towards Eastern Europe for inspiration; both approached Christianity in a literary vein and generally thought through metaphors, but with precision.

in contrast to the *Elegies*, may be specified as non-monumental, both in its ordinary sense and the Nietzschean sense of monumental history as the heroic assertion of Great Men and their works against the transience of all that is earthly.[364] There is no more talk of memorial plaques (*Inschriften*, DE1.64) in the *Sonnets*, to the contrary. "Erect no memorial stone," opens I.5. The *Sonnets* only know of earth, air, and the things of everyday life.[365] They are written as a tomb of sorts, a "Grab-Mal," which the unusual hyphenation prompts us to read rather literally, as something like a "reminder to dig." The poems draw from the earth, from the subterranean realm which they repeatedly figure as not just the place of rest for the dead, but as entirely pervaded by the dead.

> … der Toten …, die die Erde stärken.
>
> Was wissen wir von ihrem Teil an dem?
>
> Es ist seit lange ihre Art, den Lehm
>
> mit ihrem freien Marke zu durchmärken. (I.14.5-8)[366]

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, clay to clay (*Lehm*). By contrast, the *Elegies* still have our gaze lifted up high beyond the earth, towards the moon, for example, which is called a "Grab-Mal" in the Tenth, and likened to the Sphinx, a paradigm of a sepulchral monument (DE10.73-6). In the contrast between these to tombs—the monument elevated in simile to the lunar, super-terranean sphere, and the other, poetic rather than architectonic, located in the subterranean and terrestrial sphere—crystallizes the difference between *Elegies* and *Sonnets* on the question of what external realities are held up as real.

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[364] Friedrich Nietzsche ([1874] 1988, 258–65).

[365] The one exception would seem to be a castle in sonnet II.23. But even there our endurance, in the end, is said to depend on our status as undecidedly active-passive *Treibende* (l.12)*,* which means both "doing" and "drifting."

[366] ".. the dead, who fill the earth. How can we know / what part they play within the ancient cycle? / Long since, it has been their job to make the soil / vigorous with the force of their free marrow."

5.   Difficulties of Mourning.

If the *Sonnets*, particularly Part II, can initiate into a form of life-with-mourning, of being earthly, this is because they have absorbed the *Elegies*' knowledge of what loss is like, the difficulties involved in mourning loss, and what it means to face these difficulties well. In this section, I turn to key moments of the mourning process as the *Elegies* reflect it poetically to help us better understand just what they have absorbed as far as mourning is concerned. Where the *Sonnets* teach us about mourning as part of a larger whole (a way of living), the *Elegies* show it as consisting of parts that combine in process with a beginning, a middle, and an end. I turn now to the First, Sixth, and Tenth elegy to bring out Rilke's take on the difficulties characteristic of each phase in the mourning process.

My claim is that the *Elegies* mourn on two levels. They mourn the young dead of the war and invite readers to mourn with them. This is an instance of shared or public personal mourning, and Rilke's poetry, I argue, attempts to do this exemplarily, mapping, by its own poetic means, the phenomenology of mourning as a psychic process. Their example helps us make personal mourning practically intelligible again. But it can only do so, because, on a meta-poetic level, the *Elegies* also reflect on and, indeed, mourn the loss of traditional elegiac form. They creatively process this loss and thereby perform a work of what I called structural mourning.

Personal mourning, recall, is transformative of subjects' intra-psychic structures through de-cathexis and internalization; structural mourning processes (conceptual) loss by working on the extra-psychic, worldly structures, or forms of practice, that carried these concepts. Traditional elegy had contributed to the practical intelligibility of concepts of mourning. Because elegiac form is also the object of structural mourning in the case under consideration, personal and structural mourning appear unusually fused. Each side of this process reflects on, illuminates, and supports the other. I certainly do not claim that Rilke distinguished them, and I will not try to separate them artificially, but I will recurrently tease out the two levels the poetry operates on.

The beginning of mourning. World and self have become poor to the subject of the First Elegy, when we first encounter it. Freud, writing from the same historical moment, once suggested that in (healthy) mourning only the "world has become poor," while in (pathological) melancholia the self has, too.[367] Later psychoanalytic thinkers have argued that we ought not draw quite so sharp a line here, and Rilke would seem to agree.[368] Poverty of world and self belong to the experience of loss. The poem's subject, as we first meet it, is in pain, and wants to cry out. That this pain results from loss is gradually revealed.

WER, wenn ich schriee, hörte mich denn aus der Engel

Ordnungen? und gesetzt selbst, es nähme

einer mich plötzlich ans Herz: ich verginge von seinem

stärkeren Dasein. Denn das Schöne ist nichts

als des Schrecklichen Anfang, den wir noch grade ertragen,

und wir bewundern es so, weil es gelassen verschmäht,

uns zu zerstören. Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich.

Und so verhalt ich mich denn und verschlucke den Lockruf

dunkelen Schluchzens. (1-9)[369]

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[367] Freud, *Trauer und Melancholie,* 431. The idea is that negative-aggressive attachments to an ambivalently cathected love-object cannot be admitted and, thus, are projected inward: accusations against a deceased person, for example, surfacing as accusations against oneself, generating masochistic pleasure.

[368] For example, Melanie Klein ([1940] 1994), suggesting that some ambivalence will almost always be in play and that, besides unacknowledged badness turned into auto-aggression, the sheer fact of the loss of very much acknowledged goodness, on whose presence one could count, but now no longer, is an additional, perhaps more straightforward reason why loss would lead to perceived "poverty of self."

[369] "Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels' / hierarchies? and even if one of them pressed me / suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed / in that overwhelming existence. For beauty is nothing / but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure, / and we are so awed because it serenely disdains / to annihilate us. Every angel is terrifying. / And so I hold myself

The poem's subject imagines crying out to angles would go unheard (ll.1-2) and worse yet: if angels heard it, their presence would be destructive (l.2-4). So, it forbids itself not just song—and the enjambment, indeed, makes it virtually impossible to read the lines metrically—, but even the mere vocalization of pain: crying out (*schreien*, l.1) and crying tears (*schluchzen*, l.8-9).[370] Self-loathing shines through when the subject reports astonishment at the fact that the Beautiful does not insist on destroying it: from the imagined point of view of the Beautiful, it believes itself to seem worthy of destruction; the perceived worthlessness is cited as the reason for self-censorship (l.8). Although the German reflexive *sich verhalten* cannot quite mean what the English reflexive "behave yourself" means when parents tell it to their children, something of that sense is not entirely alien to the German here: tears are swallowed, emotions bottled up, quiet propriety maintained.[371]

The world, too, has become poor. An enumeration of things follows, but they appear unreliable, outdated (*von gestern*, l.15), unmotivated in their presence, isolated. The first we see, as in the *Sonnets*, is a tree. There the rising tree manifests exuberant joy. Here it is just some (*irgendein*) tree that remains for us—perhaps (*vielleicht*, l.13-4), as do a street, and habits, on which we might fall back even in mourning, and the night, which for us "remains, yearned for" (l.19).[372] Importantly, these are all said to "remain" (*bleiben* and cognates, ll. 13, 15, 17, 19, cf. l.53) hinting at the fact that something else has not remained, but was lost. The fact of loss thus comes into view, but only indirectly.

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back and swallow the call-note / of my dark sobbing."

[370] On the importance of vocalizing pain for mourning processes see Hans Joas (2015). – The first post-war elegy, the Seventh, also opens with a *Schrei*, here transfigured into the mating call of a bird in spring, albeit withheld as in the First (ll.2-3). In between those, the motif of a *Schrei* recurs throughout Rilke's war-time letters, for example his letter to Ellen Delp from Oct 10, 1915, where it is a cry of rage and despair.

[371] All we get is a sigh (*Ach*, l.9), recalling Kittler's dictum that "German poetry begins with a sigh" (1990, 3).

[372] The comma between "remain" and "yearned for" makes clear that the nights are real, here and now, having been yearned for, rather than merely anticipated ("remain yearned for"). But immediately after, they are also said to be still ahead of us (*bevorsteht*, l.21), such that the yearning, clearly, is continuous.

What is vividly on display from the beginning is the loss of traditional elegiac form. From beginning to end, the *Elegies'* meter circles around the traditional distiches, only ever achieving it momentarily.[373] In light of this, one commentator has even asked whether, strictly speaking, these poems are still elegies at all.[374] Traditional elegy deployed the constant alternation of dactylic hexameters and pentameters to achieve a sense of overall measure and balanced, that lend itself to expressing a gentle, bounded sadness.[375] In the First elegy, pain threatens to overwhelm the form. But the desire for form is palpable, too: it is thematized expressly in the opening lines, and the poem touches, again and again, on elegiac meter, only to always fall away from it, such that the form is held onto but precisely in its brokenness. The shards are kept in a dynamic play, neither discarded, nor forming a new whole, at least in the beginning.

In line with my above suggestion about the consistent parallelism of personal and structural mourning in the *Elegies*, we can read this in two ways. The precocity of the form at once aptly expresses the struggle for forms of expression that stands at the beginning of personal mourning, at least where the pain is so intense that it threatens almost to overwhelm us. Meta-poetically, it is also part of the poet's structural mourning, his mourning of a poetic form, by exhibiting its loss. Our analysis can distinguish these levels, while the question raised here is one and the same for the poet, meta-poetically, and psychologically, for the poem's subject: how can overwhelming pain be brought into form, such that pain can be faced as a loss and the work of mourning this loss be begun? How can a broken glass still be ringing, to borrow the image from sonnet II.13? The concluding lines suggest that a positive answer is found by the poem eventually.

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[373] With the exception of the Fourth and Eighth, of course, which are kept in non-dactylic meters altogether.

[374] Friedrich Beißner, cited in Daniel Frey (1995, 190).

[375] For my account of elegiac form here and below, I am relying on Frey (1995), Klaus Weissenberger (1969a; 1969b), and Julius Wiegand ([1958] 2001).

Ist die Sage umsonst, daß einst in der Klage um Linos

wagende erste Musik dürre Erstarrung durchdrang,

daß erst im erschrockenen Raum, dem ein beinah göttlicher Jüngling

plötzlich für immer enttrat, das Leere in jene

Schwingung geriet, die uns jetzt hinreißt und tröstet und hilft. (91-95)[376]

Grammatically, the poem ends on a question, but Rilke terminates it in a full stop, effectively turning it into an affirmation. The myth of yore (*einst*, l.91) is *not* in vain (*umsonst*, l.91) because even now (*jetzt*, l.95), in this very moment, song springs from loss that carries us along, helps and consoles. The poem speaks truthfully because, after the trochaic first two words, the sentence does settle into musical, dactylic flow. It ends on a rising hexameter, which would traditionally open a distich, rather than a closing pentameter. Thus, the poem points beyond itself, metrically. More song is yet to come.

But how does it get there from the opening? At the elegy's epicenter, we find another grammatical question turned *de facto* into an assertion, at the end of the second stanza.

… Ist es nicht Zeit, daß wir liebend

uns vom Geliebten befrein und es bebend bestehn:

wie der Pfeil die Sehne besteht, um gesammelt im Absprung

mehr zu sein als er selbst. Denn Bleiben ist nirgends. (50-53)[377]

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[376] "Is the legend meaningless that tells how, in the lament for Linus, / the daring first notes of song pierced through the barren numbness; / and then in the startled space which a youth as lovely as a god /had suddenly left forever, the Void felt for the first time / that harmony which now enraptures and comforts and helps us."

[377] "Isn't it time that we lovingly / freed ourselves from the beloved and, quivering, endured: / as the arrow endures the bowstring's tension, so that / gathered in the snap of release it can be more than / itself. For Remaining is nowhere."

From yearned for nights, at the end of the first stanza, the subject's thoughts turn to lovers yearning at night (l.21), then to lovers it has personally yearned for (ll.31-5). It exhorts itself to sing from its yearning (*Sehnt es dich aber, so singe…*, l.36), whereby the poem's voice is first revealed to be that of a poet. The poet looks to the unrequitedly loving, especially young girls, in comparison also with the equally archetypal heroes (l.40f) as models for such singing.

This would seem to place Rilke squarely within what the previous section has called a broadly Romantic paradigm. We will turn to the constellation of hero and girl in more detail in a minute to show how Rilke configures this aspect of the tradition. First, consider how the activity of yearning is concretized into an image of an arrow on a bowstring (*Sehne*, l.52). The poet asks—but then, as the full stop indicates, and the subsequent "therefore" (*denn*) also confirms—tells us, rather, that it is, indeed, time to *bestehen* this yearning, to stand or tarry with, to in-sist on it, like an arrow sits on a bowstring (*Sehne*). The arrow is drawn or, as one would say in German, the bow is made tense, brought under tension (*gespannt*). This is what we have to hear in *gesammelt* (l.52). The poet-subject's whole being is gathered into this tension. A string under tension is a string ready to be plucked, to be made to sound. The poem pauses at this poem of maximal tension, just prior to sound. There is a stillness. Into this stillness, voices become audible.

Stimmen, stimmen. Höre, mein Herz… (54)

Es rauscht jetzt von jenen jungen Toten zu dir. (61)[378]

Above, I argued that, in 1922, these are the young dead of the war. The doubling of "voices" (*Stimmen*), brings out the homophony with tuning (*stimmen*)—like an orchestra tunes before playing, which

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[378] "Voices. Voices. Listen, my heart…" and "It is murmuring toward you now from those who died young."

involves also an attuning to others. This cannot happen without listening (*hören*, l.54). The poem's subject is, indeed, able now to be "more than itself" (l.53), to move from attending only its own pain and yearnings, being wholly consumed by them even, to attending others, and that turns out to mean here: to tend to the death of others. Others have died, young; those deaths concern us. From mute pain and inner turmoil, the poem transitioned to a stillness. It moved from an indeterminate sense of lack in the world to a more determinate sense of loss.

This falls short yet of acknowledging this loss as the deeper cause of one's own sense of all-around ontological impoverishment. But that is the direction it moves in. "Bleiben ist nirgends" (l.53) is one of Rilke's most oft-quoted lines. I believe we are invited to hear the adjectival qualifier as nominalized: nowhere is there remaining, or: nothing(ness) remains, the emptiness referred to also at the end of both the first and final stanza (ll.23, 94). This radicalizes the sense of world-loss we saw in the first stanza. A few things seemed to have remained, at first. Now nothing seems to remain; remaining itself is said to be nowhere, placeless. Instead of holding onto false securities, the subject is willing to let go, or be let go—sent flying like an arrow on a bow-string, tensely attuned to the absence.

Poetically, this emptiness or absence is reflected in the stanza break between l.53-54, when the monologue falls silent and stillness as such becomes audible. Wolfram Groddeck reminds us of the French expression for such moments: *un ange passe*, an angel passes by.[379] If the First Elegy participates in what I have called the Romantic tradition (in a very broad sense of the term) of song springing from yearning for the infinitely removed One, figured here by the angels, then it does so with a modernist twist: the brokenness of the form, the absence of sound, muteness has brought into the form first.

Psychologically, the emptiness at the center marks a threshold, from listening only to one's own lament towards the suffering of others. The third and fifth stanza elaborate on how the being of the dead concerns us, how their suffering connects with our own; we keep the analysis of these for another

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[379] Groddeck (1997, 146).

time. At the end of the fifth stanza we again get a question turned into statement: that there can now be song, and, as argued, indeed, there is, and there has now been, such that the elegy, achieving a certain symmetry around those two moments where question becomes resolve, finds a first kind of complement and can stop—while pointing beyond itself with the opened distich (l.95).

The First Elegy thus takes us from form-exploding pain via yearning to composure to an inner quieting, a silence, in which it becomes possible to attend to the source the pain, the loss of an other, and then to elegiac song. This arc poetically maps the beginning of mourning and its difficulties, such as the transition from a dissolute self to an attentive one. For this, the meditation on model yearners and mourners, furnished by the tradition, turned out to be crucial: archetypal heroes, lovers, young girls. I now want to examine their role in the *Elegies* more closely, looking at the Sixth.

Ambivalent heroes. The Sixth is the only elegy to have been largely completed before the war but amended in 1922 by a few decisive lines that change its meaning radically. It offers a good case study for the effects of the war on the *Elegies* and, we shall see, for the difficulties surrounding ambivalently cathected love-objects.

The Sixth is known as the Hero's Elegy (*Heldenelegie*), after its protagonist. Heroes are men of action, and the Sixth is, indeed, the most dramatic elegy, with its expanded cast of characters: besides the heroes, also their mothers, young girls, the young dead, and the Elegies' poet-subject. It is the shortest elegy, hinting at the brevity of the heroes' lives (l.12-16). Focusing only on the pre-war parts, the poem reads like a 19th century exercise in hero-worship. We briefly recapitulate the classical *topoi*: the heroes live fast and die young (l.18), storming through life and the "stations of love" (l.43). What their lives lack in duration they make up in burning intensity (l.13). The only constant is change, particularly in the form of ascent (*Aufgang*, l.21), resulting, eventually in an apotheosis.

Sein Aufgang ist Dasein; beständig

nimmt er sich fort und tritt ins veränderte Sternbild

seiner steten Gefahr. (22-4)[380]

The poet-subject stands at a distance towards the hero, looking up at him (grammatically and culturally, the figure is male-coded), admiringly, perhaps even enviously (ll.9-11, 29-33). It knows its own task consists in hearing the song latent in the hero's life, channeling it into song.

… Aber,

das uns finster verschweigt, das plötzlich begeisterte Schicksal

singt ihn hinein in den Sturm seiner aufrauschenden Welt.

Hör ich doch keinen wie ihn. Auf einmal durchgeht mich

mit der strömenden Luft sein verdunkelter Ton. (24-8)[381]

The call of fate summons and inspires (*begeistert*) the heroes, which in turn inspires the poet. So far, all well-known *topoi* and constellations. After the war, I want to argue, the poet's perspective on the hero has changed. His forward-storming way of being appears now as the diametrical opposite to Orpheus' backwards looking orientation. Both affirm constant change, but the hero refuses to look back, to mourn. The poetry thus cannot champion the hero, not as Rilke had conceived of this figure pre-war, not even through distant admiration. But neither can it ask us to simply reject that 19th century ideal of resolutely forward-looking heroism entirely. That would deny the deep cultural roots of the figure

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[380] "He lives in continual ascent, / moving on into the ever-changed constellation / of perpetual danger."

[381] "But / Fate, which is silent about us, suddenly grows inspired / and sings him into the storm of his onrushing world. / I hear no one like him. All at once I am pierced / by his darkened voice, carried on the streaming air."

and the affective attachments to that ideal on the part of Rilke's audience, and probably on the part of Rilke himself. To try simply to drop this ideal and move on would be precisely to repeat the gesture of an heroic refusal to mourn.

Rilke's solution is to do something post-heroic, instead: to admit the ambivalence felt towards the figure of the hero and display it in the poem. Consider the ending of the elegy, and especially its final word, "different" (*anders*, l.45).

> Denn hinstürmte der Held durch Aufenthalte der Liebe,
>
> jeder hob ihn hinaus, jeder ihn meinende Herzschlag,
>
> abgewendet schon, stand er am Ende der Lächeln, anders. (43-5)[382]

Prior to the war, we would be justified to see here a Romantic transfiguration of the hero, who stands, in the end, "different." The vagueness of that difference makes it mysterious, which entails its own attraction. The hero is, in a mysterious way, beyond us, ahead of us mere mortals who look up to him. But after the war "different" itself has come to mean something different. By adding a few lines, Rilke manages to make the semantic ambiguity convey now an affective ambivalence.

> War er nicht Held schon in dir, o Mutter, begann nicht
>
> dort schon, in dir, seine herrische Auswahl?
>
> Tausende brauten im Schooß und wollten er sein,
>
> aber sieh: er ergriff und ließ aus, wählte und konnte.
>
> Und wenn er Säulen zerstieß, so wars, da er ausbrach

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[382] "For whenever the hero stormed through the stations of love, / each heartbeat intended for him lifted him up, beyond it; / and, turning away, he stood there, at the end of all smiles,—different."

aus der Welt deines Leibs in die engere Welt, wo er weiter

wählte und konnte. O Mütter der Helden,

o Ursprung reißender Ströme! Ihr Schluchten, in die sich

hoch von dem Herzrand, klagend,

schon die Mädchen gestürzt, künftig die Opfer dem Sohn. (33-42)[383]

The hero's orientation remains unchanged, but the reader's view is turned around. We are no longer looking up to the hero, or ahead with him. Instead, we are facing him, seeing what happens in his back, what he would see if only he were able to turn around, which he seems incapable of doing. We see that he is turned away (*abgewendet*, l.45), which is precisely not an Orphic turn back (that would be *umgewendet*). Away from what? From the girls who plunged to their death from the cliffs of the heart (ll.40-2). We see them. Subtly, the poetry has turned the reader around, like Orpheus did, to see the trail of destruction the hero leaves in his wake. When he is said, in the final line, to be at the end of all smiles (*am Ende der Lächeln*, l.45), it might just have been possible pre-war to hear as him being at their receiving end, being smiled at (though, even that might be a strain). Certainly in 1922, with the new lines added, there can be now doubt that we see him being turned away from any smile that was ever meant for him and all possible future smiles, from any further love. When we look at him again, we look at him askance, sideways and with suspicion.

By the time we get to the *Sonnets*, as we saw, Rilke's poetry has found a way to orient us backwards and forward in a constant play, or dance perhaps, of perspectives. The ambivalence that is registered

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[383] "Wasn't he a hero inside you, mother? didn't / his imperious choosing already begin there, in you? / Thousands seethed in your womb, wanting to be him, / but look: he grasped and excluded—, chose and prevailed. / And if he demolished pillars, it was when he burst / from the world of your body into the narrower world, where again / he chose and prevailed. O mothers of heroes, O sources / of ravaging floods! You ravines into which / virgins have plunged, lamenting, / from the highest rim of the heart, sacrifices to the son."

here in the Sixth is worked-through in the *Sonnets*. Unlike the other characters of the Sixth, the heroes do not return in either *Elegies* or *Sonnets*. With this we move on to the end of the mourning process as the *Elegies* portray it.

   The end of mourning. Hegel is among the many philosophers of history who views mourning as such with suspicion. "Wir haben es von Anfang an überhaupt verschmäht, den Weg [der Trauer] einzuschlagen," he writes, because "es ist … das Wesen [der Trauer], sich in den leeren, unfruchtbaren Erhabenheiten jenes negativen Resultats trübselig zu gefallen." [384] With both Rilke and the psychoanalytic tradition, I believe that successful mourning would precisely not look like that. Nevertheless, Hegel surely has a point that one can become at home in certain forms of mourning. One can derive a melancholy enjoyment (*trübselig sich gefallen*) from dwelling in self-pitying misery and its "empty, barren sublimities" (*leeren, unfruchtbaren Erhabenheiten*). In mourning the loss of an object or a beloved person, and dissolving one cathexis, one can become newly attached to the process of mourning itself, and to an image one's self as essentially world-withdrawn.[385]

   The end of mourning would then consist precisely in letting go of attachments to being-in-mourning, attachments not to that which was lost, but to the fact that it was lost. In meta-poetic terms, what is needed is an elegiac farewell to elegy form itself. This is what we get in the Tenth. As has often been pointed out, poetic form is personified in the figure of Lament here. The core of the Tenth consists of a long, cinematic journey where we see this figure guide one of the young dead through the Landscape of the Laments (*Landschaft der Klagen*, l.62) outside the City of Suffering (*Leid-Stadt*, l.16). The latter is an allegory of decadent, death-denying modernity ("…advertisements for 'Deathless' / that bitter beer, which appears sweet to the drunkards", ll.35-6).

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[384] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 34-6.
[385] Could we see the hymnal Ninth and the joy it seems to take in world-withdrawal as reflecting that possibility?

We readers get to follow this journey until the Lament and the young dead say farewell to each other, and we to both of them, at the foot of the Mountains of Ancient Sufferings (*Berge des Urleids*, 105), rocks that the cycle repeatedly associates with fathers, to whom the dead youth now returns.[386] Song falls silent (l.106). The last lines of the elegy are separated from the main text by an asterisk.

Aber erweckten sie uns, die unendlich Toten, ein Gleichnis,

siehe, sie zeigten vielleicht auf die Kätzchen der leeren

Hasel, die hängenden, oder

meinten den Regen, der fällt auf dunkles Erdreich im Frühjahr. –

Und wir, die an *steigendes* Glück

denken, empfänden die Rührung,

die uns beinah bestürzt,

wenn ein Glückliches *fällt*. (107-114)[387]

The first four lines offer a parable (*Gleichnis*, l.107), or two, though they are really the same, insofar as they are images of a falling motion: catkins *hanging* in the hazelnut tree and rain *falling* on dark earth in spring. The final four lines report an emotional reaction to these: when see a happy thing falling, we are almost shocked (*beinah bestürzt*, l.113). Our first inclination is to read these lines as quiet resignation. The hazelnut tree is empty (*leer*, l.108), the earth is dark (*dunkel*, l.110). We have been thinking of, or hoping for, a happiness that lifts us up (*steigendes Glück*, l.111), but at most we get intimations of a

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[386] Cf. 10.57-61, 2.74-76.
[387] "But if the endlessly dead awakened a symbol in us, / perhaps they would point to the catkins hanging from the bare / branches of the hazel-trees, or / would evoke the raindrops that fall onto the dark earth in springtime.— // And we, who have always thought / of happiness as rising, would feel / the emotion that almost overwhelms us / whenever a happy thing falls."

possible future happiness: hazel trees and earth that *might* bear fruit again, but now are barren. We are *bestürzt*, sad, almost devastated. Until the very end, the *Elegies* lament.

But that is not quite it; "almost" (*beinah*, l.113) has us stumble. What is the emotion (*Rührung*) we feel that *almost* renders us *bestürzt* when a happy thing falls? When we read of a happy thing falling, our first thought is it falls down, goes under, perishes. But then we would not be almost devastated. We would be entirely devastated. It is different when we read *fallen* here as *zufallen*. A happy thing falls to us, towards us, into our lap, a gift, from above (like spring rain), miraculous like the return of life in spring (the catkins). The catkins tell us that spring has already arrived. It is already *Frühjahr* (l.110). That is what we are almost shocked (*bestürzt*, l.113) about and completely moved (*Rührung*, l.112) by.

New life after a time of mourning comes us to as something unexpected, unpredictable, unmerited. We might find it hard to belief at first, and then we find it rushing (*stürzen*) onto us, suddenly, from above: joy (*Freude*), which appeared at the horizon at the end of mourning (l.100)—at the "exit of the grim insight," (*Ausgang der grimmigen Einsicht*, l.1), as the opening line has it—swells to become the "carrying current" (*tragender Strom*, l.102), flowing now (*strömend*, l.5) like the tears of the opening stanza. And we would have *almost* missed it, stuck as we were in thinking of happiness as rising, our head hanging low during mourning, looking to the ground, looking for something to rise up, *almost* would we have missed the *Glück* that fell on us from above. We did not miss it—but we could have. We were close to missing it. That, too, almost shocks us.

In its subtlety, the poem let the true meaning of its own end dawn on us as subtly and gently as spring rain; but once you see it, soon it feels as crisp and clear as a *Strom* swelling during the ice melt. The poem conveyed to us something of the surprise and soft strength of life returning at the end of mourning in the very suppleness of its own unfolding of its meaning. It does for us what it describes happening, and thereby it changes our orientation. The downward-looking mourning subject's gaze is turned upwards.

Da stieg ein Baum. O reine Übersteigung!

O Orpheus singt! O hoher Baum im Ohr! (SO I.1.1-2)[388]

Now, we are ready for the *Sonnets*.

6. Mourning Translated

We now have the contours of Rilke's concepts of mourning and being earthly before us. Whether his poetry succeeds at making these feel practically intelligible, even vibrant, on a personal level will vary, of course. The unabated popularity of the two cycles suggest they still speak to many; new translations appear almost every other year. My primary concern here is with structural mourning, however. Personal and structural mourning, as argued, are connected. They are connected in Rilke, because he structurally mourns poetic forms that carried a concept of personal mourning. And they are connected generally, simply in virtue of the fact that it is easier to believe in the possibility of structurally processing loss when the possibility of personal mourning seems practically intelligible.

The guiding hypothesis of this dissertation has been that translation can be a mode for structural mourning, for the transformative work on concepts and practices, that reckons with their loss and creatively responds to it. To this end, I reconstructed practice-immanent translation concepts, in the third chapter, and on the basis of one of these proposed a concept of translational action, in the fourth chapter. There I argued that translational action, when performed on non-instrumentally valued *translata*, in response to world-loss, diachronically, can be a form of historical agency that entails the requisite, structural mourning. I now want to look at the whole of Rilke's poetic response to the historical crises of his day to argue that *qua* response to these crises, as a historical action, it remains exemplary for us in the translational shape it took. As such, it contributes also to the practical

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[388] "A tree arose! O pure transcendence! / O Orpheus sings! O high tree in the ear!"

intelligibility of structural mourning.

I proceed in two steps. In this section, I look at Rilke's work on poetic form through my own concept of translational action. Of course, this was not a concept that Rilke himself had at his disposal to make sense of his own action. Poetry was his medium of sense-making. In the next and final section, I offer reading of a short poetic fragment, written immediately prior to finishing *Elegies* and *Sonnets*, on the eve of February 1922, as Rilke's meta-poetic account of what he was setting out to achieve. This will make plausible that, if Rilke had known the concept of translational action, he would have recognized himself in it.

Genre-likeness and separation of contexts. Translation, as we defined it, is an action, performed by an agent, the translator, on an original, resulting in something of the same kind as the original (what we referred to as the condition of genre-likeness: poetry for poetry, theory for theory, and so on), but belongs to a different time or place than the original (what we referred to as the condition of separate contexts). Applying this four-term schema to our case, we will say that the translational agent is Rilke; the translational action is his writing of *Elegies* and *Sonnets*; the original in question is an older concept of mourning immanent to traditional elegiac form; the translation produced is the concept of mourning implicit in the two poetry cycles, in its parts (*Elegies*) and as part of what it means to be earthly (*Sonnets*).

When we moved from the translation of texts to the translation of concepts, the requirement of genre-likeness became the distinction between direct and indirect translational actions. Direct translational actions, recall, operate on concepts that have been made explicit by theory. Indirect translational action operates on concepts as they are implicitly operative in forms of human practice. Rilke's translational action, as I read it, is of the latter kind. He translated a concept of mourning that older forms of poetry had carried implicitly, through a work on these forms. Elegy, as we reconstructed it, knew of mourning as a process with parts; the sonnet form, on the other hand, as Rilke understood

it, knew of a form of life of which mourning as a whole was a part, which believed in the praiseworthiness, despite it all, of this-worldly, modern existence. The ways of being earthly into which *Elegies* and *Sonnets* initiate, praising in mourning and mourning in praising, are the translation. They are conceptually articulable (which is what we did in the previous two sections), but practice embedded. The condition of genre-likeness is met.[389]

Original and translation need to belong to sufficiently differentiated contexts. What counts as sufficiently differentiated is not something we can quantify and measure, whether for translation in the ordinary sense, on the level of languages, or for translational responses to historical crises. The spatio-temporal borders between worlds are collectively felt and, on the basis of such shared feeling, recognized in practice. In our case, there can be no doubt that both the First World War and surrounding crises, as well as the modernization of preceding decades were widely felt and recognized to mark a caesura by Rilke and his contemporaries.[390] The first section has established that Rilke sought to respond to these crises, particularly their ontological dimension: the world-loss and conceptual loss they brought about. I hope the previous sections have made clear that his attempt is to be reckoned with by any historian interested in the conceptual repercussions of World War One, surrounding crises, and imminently prior modernization processes. To such historians, the saliency of Rilke's action as a historical action, in the precise sense we gave to this term, should be evident.

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[389] Translation, I argued in the fourth chapter, requires a one-to-one correspondence: one translation for one original, whether these are texts or concepts. In our case this means one traditional concept of mourning as the original, one post-war Rilkean concept of mourning as its translation. Note that no such one-to-one correspondence is needed at the level of instantiations, either for textual translations (where an original text might be instantiated in myriad copies, but its translation, initially, only in a single copy), nor for translations of concepts (where an original concept might be instantiated, in our example, across many different elegies, while the translation, initially, might be instantiated in only a single work, the *Elegies*). See above p. 166-7.

[390] A detailed account is provided by Paul Fussell (1975) with a focus on Great Britain; for the German context see, for example, Eva Horn (1999).

Translational reasoning. We said that translational action is preceded by translational reasoning which is concerned with the possibility and desirability of the action. We have already seen why elegy and sonnet form appeared to him important, in the way potential *translata* appear important to translators: as existing, or having existed, in a source context, potentially meeting important needs of a target context, if only something sufficiently like them could be produced there, too. In discussing this needfulness, we made a distinction between instrumentally and non-instrumentally valued *translata*. The poetic forms in question, for Rilke, clearly fall in the latter category. They appeared to him as what I have been calling grounds of valuation and of subject-formation: forms of human practice that disclose and enable certain ways of valuing and being. They were not merely valuable by some given standard but disclosing standards of value in the first place. Moreover, Rilke thought they belonged to a past of which he felt himself to be an heir (as we gleaned, for example, from his reflections on Petrarch). This means that their unavailability is not simply a lack, but a genuine loss in need of mourning on the part of a modern "we" to which Rilke felt he and his contemporaries belonged.

As far as the possibility of such a transfer is concerned, I noted a peculiar difficulty for cases of world-loss. World-loss, recall, is a form of incapacitation that will involve many dimensions: ontological, because certain concepts are lost and with them certain possibilities of being; but often also psychological. *Qua* inhabitants of a world, we are affectively invested in what was lost, such that their loss puts us into what psychoanalysts call a "depressive position," not different in principle from the loss of a loved one.[391] To have suffered from large-scale, rapid world-loss in the course of a cluster of historical crises, means an attack on structures that had been bound up with our sense of self, our agency, our capacity to trust both others and ourselves. The First elegy powerfully conveyed the phenomenology of such a state.

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[391] Freud's essay on "Transience" ([1916] 1946) stands as a testimony to Freud's own mourning the loss of the post-war world. It features a nameless poet and his friend, behind which many have suspected Rilke and Lou Andreas-Salomé. See also footnote 18 above.

Ontology and psychology should not be kept too neatly apart here and Rilke is a case in point. His letters document the general depression he suffered in the decade prior to 1922. The onset of his condition preceded the war slightly, but there can be no doubt that Rilke felt how the crises of the war-years and their aftermath intensified it. It directly impinged on his work as a poet, understandably for psychological reasons, but not only. We have seen in the first section that Rilke thought of his work as responding to modernity and its crises, certainly by the time he wrote *Malte* (1910). The inextricability of psychological and ontological constraints comes through in this war-time letters, too.

... for what is there to write, where everything one touches is unsayable, unrecognizable... nowhere does the yardstick of the individual heart apply anymore. (To Helene von Nostitz, Munich, July 12, 1915)

I, at least, as long as war continues, cannot resolve myself to pick up what has been interrupted; it is a life *en parenthèse*, and only when, one day, one is able to close the parenthesis, will it be possible to continue the main clause in which he have been interrupted. (To Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, Munich, Apr 4, 1918)

Only towards the end of the war, weeks before armistice, Rilke finds himself able, for the first time in years, to articulate an affirmative stance towards life again.

During all these years, I did not ask myself (it would have been imprudent to do so) to what extent amidst all the tribulations, confusions, and defacing of the world, I still believe in the great, perfect, still inexhaustible possibilities of life. Your wedding day shall be an occasion for me to test myself. And now I confess, dear countess, that I think of life as a thing of the most untouchable delight,

and that the knot of so many calamities and atrocities, the sacrifice of countless fates, everything which these past years has grown into yet increasing terror: that all this cannot lead me to despair of the fullness and goodness and friendliness (*Zugeneigtheit*) of our existence. (To Aline Dietrichstein, Munich, Oct 9, 1918)

The crises did not end in November 1918, and it would take another four years before would find again the inner tranquility and confidence to "close the parenthesis" at Muzot in the winter of 1922.

Original letter and spirit. Translation, as reconstructed in preceding chapters, begins with a turn to the original. This original then appears as both given and to-be-constructed. It is taken as the original because it is judged to be translation-worthy, but equally and simultaneously, it is judged to stand in need of further determination. When I defined translational action, I suggested that the logic governing this determination, or construction, of the original ought to be understood as an extension of the logic of letter and spirit which governs the middle of the translation process (the actual translation, part for part) into its beginning.

By this logic, I mean the following principle. Trade-offs in translation are inevitable; to translate well means to make good trade-offs. Something will be dedicated as, in this instance, the "letter," to be sacrificed for what, in this instance, is the "spirit." Letter and spirit are logical categories here; they can vary from case to case (as, in fact, they did for translators around 1800). But the decisive twist is that such sacrificial trade-offs, and the general designation of some elements of the original *translatum* as letter and others as spirit, proceeds on the assumption of a prior commitment to their unity. Just what the letter is and what the spirit, in each case, is to be discerned from the most scrupulous attention to the interlocking of all the elements of the original.

Here a closer look at traditional elegy for is needed. An ancient genre, contemporary scholarship defines elegy either via formal criteria, first among them its traditional meter, the elegiac distich,"

consisting of dactylic hexameters and pentameters in alternation; or focus is on distinctly elegiac mood: longing sadness and gentle joy, kept in relatively narrow bounds.[392] Where it leaves those bounds behind, elegy tends to shift into the neighboring registers of ode or hymn.[393] Elegy of this kind, in the German tradition, saw a high period around 1800, when Schiller offered a canonical theoretical account of elegiac mood as expressing the yearning for a lost ideal and how the traditional distich formally encodes this felt distance between ideal and reality:[394] rising hexameters expressing the longing, falling pentameters its disappointment, but such that, over the course of the poem, their regular alternation brings an affective stabilization, holding the pain within bounds, and the measured, balanced beauty of the elegy offers itself as consolation for the lost object. In line with a Romantic view of art as ersatz religion, the basic wager would often be that elegy would preserve for eternity what nature, under the iron law of time, has taken away.[395]

As the last section has shown, Rilke's translation, clearly, did not cling to the letter. Daniel Frey gathers examples of infelicitous early 20th century attempts at re-animating the form that fell into this

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[392] I am drawing here on Frey, Weissenberger, and Wiegand, see also above footnote 375.

[393] A good example is Hölderlin's *Menons Klagen um Diotima* (circa 1803).

[394] Schiller, *Naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung*, 47f; *Das Distichon*, 67. See Weissenberger, 12f. for a speculative history connecting these formal features to archaic forms of lament.

[395] Cf. the concluding lines of his poem *Nänie* (1800). – The question can be asked, but not discussed at length here: what are the theological premises of Rilke's *Elegies* and *Sonnets*, especially in relation to Christianity? The topic is controversial. My own view is closest to Balthasar's: that the Christian can see in Rilke's refusal of any theological assurance in favor of insistent existential questioning a deeper kind of religiosity, even if Rilke himself would not share that interpretation (Balthasar 1998, 310). I am skeptical that, as Thomas Pfau (2019) argues, and Charles Taylor now argues (2024) and has long been suggesting (1992, 491, 506f; 2018, 88–89) a positive affirmation of transcendence can be found in the late poetry, but neither should we simply read him as a Nietzschean anti-Christian, as Heidegger (GA95.438) and Peter Pfaff (1983) do. Rilke's struggle with the Christian heritage springs from deep ambivalences that never resolve into the clarity of mere enmity. When Gadamer describes him as "drawing on Christian truths that remain hidden to him," he does not seem to capture the self-awareness with which Rilke engages in this struggle (1954, 92). A somewhat unusual position is taken by Karl-Heinz Bohrer, to whom even a thoroughly pagan Rilke would still be too religious, compared with the resolute secularism of a Baudelaire (Bohrer 1996). At least, it shows a certain sense for the religious dimension of Rilke's work.

trap, from the oeuvre of Rudolf Alexander Schröder, Rudolf Borchardt, and Franz Werfel.[396] The overall impression one gleans from these is epigonal work, aesthetic conservatism, even kitsch. Instead, Rilke exhibits the breakdown of the form. The *Elegies* circle around the traditional distich, occasionally finding into their rhythms for the briefest of moment, only to immediately depart again. Enjambments that radically separate logical, syntactic, and verse units (anticipated here by Hölderlin), stanzas of irregular number and length, the occasional interjection of unmetrical phrases together prevent any easy sense of measure, balance, symmetry or beauty. As do the almost always aporetic endings.

But, of course, Rilke does more than just offering us the shards of the form. Eventually, he welds them into a whole, when, at their very end, the *Elegies* achieve the integrity of a *cycle* of poems (*Gedichtszyklus*). In doing so, elegy achieves again the capacity to guide the reader through a mourning process, begun in the First and completed in the Tenth—despite, or rather: precisely because of the sacrifice of traditional form. This capacity, I want to suggest, was precisely the spirit to which Rilke sacrificed the letter of the form.

Such sacrifice emphatically should not be thought of as mere dismissal of traditional form and all it expressed. The form is translated, and it is mourned. The previous chapter has argued that the logic of letter and spirit is crucial for understanding how translational action can entail collective mourning. Like translation, insofar as it follows this logic, successful mourning is premised on a commitment to the whole, however ambivalently cathected it might be. Ultimately, we might want to retain certain aspects of the *translatum*. In this case, that was the capacity to reconcile us to our finite, earthly being. And we want to discard others as, in this case, hero-worship, and a certain conception of art as ersatz religion, insofar as it upholds Romantic dualisms between art and nature, and so on.

Separating the one from the other requires first acknowledging their initial unity—in the case of successful mourning, in the case of successful translation, and in the case of Rilke's late poetry. Rilke

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[396] Frey (1995, 191-5).

achieves this in the same gestures that, in the previous, chapter I singled out as moments of meta-poetic reflection of elegiac form onto itself. The poems bring the loss of their own form into view—though it is not quite their form anymore, albeit neither is it unrelated, just in the way translation, as we reconstructed it, stands in relation to its original. Elegy is dead, long live elegy! But, of course, translational action as I propose it here, unlike Medieval *translatio*, does not postulate an eternal spiritual body that could be transferred without loss.[397] Elegy had to mourn itself to live on, translated.

Such mourning entails working through ambivalences, for example towards hero-worship (in the Sixth) and the Romantic dualisms as structuring principles underlying many traditional examples of elegy and sonnet form. The common denominator to these two is that they express artistic, religious, ethical modes of grappling with our finitude that do not quite accept loss as real. Post-war, they appeared to Rilke as forms of refusing the need for mourning. The reality of loss had become too overwhelming: individual human loss, but also the loss of entire human worlds. The 19th century, post-Christian theologies of art as ersatz religion, or history as theodicy had been lost. Rilke did not hold onto their forms and frameworks, but neither did he, as the avantgarde movements of the 1920s soon would, celebrate the explosion of form. He mourned the old forms and, in doing so, reckoned with their loss, and translated them.

7. Rilke's Progress

In Chapter Three, I suggested that translational practice around 1800 had its own distinct understanding of translational progress. I reconstructed it from remarks often found near the end of translator's prefaces, when translators stepped back to offer reflections on what faults they thought remain, what subsequent translation attempts could improve, and how their own translations differ

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[397] The allusion here is to the Medieval doctrine of the King's Two Bodies, made famous by Ernst Kantorowicz, which underlines the famous formula, "The king is dead, long live the king."

from, or improve on, past attempts. When I then proposed my concept of translational action, I connected this translational model of progress with progress in mourning. Personal mourning progresses towards a free relationship with lost love-objects. This can include a negative "freedom from," by loosening our attachments to what these formative alterities now in our past, but also positive "freedom with," by setting up supportive internalizations, whom we recognize as recognizers and feel ourselves recognized in turn.

Analogously for translational action as a form of structural mourning: reckoning with loss at every step, the translational agent *qua* inhabitant of some world can work through shared cathexes, and the translations of lost concepts and practices created in the process can function there like supportive internalizations, when they are properly integrated into the complicated web of recognitive relations and structures of affect on the target side. Working-through a shared past over several iterations of translational actions in this way and for several aspects of a lost world helps, step by step, to build towards a free relationship with that past. And so, I argued, translational historical action should count as progressive or emancipatory, in the sense of contributing to the realization of greater freedom.[398]

It may be doubted that Rilke thought much about questions of historical progress at all, much less of this particular kind. Certainly, if one looks only at *Elegies* and *Sonnets* it seems like he did not. But, of course, for our translators around 1800, too, this is not a question they would broach explicitly in their translations, but in their translator's prefaces. By way of conclusion, I want to suggest that there is a Rilke poem which stands as a "preface" to *Elegies'* and *Sonnets'* translation. Poetically, it reflects on

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[398] With the proviso that translational action will be an attractive option for positively or ambivalently cathected concepts and practices. One would expect the latter to be the majority, on the assumption that every world (or society, or polity) consists of a plurality of participants, differentiated across intersecting axes of power and identity, such that affective attachments to shared elements of these worlds will be asymmetrically distributed. What ties inhabitants of a world together, in other words, is that they care about the same things, but differently. From the point of view of the whole this can be construed as a collective ambivalence. More would need to be said about that point of view; I would merely caution not to identify it prematurely with that of the state.

the translational status of the two cycles by describing and enacting, primarily through its images and rhyme, a motion of crossing, of *trans-latio*, *über-setzen*, carrying over, in which we can now recognize the "hermeneutic motion" (Steiner) of translation—condensed, as it were, into its Warburgian *Pathosformel*.

What is more, the poem evinces a Rilkean understanding of such motion as progressive in quite the sense I reconstructed from translational discourse around 1800: progress not as a qualitative or quantitative overcoming of a previous state, but as a deepening and improving of relationships with the past over several iterations. Finally, the analysis of this poem also answers to the difficulty mentioned at the outset that Rilke, inevitably, did not have the concept of translational action at his disposal. I believe this poem is great evidence that he would have recognized himself in the concept. The following, untitled lines, written in Muzot on January 31, 1922, appeared to him, in hindsight, as the opening poem (*Auftaktgedicht*) to *Elegies* and *Sonnets*.

Solang du Selbstgeworfnes fängst, ist alles
Geschicklichkeit und läßlicher Gewinn -;
erst wenn du plötzlich Fänger wirst des Balles,
den eine ewige Mit-Spielerin
dir zuwarf, deiner Mitte, in genau   5
gekonntem Schwung, in einem jener Bögen
aus Gottes großem Brücken-Bau:
erst dann ist Fangen-Können ein Vermögen, -
nicht deines, einer Welt. Und wenn du gar
zurückzuwerfen Kraft und Mut besäßest,   10
nein, wunderbarer: Mut und Kraft vergäßest
und schon geworfen hättest... (wie das Jahr

die Vögel wirft, die Wandervogelschwärme,

die eine ältre einer jungen Wärme

hinüberschleudert über Meere -) erst   15

in diesem Wagnis spielst du gültig mit.

Erleichterst dir den Wurf nicht mehr; erschwerst

dir ihn nicht mehr. Aus deinen Händen tritt

das Meteor und rast in seine Räume...[399]

The poem speaks of a motion, which I read as translational, in three images: first, a ball is being thrown and caught, back and forth; then birds are "thrown" across oceans as they migrate through the seasons; finally, a meteor is thrown, or rather, somewhat oddly, "steps" (*tritt*, l.18) from the thrower's hands. Who is throwing, what here, and what, if any, are the differences between these three motions?

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[399] My attempt at a translation:

> As long as you but catch what you yourself have thrown
> it's all mere skill and profit well dispensable;
> only if, suddenly, you turn to catch the ball
> which an eternal Co-Player has thrown,
> to you, to just your middle, in precisely
> drawn parabola, in one of those long arches
> of God's great edifice of bridges:
> then only is your catching fortune, powerful—
> not yours, but of a world. And now imagine: if
> you even had the strength and courage,
> no! More wonderful: forgotten courage, strength
> and *had* already thrown…   (Just like the year
> hurls birds, those swarms of birds migrating,
> which elder warmth to younger one,
> sends out across the oceans—), only
> in this venture do you validly co-play.
> Easier no longer, nor harder than it needs to be
> for you. From out of your hands launches
> a meteor, sets off into its spaces…

As he so often does, Rilke deploys the indeterminacy of second-person pronominal deixis to undercut the distinction between self-address and reader address. What the poem describes is both a state of being and an aspiration: it is an ideal of letting-go and playing-with (*mitspielen*, l.4, 16) that captures phenomenologically how Rilke would in the immediate aftermath of writing this poem proceed, at long last, to finish the *Elegies* and write the *Sonnets*. And this aspired ideal is something the poem invites others to countenance inhabiting or aspiring to in turn. What exactly does it look like, this playful throwing, back and forth? Of what kind is the agency involved, if we can speak of agency here?

Hans-Georg Gadamer made the poem famous by placing it as the epigraph of *Truth and Method* (1960). He breaks off after l.9, which brusquely undercuts the joyful conclusion arrived at in the previous line, the sense of having been able to catch what an eternal and divine being, the Muse to all appearance, has thrown towards us, of having a *Vermögen* (l.8), which we might translate as both capacity or fortune (a talent, if we are able to hear in that both gift and gold). Gadamer's choice is emblematic of his thought and Rilke interpretations generally, as his *opus magnum* is written against robust notions of subjectivity or agency, in favor of a philosophy that sees human beings as everywhere preceded by such impersonal structures as language, world, tradition. He is close here to his teacher Martin Heidegger's early reading of Rilke, but also diametrically opposed to the middle-period Heidegger's take on Rilke, which, to the contrary, sees the poetry as continuous with a Nietzschean metaphysics of the will.

All of [Rilke] is still the urge and necessity (*Not und Notwendigkeit*) of metaphysics, is insurrectionary willing of the productive, is still genius-like and oriented towards creative achievement (*Schaffen*) – is still the pull and being-pulled of subjecticity (*Subjektität*).[400]

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[400] "Das alles ist noch Not und Notwendigkeit der Metaphysik, ist aufständisches Wollen des

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"Solang du Selbstgeworfnes" makes this claim very doubtful. When strength and courage are forgotten in l.11, this is no Nietzschean forgetting of our history to retrieve a new animalic or heroic vitality full of *Mut* and *Kraft*. To the very contrary, what takes its place is an attitude of *mitspielen*, playing-with. How much willing is involved now in the form of agency? The somewhat unhelpful, but nonetheless true answer given by the poem is: the right amount.

> Erleichterst dir den Wurf nicht mehr;
>
> erschwerst dir ihn nicht mehr. Aus deinen Händen tritt (ll.17-8)

We would not will too much or try too hard anymore, but neither would we take the task too easily or passively. Notice how the meter alternately emphasizes and de-emphasizes the second-person pronouns here: the first "dir" is stressed, the second unstressed, "deinen" again stressed, enacting in playful back-and-forth the mitspielende agency: sometimes (actively) throwing, sometimes (passively) receiving. We are *Mitspieler*; the result is not fully in our hands, but our hands are at work in it. The "aus" in "[a]us deinen Händen tritt" has to be read as both "from" and "out of": it is from *our* hands (stressed) that the throw is launched. *Aus* read as "from" points to us as origin of the movement, dignifies us; *aus* read, equally, as "out of" points to our lack of possession and power.

And what is this throwing that we are (called to be) at work on? The three images around which the poem is built convey it. First, there is the throwing and catching of a ball, back and forth. This catching the poem also enacts sonically, as later lines "catch" previous ones through rhyme. Even on several re-readings, the rhyme of ll.6-8, *Bögen-Vermögen*, is the first I register consciously. *[E]rst dann* (l.8) announce that the parenthesis *solange* opened (l.1) will now be closed, soliciting our special

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Produktiven, ist noch Geniehaft und auf das Schaffen gerichtet - ist noch Zerren und Fortriß der Subjektität," (GA97, p. 439). For his earlier, more sympathetic reading of Rilke, see "Philosophie und Theologie" from 1927 (GA9, p. 78.).

attention to this line, and the round and drawn-out umlauts, anchored by the sonorous *m* and the elongated *e* of *Vermögen* conclude it majestically. But the play of throw-and-catch has been going on from the beginning, and, lo and behold, this sense of having thrown and caught already—even "always already" as far as the poem extends—is made thematic in ll.11-12. When we play-with rightly, we realize that we have already been playing-with. We repeat what we have already been doing.

But we repeat with a difference. The motion is next likened (*wie*, l.12) to birds "hurled" (l.15) across the ocean by the change of seasons. Birds reappear throughout the *Elegies* and the *Sonnets*, occupying a middle-position in Rilke's universe between fully earth-bound human beings and the earth-transcendent angels. They lift off the earth and return to it. As the ball describes a curve or bridge (*Brücke*, l.5-7), the birds are bridging beings, crossing water. On each side of the ocean crossed we find a warmth (*eine Wärme*, l.14). Birds migrate with the seasons; the warmths are those of summer and seasons, as we saw, in Rilke everywhere are also seasons of the heart. The spatial image of a ball, thrown by the eternal (*ewige*, l.4) muse is now temporalized. One could not tell it from the poem alone, but in light of all we said about Rilke's poetry of that moment and its relationship to the historical crises of this day, I think we are justified in hearing in this warmth what we hear in the *Vermögen* of some world: the treasured capacities of a older world, now fading, that Rilke wants to carry over, to translate. For example, its poetic forms.

> Precisely this: to transform the sonnet, to elevate it, yes, to carry it, so to speak, while running, without destroying it was for me, in the case [of the *Sonnets*], the proper test and task: for which I barely had to decide myself, by the way. It posed itself all by itself and carried its own solution. (Letter to Katharina Kippenberg, Feb 23, 1922)[401]

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[401] "Aber gerade dies: das Sonett abzuwandeln, es zu heben, ja gewissermaßen, es im Laufen zu tragen, ohne es zu zerstören, war mir, in diesem Fall, eine eigentümliche Probe und Aufgabe: zu der ich mich, nebenbei, kaum zu entscheiden hatte, so sehr war sie gestellt und trug ihre Lösung in sich."

To transform, to carry, to elevate at the same time, in and through motion, is how Rilke thought of his task. The central image of the migrating birds is offered in parenthesis, carried and held by the lines around it, typographically, like hands holding a ball, preserving or carrying the previous image.

But there is also transformation: l.16 describes the motion of the image as a venture (*Wagnis*). The journey across the oceans, of course, is a venture to the birds (who are thrown, or hurled, *hinübergeschleudert*, l.15), rather than the years (who do the hurling). So, our position has transformed from being thrower-catcher in the ball-game, to being with the object thrown, mid-flight, as co-players in the venture (l.16). Finally, the ball that has become the birds eventually becomes a meteor launched from out of our hands. The poem invites the You who would respond to its address to imaginatively take up three positions in succession: of receiving (the ball), of being thrown (like the birds), of passing on (the meteor). Translationally spoken: we receive something from the old world—its *Vermögen*, its warmth—and like migrating birds carry it across a historical abyss, and finally, pass it on towards yet future generations, trusting that someone might receive it.

The three images are thus images of one and the same motion. They are metaphors of, at bottom, metaphoricity itself: *meta-pherein*, *trans-latio*, *Über-setzung*, carrying across, or: the translation which, I argued, the cycles onto which the poem opens accomplish. And yet the three images also differ. From the purely spatial or atemporal ball-game with the eternal Muse, that had always been going on, much like the poem's play of rhyme, we move to a temporal order, the birds migrating with the seasons, and finally back to the spatial again (*Räume*, l.19). To translate into translational terms: the movement goes from one world's now (spatial), through historical rupture (temporal), to another present (spatial). There is "elevation" too, as Rilke called it in his letter. The images repeat the same motion, but better, greater: from the relatively down-to-earth ball-game, to trans-continental flight, to the final frontiers of space. Is this not precisely the notion of translational progress we have seen? Not a radical break or leaving behind, but a deepening or heightening, if you will: the same again, but better.

Consider the final line. The poem ends with an ellipsis. Initially, this might have us think of it as a fragment, given also its lack of a title. But if the reading suggested here is right, the poem is in fact complete. It has to end in an ellipsis which continues the motion of the meteor into its spaces, spaces that are not the poem's, and perhaps not even the present reader's, but spaces in which yet future readers (always still future readers, so to speak) might come to receive it. Complete in its incompletion, the poem shares one more characteristic with translations: they might be finished but never final. To the contrary, the value of a translation, in part at least, lies precisely in its generation of yet new receptions, translation attempts, and inspired poetic creations. The poem ends with a beginning, the meteor traveling into its spaces, to which no rhyme responds. It is the very opposite of a disaster—a falling of the stars; it is the ascension of a new star, a spark of light in darkness.

Conclusion and Outlook

In addressing the problem of world-loss, I found it necessary to cross disciplinary boundaries. Bringing together findings and vocabularies from different fields, I strove throughout to remain legible to non-specialists, as everyone is a layperson outside their own their own field. But I also contributed to specialists' debates on the way, as is proper for a dissertation. Let me survey both the field-specific and the general conclusions reached and indicate some of the questions that remain open.

The second, third, and fifth chapter speak most directly to particular disciplinary debates. In the second chapter, on Kant's philosophy of history, I distinguished sharply between the various kinds of historical progress Kant theorizes, between natural and free progress, with civilizational and political progress as sub-divisions of the former and moral and religious progress as sub-divisions of the latter. Some scholars have seen that Kant observes these distinctions, often following Allan Wood. But very few have drawn out the important consequence following from this, that Kant's view leaves room for human historical agency, in a robust sense of free, moral agency. Even fewer have begun to look for places in Kant's work where he theorizes how such agency becomes historically efficacious. The place to look, I argued, is the *Religion*, making this the key text for his philosophy of history where, so far, it is often ignored. And I connected the *Religion* to Kant's aesthetics, showing that genius is the model for moral agency that becomes historically efficacious in acts of revolutionary foundings of churches, with important consequences also for political progress. This idea had so far been only suggested in passing once, by Karl Ameriks, and defended by Omri Boehm, though, I argue, on grounds that end up distorting Kant's views.

The third chapter has developed new methods for translation studies. Beyond what Germans would call *Höhenkammforschung*, "summit-to-summit-research" attending to famous individual translations or theorists, I showed the potential of analyzing ordinary translator's prefaces and similar

paratexts for reconstructing practice-immanent translation concepts that can serve, ultimately, as a thick (normative-descriptive) conceptual resource for the philosophy of history. To reconstruct these concepts, I developed a framework using broadly Aristotelian categories in an overall pragmatist setting for thinking about translation as a form of *poiesis* and *kinesis*, and I identified the structure of the practical reasoning that carries it. With this general framework I approached my newly constructed corpus of over 330 translational paratexts, the first of its kind for translations into German and one of the most substantive such corpuses for any language to date, reflecting over sixteen source languages and a plethora of genres, both fiction and non-fiction, spanning a period of eighty years.

I identified over twenty recurring, genre-defining features of preface form and content and mapped how these reflected on the general concept of translation. Correlating aspects of translator demographics and source-texts with these genre-features across the corpus, in combination with analyzing the translators' discourse, computationally and hermeneutically, I was able to identify distinct strands of translational practice in Germany around 1800, each operating on the basis of its own, locally normative understanding of translation. This method-mix allowed us to better contextualize the debates between theorists of the time against the practice at large, to understand how theory and practice informed each other. Some theoretical positions, like Schleiermacher's championing of foreignizing translation, characterizing difference in terms of negation, though they had an outsized influence later on, were by no means without alternative at the time, like Wieland's characterization of difference in terms of singularity.

The final chapter offered a new reading of Rilke's crowning achievements, the *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Earlier German commentary (roughly, from Heidegger to Jacob Steiner) had routinely read these cycles together, usually in an existentialist or phenomenological key, and such general philosophizing with the poetry is still not uncommon in certain corners of Anglophone scholarship. More recent, resolutely philological German scholarship tends to treat the cycles

separately. By contrast, I show that one can and, indeed, has to read the two together on solid philological and poetological grounds. Only when we see how these two cycles' poetics formally and hermeneutically depend on each other can we see them as jointly responding to World War One and related historical crises, themselves understood by Rilke as the culmination of decades of modernization, through a work on poetic form. This work, which I argued took translational shape, is also a work of mourning. Once we are able to see how both *Elegies* and *Sonnets* are engaged in this work of mourning, we are able to understand also how they differ, how the latter advance beyond the standpoint of the former while containing it as a moment, such that the interiorization doctrine of the Seventh and Ninth, which is routinely put forth as Rilke's final view on the task of poetry and the meaning of human life *cannot* be Rilke's final view on these.

These can easily seem like three all-too disparate fields of inquiry to cohere in a single dissertation. But they are held together by the first and fourth chapter. The first sets out the problem of world-loss and conceptual loss as caused by historical crises. To this end, I synthesized insights from three bodies of literature in a general pragmatist framework: first, heterodox strands of analytic moral philosophy that deal with the phenomenon of conceptual loss (represented by such thinkers as Cora Diamond, Jonathan Lear, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Bernard Williams); secondly, psychoanalytic analyses of the concept of mourning (especially Hans Loewald, but also Judith Butler, Melanie Klein, Jonathan Lear again, and of course Freud himself); and finally, post-narrativist philosophy of history (Frank Ankersmit's late work, Eelco Runia).

And, of course, the fourth chapter draws on the concept of translation reconstructed from historical practice in the third chapter to propose a concept of translational action as an answer to this problem of world-loss, allowing us to understand the translation of concepts and practices lost to historical crises as a form of creatively mourning them. I argue that such mourning under the right conditions can count as historical action, thereby providing an alternative to the model of historical

agency described in the second chapter, while the final chapter, on Rilke, offers an extended study of an example of such translational crisis-response. In this way, the fourth chapter gives new life to an old idea: the concept of *translatio*, which had been central to Latinate historical thought, but this time without the baggage of pre-modern metaphysical, theological, and political frameworks, and suitable for our own times characterized by multi-dimensional and rapid historical change and, consequently, constant need to transformatively mourn those historical practices and concepts that provided us with ever-shifting grounds of valuation and subject-formation. Such translation, I suggested, is needed to safeguard the possibility of a certain kind of freedom, of realizing practical, historical conditions of self-determining agency.

Most of all, I hope that this dissertation helps to put the problem of historical agency back on the agenda. World-loss and subsequent conceptual loss, giving rise to historical consciousness, are distinctly historical dynamics. We need to understand what concepts we currently have in place, if only tacitly, for thinking through such dynamics and what it would mean to shape the dynamics for the better. I believe that the poetic paradigm names a deep conceptual structure that still informs how we think about agency in the context of historical crises, even if few would claim to endorse this model explicitly. As I have tried to show, translation can be an alternative. Evidently, all the foregoing stands in need of further elaboration and supplementation. At least some directions for further work have become clear, I hope.

One way to expand this research program is through further case studies. I have only been able to do full justice to one example here, Rilke's post-war poetics. Having a rich variety of case studies representing world-loss of many types, with varying degrees of fundamentality and comprehensiveness, at rapid and slower time-scales, including different forms of practice (cultural, political, economic, religious, and so on), would greatly help us better understand the problem. As far as translational answers are concerned, more samples would help us better understand the socio-cultural conditions

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that enable translational actions, from a sociological point of view, and the reasoning and excellences required by translational agents, from the point of view of ethics and moral psychology.

Secondly, a more comprehensive assessment of existing concepts of historical agency, including the poetic paradigm, would be needed to see if the critique offered in the second chapter truly holds across all its instances. I suspect that we find versions of the poetic paradigm in many classical German thinkers and their readers, from Schiller and Marx to Blanqui and Badiou, in the Romantics, in Nietzsche and Heidegger, Weber's charismatic leaders, 19th century Great Man theorists and 20th century fascists, even in certain discourses of economic (neo-)liberalism, from the creative destructions of Schumpeterian entrepreneurs to Silicon Valley's disruptors, and in liberal theorists of cultural change from Cassirer to Rorty. Are all their accounts of historical change and agency, sometimes specific to certain domains, like culture, politics, the economy, alike symptomatic of a modern incapacity to mourn, personally and structurally?

Thirdly, I have proposed my concept of translational action on the basis of a German translation practice around 1800. It would be very interesting to study other historical translation practices, first, to see whether the method-mix I developed for analyzing translational paratexts can be brought to bear on them, too, and, secondly, to pluralize the bases from which to theorize translational responses to historical crises.

Appendices

A1. Historical Shifts in the Semantics of Genius around 1800

In Section Two, I claimed that Kant's introduction of the concept of genius into his philosophy of history reflected a historical tendency by which the semantics of genius expanded after 1789 to increasingly include also political and military leaders. Here, I offer some evidence for this claim.

Where there was talk of historical genius in late 18th and early 19th century Germany, it referred almost always to the inspired writer of history, not the inspired maker of history—exclusively so, I believe, prior to the French Revolution and commonly for a long time afterwards still. See the entries below for Johann Christoph Gatterer (1767), Friedrich Eberhard Boysen and Johann Gottfried Herder (both 1769), Gottlob David Hartman (1773), Carl Friedrich Flögel (1778), Johann August Eberhard (1778), Jonas Ludwig von Heß (1792), Karl Ludewig Woltmann (in 1795 and 1797), Johann Christoph Adelung's Grammatical-Critical Dictionary of 1796, Victorin Laaber (1801), August Ludwig Schlözer (1802), Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1805), Wilhelm Körte (1806), the Munich Royal Academy of Science in a prize question of 1811, an anonymous reviewer of August Wilhelm Schlegel's Indological journal, *Indische Bibliothek* (first volume, 1820), and August Wilhelm Rehberg, responding to Woltmann, in 1829.

There are instances prior to 1789 of military and political leaders, like Cesar and Alexander, being referred to as geniuses, but they are rare. Often, they will be translations, for example, of David Hume's History of England from 1762 or an essay on genius by the French Abbé du Bos, translated in 1752. "Genius" (*Genie*) was generally perceived as a French loanword in Germany, and I have found only two originally German instance of the term genius being applied to Cesar from before 1780: from the *Sturm und Drang*, Thomas Abbt's 1761 treatise on dying for the fatherland and J. H. Gellius' *Julius Cesar—A Tragedy* of 1763. Then, in 1785, an anonymous, satirical novella in the journal *Olla potrida*

mentions Cesar's genius, but only to mock the idea.

The tone shifts in the wake of the French Revolution. Cesar's genius is mentioned unironically by Butenschoen in 1789, Alexander's by C. H. Müller in 1792, Cesar again by Libenroth in 1799, in a treatise comparing the end of the Roman and French monarchies, by Meißner and Haken in 1812 and the Brockhaus Encyclopedia (the entry on "Gauls," *Gallier*) in 1822. Girtanner in 1797 notes a lack of men of genius among the French Revolutionaries. The term is also part and parcel of German discourse around Napoleon from the early 1800s onwards: Adam Heinrich Dietrich von Bülow in 1804, Saul Ascher in 1808, Johann Christoph von Aretin and Christian Ulrich Detlev von Egger in 1810, and Ludwig Harscher von Almendingen in 1811, as well as many other anonymous publications from before 1815, all either speak of it as a matter of course, or actively seek to disprove it.

Among theorists, Schiller, in his 1789 inaugural lecture, *What is and to what end ought one study universal history?*, delivered a mere month before the storming of the Bastille, still primarily talks about artistic and scientific genius, as the context and topic of his speech would suggest. But concerns about genius' historical efficacy and legacy are unmistakably present in its opening and closing paragraphs, and in his chief philosophical oeuvre, *Naive and Sentimental Poetry* (1795), Schiller talks about the genius of great statesmen, side by side with poetic genius, in explicitly parallel that Wilhelm Traugott Krug, for example, in a philosophical treatise of 1818 will try to theorize as the difference between aesthetic and practical genius.

A2. On the Database and Corpus of Translational Paratexts

This appendix makes transparent how I assembled the database of translations and, on its basis, the corpus of translational paratexts. For invaluable assistance with all technical matters, I want to offer heartfelt thanks to Jeffrey Tharsen at the outset.

Existing databases of translations for the period 1750-1830 proved insufficient. The national bibliography for the 19th century (*Verzeichnis der Druckwerke für das 18. Jahrhundert*, or VD18) is comprehensive, but ends, of course, in 1800. The Heidelberger Translation Bibliography (*HÜB*) ranges from 1450-1850 but includes only non-fiction translations and almost exclusively from Latin, French, English, and Dutch.

So, I have used optical character recognition (OCR) software to turn the catalogues of the Frankfurt and Leipzig book-fairs, the largest German book-fairs, dating from 1594-1860, into machine-searchable text.[402] As a rule, each year had two book fairs, one at Easter, one at Michaelmas. I have used the Michaelmas catalogues, because they tend to be shorter, from the years 1750, 1760, 1770… 1830, and I searched these for translations.

Accounting for variations in spelling, bibliographical format, and errors in the OCR transcription, I have searched these for the strings "übers, überf, übert, uebers, ueberf, uebert, aus dem" to catch instances of "übersetzen" or "übertragen," two common words for translation, and the phrase "from the (*aus dem*)" which would often be used to indicate translations (as in "from the French"). Using a variety of search terms also meant that the translations selected came from every section of each

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[402] This project has been done in cooperation with Jeff Tharsen. The database and a custom-built n-gram viewer (to plot word-frequencies over time) are freely available here: https://github.com/thars3n/messkataloge. We estimate the OCR accuracy rate to be around 98%. This already opens up a lot of possibilities for work in the history of the book, publishing history, and intellectual history. Of course, the catalogues can lay no claim to comprehensiveness, and it is true that sometimes they announced texts that, in the end, were never published. This is less relevant for us, since we only use the catalogues to establish a first database of translations from which we can then build a database of translator's *prefaces*, which is what we are actually interested in.

catalogue. This is important because, until well into the 18th century, they were not sorted alphabetically, but by genre. Simply taking the first 75 translations that show up from one search term, if a single search term could have yielded all, would have let to a structural bias towards the earlier sections (that is, theology).

I have further capped the total of translations taken from each catalogue at 75, for reasons of feasibility and to not overrepresent certain decades, since we are interested in changes in the preface form (and corresponding concepts of translation) over time, rather than absolute numbers of translations. However, most catalogues contained less than 75 translations, sometimes significantly less, while, in one instance (the 1780 catalogue), due to a miscount, I accidentally collected 84 translations. This has resulted in a database of 473 translations. Leaving aside an outlier case from 1723, they all range from between 1744 and 1842. The chart below shows how they distribute over time. We can see that, as expected, they cluster around the publication dates of the catalogue from which they are taken. Later decades are slightly overrepresented, reflecting also the fact that the absolute number of translations increased during the time period considered. The decline around 1810, I suspect, is the effect of the Napoleonic Wars.
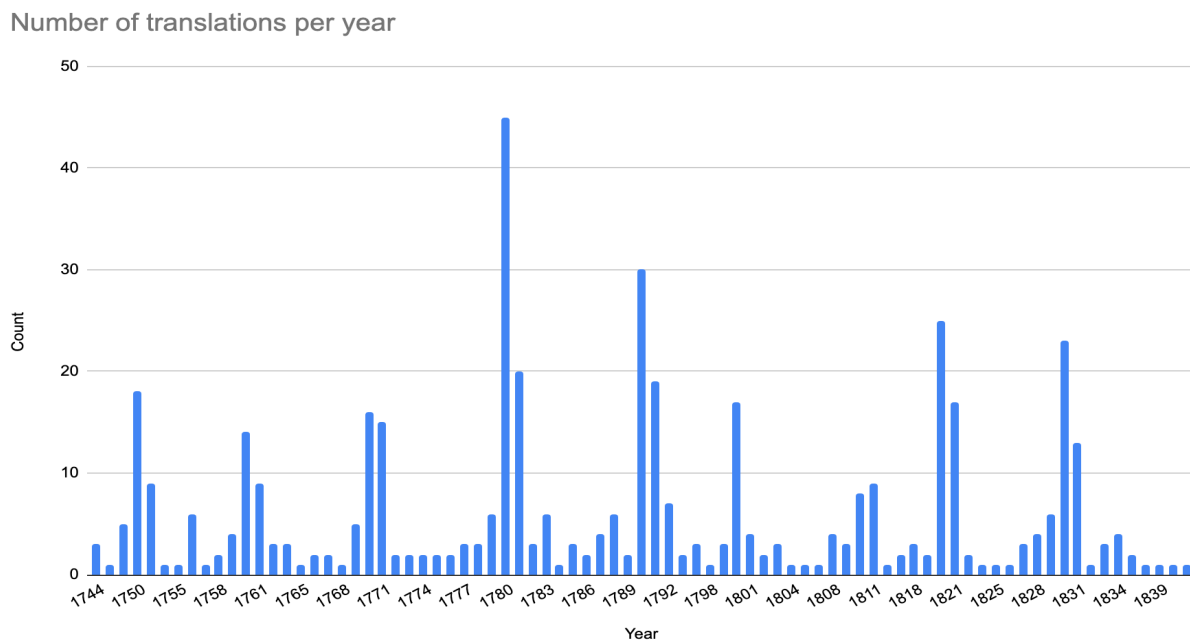
Figure 10. Absolute number of translations per year.

I have only included translations for which I could find digital copies, to confirm that they did, in fact, exist, and whether they included translational paratexts. Some translations listed in the catalogues either were never published, or lost in time, or are not yet digitized. Usually, it has not been possible to tell which of these is the case for any missing translation, except occasionally when we find reviews of translations, confirming their existence, but no scans of the texts themselves.

From this database of translations that I verified to have existed, I have built a corpus of 331 "translators prefaces" which I use as shorthand for all kinds of book-immanent paratexts (or "peritexts" – Genette), that functionally serve as translators prefaces. This includes proper translator's prefaces alongside prefatory notes, introductions, and prefaces written either by the translators themselves, or by editors, or sometimes famous writers of scholars – as long as they recognizably, functionally serve to reflect on translation, even where this is not their primary purpose, but perhaps only a secondary purpose. For all the translations that did include a translator's preface, in this broad sense, I have also

included two other kinds of paratexts: title pages and also dedicatory letters, because these were typically written by the translators. Strictly speaking, it would be more appropriate to refer to the corpus as consisting of translational paratext-sets, but throughout I shall use translator's preface as shorthand. One type of paratext that includes substantial reflection on translation but was not included for any case in the database, were translator's notes, spread throughout the body of the text, because it was not feasible to collect them.[403]

The difference in the number of translations in the database and the number of prefaces in the corpus is primarily due to the fact that not all translations received a preface. There were less than a handful of cases of texts pretending to be translations, and two cases where not the full preface was digitized.[404] There is the possibility that other texts, too, originally had prefaces that were cut in the digitization process, but I have found no indication to think that this was common practice. To the contrary, most text that were digitized at all seem to have been handled with extraordinary care as to their comprehensiveness.

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[403] One translator memorably concludes his preface with the words: "In the notes, we shall meet again" ("In den Noten sehen wir uns wieder," 1811_001).

[404] The two incomplete prefaces are in 1760_014 and 1838_001.

A3. On the Construal of Genre Moves in Translational Paratexts

This appendix makes transparent how I construed each of the genre moves and formal features which I tracked systematically across the corpus. Section III introduced all of them that I also collect in the "index of reflexivity"; this list is slightly more comprehensive.[405]

[1] Does the translation have a translator's preface, in our broad sense of the term?
[2] Is the primary purpose of that paratext to reflect on translation?
[3] Was it written by the translator?
[4] How is it titled?
[5] What is its word-length?

[1] to [3] are coded as binary variables; [4] as a string of characters; [5] as an integer. "Reflecting on translation" is defined as containing information on at least one of the four basic terms (see Section II). [2] will be marked negative if all the paratexts, other than the title page, that reflect on translation serve a primary function other than being a translator's preface: for example, if the reflections on translation are folded into a dedicatory letter,[406] a technical introduction, or a separate essay by the translator accompanying the text. It will, however, be marked positive, if the paratexts in question are *de facto* translator's prefaces in all but name, written, for example, by an editor.[407] [3] and [5] are self-explanatory;[408] [4] captures the rich variety of titles given to the paratext reflecting on translation: prologue (*Vorrede*), preface (*Vorwort*), the harder to translate *Vorerinnerung* (roughly: pre-reminder),

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[405] It includes also title and length of preface, social class, gender, and number of the translator, as well as whether external motivations for translating are mentioned in the preface.

[406] For example, in the cases of 1750_007, 1751_010, 1766_001, 1772_001.

[407] For example, in the case of 1770_004.

[408] Just as there are cases of de facto translator's prefaces written by people other than the translator, there are also cases of paratexts reflecting on translation written by translator's whose primary purpose, nonetheless, is not that of a translator's preface (but, for example, of a dedicatory letter.) Tracking [3] separately preserves that information. 1771_010 is a borderline case: it is written by the editor, but includes a long footnote written separately by the translator.

introduction (*Einleitung*), and often simply forms of address to the reader ("*Geneigter Leser!*").

The translator. Regarding the translator, I have tracked the following information:

[6] nymity,

[7] social position,

[8] gender,

[9] number.

All but [7] are coded as binary variables; [7] was coded through letters representing social classes (A for aristocracy, B for bourgeoisie) with the possibility of multiple letters per entry for cases of co-translators who come from different classes. Nymity refers to whether they are identified by their real name, by a pseudonym, are referred to anonymously, or go entirely unmentioned. I have marked this field as 1, when the translator is identified by their real name and 0 otherwise. Under [7] social position, I have tracked whether the translators are members of the aristocracy (A), clergy (C), the bourgeoisie (B), are anonymous (N), or named, but of unidentifiable class (X). For translators who ascended to the clergy or aristocracy at one point during their lives, I have marked their social position according to the time of the translation. I have inferred [8] gender from their names, where known, and sometimes from additional information in the prefaces, coding it as binary (since there were no indications of other genders in the corpus). The [9] number of translators involved was taken from the title pages or the prefaces themselves and coded as either a single translator (zero) or multiple translators (one). Given the small number of co-translations in the corpus, I has been feasible, to note for each co-translation also the precise number of translator's wherever that information is preserved.

Reasoning preceding the action. Section II argued that the action of translation is preceded by a distinct kind of practical reasoning that establishes the desirability and possibility (of the possibility)

of the translation. Such reasoning is reasoning at the level of the whole of the original. I have chosen to focus on the following genre moves:

[10] descriptions of content,

[11] context for original and/or author,

[12] purpose of translation,

[13] reflections on the target context,

[14] justifications,

[15] external motivations for translating,

[16] trust in the non-impossibility of translation.

These and all of the following are coded as binary variables. [10] Descriptive introductions refers to one of the most basic moves: the translator introduces their text to the audience by giving a description of what it is they are translating. [11] collects source context-side information given beyond the original: anything about its author, their larger oeuvre, or the times and place work and author are from, the conditions of the work's genesis, etc. Some of this contextualization can happen in a translator's notes (which we capture with another genre move). Here, I collect only contextualization that occurs in the preface. [10] and [11] answer to the question: what is being translated?

[12] to [15] answer to the question: why is it good, or needful, to translate this text? [12] tracks information given as to the purpose of the translations. Often the purpose is given in terms of certain qualities predicated of the original that make it worthy of translation, such as its usefulness (*Nützlichkeit*), pleasantness (*Annehmlichkeit*), its edifying power *(Erbaulichkeit)*. These might be specified further: usefulness, for example, in moral or scientific terms. Sometimes the purpose is given in terms of a need in the target context, for example, the lack of a certain kind of text. Translators of technical, medical, and scientific texts will often evaluate the factual accuracy, comprehensiveness, or up-to-date-ness of their originals. Some translators distinguish between their main purpose (*Hauptzweck*), next to

secondary purposes (*Nebenzwecke*). We have collected all of these here, since they all answer to the question: why translate this text, in terms that have something to do with the inner qualities of the text translated and, potentially, a corresponding need in the target context.

Translators often seek to establish that their translation is worthwhile not just because of the abstract goodness of the original, but its concrete goodness for the envisaged target-context audience in particular. This will involve what I call [13] historical self-location: any account of the translator's own historical and cultural context, in aesthetic, moral, scientific, etc., – very often also in religious terms – falls under this heading, as well as linguistic self-location insofar as the reasoning moves at the level of the whole. (Linguistic self-location insofar as it concerns specific translational choices, hence reasoning about parts, is tracked separately.)

Beyond stating their purposes, translators will pursue a variety of [14] justificatory strategies to further buttress their claims to the translation-worthiness of their original. This is the most common genre move. Here it has proved feasible to track several distinct justification strategies, as possible steps within one genre move: [14.1] citing authorities on the worthiness of the original, [14.2] citing authorities on the worthiness of the author, [14.3] evaluating the original further in their own name, [14.4] evaluating the author further in their own terms. This can involve lengthy, more detailed favorable descriptions.[409] Where the preface is not written by the translators themselves, but, for example, by an editor, we sometimes also find praise of the translation or the translator, but these are rarer, and I have not tracked them separately.[410]

Finally, I have tracked [15] external motivations for translating such as money, fame, professional obligations, high command, favors to friends, the desire to not loose one's fluency in a language, or

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[409] Sometimes this will overlap with the descriptions collected under [5].
[410] Case where translator is son of the author and, thus, offers no justification/praise: 1800_011.

the trendiness of translation as such.

[16] Discussions of the trust needed to set out on translating a text are relatively rare in the corpus, although they do exist. Often such thematization takes the form of discourse on the difficulties inherent in translation and the uncertainties as to its outcome. I have made sure to include here only cases where those difficulties and uncertainties pertain to the work of translation itself, not, for example, any trepidations, pretended or otherwise, about *publishing* the translation. (It is very common in 18th and early 19th century prefaces to feign great hesitations as a form of *captatio benevolentiae*.)

Reasoning within the action. The action itself was said to consist of a beginning, a middle, and an end. The turn to the original marks its beginning. Several recurring features reveal how the original is initially seized. I am tracking whether the prefaces offer

[17] philological remarks,
[18] discussions of cuts,
[19] additions,
[20] and other changes to the original

Under [17] philological remarks, I collect everything that shows an awareness of the text as a historically and materially constituted entity, such as bibliographical information about the original, or discussions which edition or manuscript the translator took as authoritative.

Regarding [18] to [20], it is worth pointing out that a negative mark for any given entry means either that no cuts, additions, or changes were made to the original, or that they were simply not thematized. Sometimes translator's expressly mention that they did *not* make any cuts to the original or, contrary to convention, did not provide any additions (such as notes, appendixes, or other forms of supplements) to the text. [20] collects all changes made to the original that are neither cuts, nor additions, but, for example, changes to the order of the material, or corrections of (factual) errors.

Regarding the middle of the action, the *how* of translation proper, I have been tracking whether the prefaces contain

[21] basic information about how the translator wants to translate,

[22] discussions of previous translations,

[23] reflections on the peculiarities of the languages involved,

[24] (proto-)theory,

[25] discussions of examples,

[26] and of the use of translation aides.

[21] collects anything from a few adjectives used to describe the translation as, for example, faithful (*treu*), free (*frei*), literal, (*wörtlich*), metrical, clear (*deutlich*), readable, etc., to basic descriptions of the translation as, for instance, a prose translation.

[22] collects all discussion of previous translations, including non-German previous translations. During the 18th century, German translators will often compare their own efforts with earlier French translations, even where they did not relay translate from the French, but from the original source language. I did not count instances of translators thematizing that they are the first to translate this text, or discussions of previous translations they or someone else did of different works by the same author, but I did count comparisons with previous editions of the same translation, where the text indicates that the new edition amounts to a substantial revision. I also did not count discussions of unfinished draft translations that the translator inherited from someone else who was supposed to do the work initially.

[23] collects reflections on the particularities of the two languages involved and how these facilitate or hinder the work of translation. [24] traces (proto-)theoretical discussions in the prefaces: any sort of claims made about translation as such, whose generality aims beyond the context of the translation at hand: for example, definitions of what one means by fidelity, or statements of principles that the

translator held themselves to. If discussions of examples are then used to show how these general principles bear on particular instances [25] will be marked positive. [26] tracks the discussion of textual translation aids: commentaries, dictionaries, and, for example, existing translations of classical authors who are quoted in the text one translates.[411]

The action of translation culminates in the translation produced. From this point, two typical genre moves, often located towards the end of a preface, are

[27] forms of apology and
[28] expressions of hope.

The former look back at the now finished translation. The translators identify mistakes that were made, explain why they occurred and why they could not have been avoided; they promise how they will be remedied in future editions, and ask their readers for indulgence. All of these are collected in [27]. Expressions of hope look forward in time. [28] collects hopes that the translation will see future editions, perhaps revised, hopes for future translations on the part of other translators, hopes for future creations of similar works directly in the target language, and other kinds of goodness they hope their work brings about. Often, these will be couched in religious language.

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[411] Sometimes, translators will mention having had aid in editing the text by friends, or authorities on the subject matter. I did not include these here.

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Chapter 1. World-loss, Mourning, and Historical Agency

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Appendix One. Notes on an 18th Cent. Semantic Expansion of the Term Genius

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