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The Ironical Allegory of Remembrance and Oblivion

(In Memory of Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida)*

Paul de Man, in *Allegories of Reading*, refers to irony as the key rhetorical and linguistic figure of his allegorical readings. It looks as if everything/it was *turned* upon by irony: the figure is shown as the trope of tropes, the essence of rhetoric. The surprising and effective ending can also be read as the beginning of another story which would be about the understanding of the relation between irony and allegory. "I have never known how to tell a story," Derrida says in the opening of his lecture-series, *Mémoires*, dedicated to his friend de Man's memory. This story of remembrance introduced by an ironical and self-reflective statement, which can be taken as the mirror-image of the de Manian closing, is speaking about the allegorical reading, or rather unreadability of irony. In this particular story, embedded in the context of allegory and irony, such flowers of rhetoric flourish as Mnemosyne, Lethe, Psyche or Narcissus. In my text I am trying to interpret these rhetorical figures in these two thinkers' works, while the recurrent 'narcissus' becomes the rhetorical flower of (my) reading.

> Of the two springs called Mnemosyne and Lethe, which is the right one for Narcissus?
> The other.
>
> *(Jacques Derrida)*

In his *Allegories of Reading* – in its concluding and rather 'telling' chapter titled "Excuses" – Paul de Man refers to irony as the key rhetorical and linguistic figure of his allegorical readings: "Irony is no longer a trope but the undoing of the deconstructive allegory of all tropological cognitions, the systematic undoing, in other

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words, of understanding. As such, far from closing off the tropological system, irony enforces the repetition of its aberration."[1] While the first sentence of the quotation dreadfully questions the seemingly 'closing off' readings of the previous chapters, in the second the proliferation of other possible readings is promised. It looks as if it/everything was *turned* upon by irony: the figure is shown as the trope of tropes, the essence of rhetoric. The surprising and effective ending can also be read as the beginning of another story which would be about the understanding of the relation between irony and allegory.

Now it is appropriate to quote another statement: "I have never known how to tell a story," as Derrida says in the opening of the very first part of his lecture series, *Mémoires*, dedicated to de Man's memory.[2] This story of remembrance introduced by an ironical and self-reflective statement, which can be taken as the mirror-image of the de Manian closing, is speaking about the allegorical reading/unreadability of irony. Derrida also claims that he "love[s] nothing better than remembering and Memory itself";[3] thus, his strange confession about his 'inability felt as a sad infirmity' can be connected with the possibility (or impossibility) of *my own* story-telling. In this particular story, embedded in the context of allegory and irony, such flowers of rhetoric flourish as Mnemosyne, Lethe, Psyche or Narcissus. In my text I am trying to interpret these rhetorical figures in the above-mentioned two thinkers' works, while the recurrent 'Narcissus' becomes the rhetorical flower of (my) reading.

In one of his early writings, in the essay titled "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (in *Blindness and Insight*), de Man regards allegory together with irony as the key rhetorical tropes of our (textual) understanding. Although both show the discontinuous relationship between sign and meaning, and are characterised by temporality, the experience of time in the case of allegory means a diachronic (narrative), while in irony a synchronic (momentary) structure: "Essentially the mode of the present, [irony] knows neither memory nor prefigurative duration, whereas allegory exists entirely within an ideal time that is never here and now but always a past or an endless future. . . . Yet the two modes, for all their profound distinctions in mood and structure, are the two faces of the same fundamental experience of time."[4] According

1. Paul de Man, "Excuses," in *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979), 278–301, p. 301.

2. Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires for Paul de Man*, trans. C. Lindsay, J. Culler, E. Cadava (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), p. 3.

3. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 3.

4. Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight* (London: Routledge, 1993), 187–228, p. 226.

to de Man, allegory is in charge of the individual narratives while irony with its sudden interference interrupts, then restarts the interpretative activity. In the essay, de Man's famous example is William Wordsworth's poem titled "A slumber did my spirit seal,"[5] in which the persona's previous death and life-forgetting slumber is counterbalanced by his wise insight about the death of the beloved. Instead of this 'being counterbalanced,' I would rather say 'being ironised' but de Man claims that the poem is not ironic at all, and he tries to write the speaker's allegorical story referring to the phases as error-death-recognition-wisdom.

It can be accepted that the poem is basically allegorical but in the de Manian temporal scheme the moment of retrospection – in the twinkling of an eye/I – is assured by irony. The illusion of the allegorical timeless recollection in the first stanza is broken by the intrusion of the momentary ironical reminiscence, which makes not only the present of the second stanza, but also the past of the first stanza, 'real,' emphasising temporality. Whereas de Man speaks about "a stance of wisdom" that "is no longer vulnerable to irony";[6] that is, he does not realise that the co-operation of the two figures and their infinite playing gives the unique temporality of the poem. Nevertheless, he remarks that "[t]he structure of irony, however, is the reversed mirror-image of this [allegorical] form."[7] Since the mirror-reflection of a 'thing' is a reversed image, the reversal of the reversed can be thought of as re-establishing the real 'thing' – similarly to how the positive affirmative of double negation does. This scheme can be used in the poem as in the previous reflection of the lover's allegorical, imagined narration, the dead beloved seemed immortal and now she is really dead; that is, the allegory of remembering is reversed by the ironical insight of temporality. However, the story obviously does not end here because the work of recollection can be started any time, so that it should be reversed by irony – recollecting the previous ironically reversed recollections as well. Consequently, we cannot speak about tautology and one single chiastic transformation, but the relation between the two figures is unfolded in an 'infinite' number of chiasms. Since both of

5. "A slumber did my spirit seal; / I had no human fears; / She seemed a thing that could not feel / The touch of earthly years. // No motion has she now, no force; / She neither hears nor sees; / Rolled round in earth's diurnal course, / With rocks, and stones, and trees" (William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958], p. 79).

6. De Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," p. 224. See more about it in my paper titled "The 'Thing' Betwixt and Between: Irony and Allegory in Wordsworth's 'A slumber did my spirit seal,' " in *HUSSE Papers 2003* (University of Debrecen, 2004), 7–15.

7. De Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," p. 225.

them function as a swinging mirror, playing them off[8] and turning them against each other, the two mirrors will reflect each other *ad infinitum*. At this point we can remember the early romantic German critic and essayist, Friedrich Schlegel, whom de Man heartily and frequently quotes in his works, and his 116th *Athenaeum*-fragment, where he describes the romantic-poetic working process (cf. the new poesy) claiming that "on the wings of poetic reflection [one can] raise to higher and higher powers and multiply it, as it were, in an endless array of mirrors."[9] Being the motto of the so-called Jena Romantic School, this fragment shows/displays the progressiveness and infinity of the creative work, where the significance of irony is emphasised and allegory is neglected. The irony of the romantically poetical life-work is expressed in the artist's reflexivity and in the recognition of his own reflexivity, which, accepting the rhetoricity of language, we can read as the presentation of textual understanding itself.

But let me refer to a more puzzling statement taken from Walter Benjamin's *Das Passagen-Werk* on mirroring mirrors, which takes us closer to the story of allegory and irony: "If two mirrors behold each other, Satan plays his most favourite trick and, in his own way, opens up the perspective into infinity (just like his partner, in the other way, does it in the lovers' glance)."[10] In my paper, several times I will refer to Benjamin's images: the dull reflecting surface and the mirror of the eye. Right now the interpretation of these would lead us far away, but with the help of the quotation we can turn back to the reflection of allegory and irony. In the conclusion of "The Rhetoric of Temporality" showing the possible combination of allegory and irony, de Man also refers to a love-story in Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme* as an example. The novel tells the story of two unfortunate lovers, who cannot be together, thus, their allegory recalls the myth of Eros and Psyche. In the mythical narrative, Psyche cannot see her lover and should not look for his identity, and when the truth comes to light only after rough trials, only in her death – that is, in immortality – does she

8. De Man mentions in the same article that in the question of irony vs. allegory, "[o]ne is tempted to play them off against each other and to attach value judgments to each, as if one were intrinsically superior to the other." See "The Rhetoric of Temporality," p. 226.

9. Quoted in Ernst Behler, "The Theory of Irony in German Romanticism," in *Romantic Irony*, ed. Frederick Garber (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988), 43–81, p. 58.

10. "Blicken zwei Spiegel einander an, so spielt der Satan seinen liebsten Trick und öffnet auf seine Weise (wie sein Partner in den Blicken der Liebenden tut) die Perspektive ins Unendliche" (Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* [Frankfurt an Main: Suhrkamp, 1982], vol. 5, p. 1049, my translation).

'really' become her beloved's true partner.[11] In de Man's reading, Psyche's story as "the myth of the unovercomable distance"[12] thematises not only the disruption in understanding that separates individuals (or Stendhal's pseudonymous and nominal selves), but also the breaks in our reading of a text – that is, the ironical reversal/twisting of the allegorical narrative/myth.

In his lecture, "Psyche: Inventions of the Other" ("Psyche: Invention de l'autre"), Derrida also speaks of Amor and Psyche's story (*fable*) given in Apuleius's work and hints at de Man's above mentioned interpretation of the myth. But beforehand, in his lecture, he dedicates the reading of Francis Ponge's poem titled "Fable" to his (dead) friend. For Derrida, this short text recalls the memory of the three thinkers' relationship and it also speaks of the interrelation between allegory and irony. So the *fable* reads:

> *By the word by commences then this text*
> *Of which the first line states the truth*
> *But this silvering under the one and other*
> *Can it be tolerated?*
> *Dear reader already you judge*
> *There as to our difficulties. . .*

then the six italicised lines are followed by the last two put in brackets:

> (AFTER seven years of misfortune
> She broke her mirror.)[13]

The 'fable' is telling the story of its own story-telling, that is, it 'creates' itself starting the endless mirroring of the written words. In this play, however, the text "presents itself ironically as an allegory 'of which the first line states the truth': truth

11. See in Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. Robert Graves (Penguin Books, 1950).

12. De Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," p. 228.

13. Jacques Derrida, "Psyche: Inventions of the Other," trans. by Catherine Porter, in *Reading de Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 25–65, p. 30. In the original, the *fable* of "Fable" runs: "*Par le mot* par *commence donc ce texte / Dont la première ligne dit la vérité / Mais ce tain sous l'une et l'autre / Peut-il être toléré? / Cher lecteur déjà tu juges / Là de nos difficultés. . .* (APRÈS sept ans de malheurs / Elle brisa son miroir)" (p. 30). Cf. Jacques Derrida, "Psyché: Invention de l'autre," in *Psyché* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), 11–61, p. 19. Writing my paper I used both the original essay and the English translation.

of allegory and allegory of truth, truth as allegory."[14] We cannot overstep the relation of the two figures and words, we cannot cross over to the other side of the mirror as we cannot go beyond 'ourselves' and language, and 'our selves' in language. In the last lines of the poem, there is only one possible way of getting outside the fable – its allegory, or rather its irony – which is an extremely narcissistic one. Here the self, who destroys the mirror and together with it the self, is introduced by the feminine personal pronoun, she (*elle*). This 'she' appears as an allegorical figure and can be associated with the French feminine (la) *fable/Fable*, or Truth (*la vérité*), which is tautological regarding the second line of "Fable." At this point Derrida refers to the dead female figure ('she') in de Man's favourite Wordsworth-poem so as to lead us to the figure of Psyche.

The French *psyché* – besides its usage as a proper name (*Psyché*) – as a common name has preserved not only the original meaning of the Greek psyche, but it also means a revolving mirror.[15] The French *psyché* is a very special kind of mirror as it has two reflecting surfaces on both sides, which are connected and separated by the 'psyche' of the mirror, its silvering/tain. The tain is the *inventio* of the mirror as its surface blocks transparency and without the tain the mirror does not reflect anything. If two persons are standing at each side of such a 'mirror,' without the tained surface, as if a pane of glass were between them, they could see each other clearly; more exactly, losing their own reflection, they could see only the other. However, here, as in all texts, we have a mirror, in which we cannot see anybody other than ourselves. Except if at the right angle we place another mirror facing the first (at both sides) and it will generate the mirror-play of reflection. Similarly, now I am flashing de Man-reflections in Derrida's texts and Derrida-references in de Man's works. It is not by chance that to his work on Derrida's reflexivity, Rodolphe Gasché gave the title, *The Tain of the Mirror*. As he claims: "Derrida's philosophy, rather than being a philosophy of reflection, is engaged in the systematic exploration of that dull surface without which no reflection and no specular and speculative activity would be possible, but which at the same time has no place and no part in reflection's scintillating play."[16]

14. Derrida, "Psyche: Invention of the Other," p. 31.

15. Cf. "Psyche: A mirror that swings in a frame; a cheval glass. In full psyche glass." In *A Dictionary of American English*, ed. Sir William A. Craigie and James R. Hulbert (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1942), vol. III, p. 1849.

16. Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard UP, 1986), p. 6.

Turning back to the de Manian Psyche-reference, Derrida disappointedly states that here de Man speaks not about the mirror, but about the mythical character. Nevertheless, in his summary he reveals that this passage still "matters much [to us] since it also points up the distance between the two 'selves' (*moi-mêmes*), the subject's two selves, the impossibility of seeing and touching oneself at the same time, the 'permanent parabasis' and the 'allegory of irony.' "[17] In this blink of the eye, the mirror-play between the two thinkers' texts can be traced and the con-text is brought to life by recollection. Although in Derrida's "Psyche" several de Manian texts and ideas are referred to, there it is not the allegory and irony of remembrance that are put in the centre. Actually, Derrida only uses the Apuleian Psyche's fable and Ponge's "Fable" as pre-text(s) in his introduction on rhetoricity and the deconstruction of classical rhetoric. In the title of the work, "Psyche: Inventions of the Other" (*Psyche: Invention de l'autre*), the classical *inventio* as the first operation of the rhetorical machinery, *tekhnē rhetorikē*, alludes not to the invention, but the (re-)discovery of arguments.[18] He claims that we cannot create new things in our invention and he speaks about the finding or discovering of machines. According to Derrida, today we work with ready made (allegorical) narrating machines but the deconstructive invention aims at reaching some *other* outside the machinery as deconstruction wants "to allow the coming of the entirely other" (*laisser venir le tout autre*).[19] However, 'the other in his/her/its own otherness' cannot be placed into our context, cannot be understood and read. Thus, we can do nothing *else* then undertake this 'mission impossible' and "get ready for this coming of the other" (*se préparer à cette venue de l'autre*).[20]

This rather utopian (and quite messianic) idea and the undertaken mission influences those three lectures that Derrida wrote to commemorate de Man's death and published together under the provocative title: *Mémoires for Paul de Man*. The first word of the title with the already-quoted opening sentence – "I have never known how to tell a story" – can be taken as an inventive beginning of an autobiographical writing. But from the introductory "A peine" it becomes obvious that in these texts the mourning Derrida remembers de Man – unfortunately, speaking about him and not to him. At the same time, the promise formulated in the title re-

17. Derrida, "Psyche: Invention of the Other," p. 39. Cf. "Psyché," p. 30.

18. Derrida, "Psyche: Invention of the Other," p. 51. Cf. "Psyché," p. 47.

19. Derrida, "Psyche: Invention of the Other," p. 55. Cf. "Psyché," p. 53.

20. Derrida, "Psyche: Invention of the Other," p. 56 and "Psyché," p. 53. Derrida also calls our attention to the same root of the words 'event,' 'advent' and 'invention' – linked to the Latin coming (*venire*).

calls the promise of "Psyche": to let the other come out in mourning and remembrance. Thus, it is not a surprise that in the conclusion of the first lecture, "Mnemosyne," we can again meet the allegorical figure of (the) *psyche*. Remembering the beloved friend and referring to the favourite Wordsworth poem, Derrida dis-plays the irony of the other's inaccessibility:

> The death of the other, if we can say this, is also situated on our side at the very moment when it comes to us from an altogether other side. . . . In another context, I have called this Psyche: Psyche, the proper name of an allegory; Psyche, the common name for the soul; and Psyche, in French, the name of a *revolving mirror*. Today it is no longer Psyche, but apparently Mnemosyne. In truth, tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow, the 'naked name' will be Paul de Man. This is what we shall call to, and toward which we shall again *turn* our thoughts.[21]

In his *Mémoires*, Derrida deals with the nature of true 'mourning' and 'true' remembrance while paying attention to the most important ideas and tropes of the de Manian oeuvre. In the Mnemosyne lecture named after the goddess of memory, there are several hints about de Man's and Derrida's theory of remembrance. Here, just like in the other two lectures – "The Art of *Mémoires*" and "Acts" – two kinds of memory are distinguished, which is based on and *recalls* a late essay of de Man titled "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*." The German *Erinnerung* signifies the interiorizing memory, while *Gedächtnis* the mechanical memorization, but – as Derrida says – "the relation between memory and interiorizing recollection is not 'dialectical,' as Hegelian interpretation and Hegel's interpretation would have it, but one of rupture, heterogeneity, disjunction."[22] In order to be able to mechanically and automatically remember something using our memory, we should forget about recollection, that is, we should avoid being lost in reverie meditating upon the past. Derrida cites de Man's statement twice, namely: "memory effaces remembrance,"[23] but he fails to quote the whole sentence (he may have misrecollected it or his memory has played him false). Quoting the whole statement from de Man's text: "Memory effaces remembrance (or recollection) just as it effaces itself."[24] In this text, which is concerned with the Hegelian theory of signification, the activities of the symbolical rec-

21. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 39, my italics.
22. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 56.
23. Derrida, *Mémoires*, pp. 62 and 72.
24. Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics," in *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 91–104, p. 102.

ollection and allegorical remembrance are replaced with memorization and writing linked to the sign. In the Greek tradition, Mnemosyne serves as a storehouse of all the stories and no kind of knowledge can be achieved without her help. Her important role is related with the strong verbality ('oral fixation') of Greek culture, where writing and the use of written records were thought to weaken memory and make man absentminded/forgetful. I do not want to dwell on the forgetfulness and memento of writing (which is introduced and dealt as a pharmakon in Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy"), I would rather call attention to the element of forgetting. According to Derrida, "for de Man, great thinker and theorist of memory, there is only memory but, strictly speaking, the past does not exist";[25] thus, in his allegorical readings, de Man always writes (about) the rhetoric of remembrance and of temporality.

If the source of all the allegories is memory and de Man is labelled as "the thinker and theorist of memory," then Derrida is the one who writes about the art of remembering *and* forgetting. The above quoted de Manian statement about memorization is elaborated in Derrida's 'memoirs' – Derrida's *Mémoires* written for de Man – where besides Mnemosyne, the mythical figure of forgetting/oblivion, Lethe, appears on the scene. Although the two characters are not closely related in Greek mythology, Pausanias records that the two fountains of the rivers, which are named after the two goddesses, can be found in the human world and they are close to each other.[26] Derrida also refers to this *locus classicus* and, while he takes Lethe as the allegory of oblivion, sleep and death, he regards her opposite, Mnemosyne, as the allegory of truth, that is *a-lethe-ia*. What is more, he connects the two allegorical figures, doing it in defence of his long de Manian quotations in his *Mémoires* (without giving the exact *source*):

> Fidelity requires that one quote, in the desire to let the other speak; and fidelity requires that one not just quote, not restrict oneself to quoting. It is with the law of this double law that we are here engaged, and this is also

25. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 58.

26. In Greek theogony, opposed to the bright goddess of Mnemosyne, Lethe is the daughter of Eris and the offspring of Night, and one of the rivers in Hades, the one making the souls of the dead forget their previous existence on earth, is named after her. If ever anybody is allowed back to life, again they have to drink from the river so as not to remember the afterlife. The well of Mnemosyne makes the dead who drink from it remember their lives, as opposed to the well of Lethe which makes them forget. See H. J. Rose, "The Children of Kronos II," in *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1959), 78–101.

> the double law of Mnemosyne – unless it is the common law of the double source, Mnemosyne/Lethe: source of memory, source of forgetting.[27]

I wonder how the (inner) remembrance, (outer) memory and (inner/outer) forgetting are related. In the Hegel text we have already read that the basis of memorizing is given by the forgetting of remembrance, which the forgetting of memory goes with. That is, we can achieve memory and the allegorical remembering narratives through forgetting, the ironical act of forgetting recollection itself. Referring back to, and re-interpreting his opening sentence ("I have never known how to tell a story"), Derrida, in the conclusion of the second lecture, "The Art of *Mémoires*," considers whether he suffers from amnesia or hyper-mnesia. It seems that the recalling of allegorical and mythical figures *springs* from the lack or incapability of story-telling – whether from the *spring* of oblivion or from the *spring* of remembrance?

Derrida's text disseminates its ideas pointing at different directions for discussion, but I am still trying to follow the thread of my chosen narrative about the interrelation between allegory and irony. That is, interpreting the de Manian reminiscents, I am going to pay attention to the (en)twin(ing) of the two allegorical figures. Derrida also tries to follow the thread of his de Manian recollection, which calls and takes us into an endless chiasm from Mnemosyne to Lethe, then from Lethe to Mnemosyne. We should not forget that allegory as a recollective and narrative figure in its "specular self-reflection"[28] is of disjunctive structure: it says something, but always means something else (as well). The statements of remembrance cannot do without the moments of oblivion (either). On the basis of the chiastic relation between recollection and oblivion, Derrida ingeniously connects the two figures, as he thinks that the functioning of the two gives the rhetoric of memory, "which recalls, recounts, forgets, recounts, and recalls forgetting, referring to the past only to efface what is essential to it: anteriority."[29] In accordance with the earlier quoted de Manian definitions of allegory and irony, in our story the quasi-storyteller is diachronic allegory, while the other figure feigning amnesia is synchronic irony. That is, irony, just like allegory, is also a 'meaning one thing, saying another' type figure of self-duplicating and disjunctive structure, which, in the twinkling of an eye, is able to interrupt a narrative. It can interrupt a narrative, then it can (pretend to) cause this interruption to be forgotten so as to recall the allegorical functioning, in order to generate another break by recollecting the previous one(s), then pretend to efface the

27. Derrida, *Mémoires*, pp. 50–51.
28. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 76.
29. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 82.

memory of it/them – *ad infinitum*. It is only one further step for Derrida to 'discover' or display Mnemosyne as the allegory of allegory, Lethe as the allegorical-ironical figure, and their co-operation as "a kind of hybrid of two memories, or of a memory and an amnesia which divide the same act."[30] Similarly, the moments' questioning remembrance is necessarily inscribed in the Derridian flow(ers) of recollection in *Mémoires*.

Actually, it seems that throughout his work, Derrida is struggling not to come up with his de Man image, but to 'let the other come in his otherness.' Although the title itself ironically alludes to the autobiographical voice of memoirs, here Derrida shares with us the memories about de Man, as if these were collected *for* his dead friend as well. At the same time, the work – allegorically, or with a double metonymy – is also about "deconstruction in America," which would have been radically different without de Man. As he says: "But just as, under the name or in the name of Paul de Man, we cannot say everything about deconstruction (even in America), so I cannot, in such a short time and under the single title of memory, master or exhaust the immense work of Paul de Man. Let us call it allegory or double metonymy, this modest journey that I will undertake for a few hours with you."[31] In Derrida's text, de Man's favourite and recurrent metaphors or phrases are recalled or brought to light; all that Derrida attributes to his coming domain (cf. 'de Man').[32] Therefore, the title is a direct hit as the word, *mémoires*, refers to the recollecting and autobiographical nature of writing. At the same time, the subtitle with de Man's name transfers the previous statement into the world of the de Manian texts and readings, where every writing becomes an autobiography, or an epitaph. In "Autobiography As De-Facement" de Man analyses Wordsworth's *Essays Upon Epitaphs* displaying that the poet, like a ghost or a living dead, addresses us as if his voice came from beyond the grave. Thus, the essay becomes a "monumental inscription" or epitaph, where the text of the (speaking) gravestone is (firstly) read by the (seeing) sun:

> We can identify the figure that completes the central metaphor of the sun and thus completes the tropological spectrum that the sun engenders: it is the figure of prosopopeia, the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply

30. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 84.

31. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 20.

32. Not only Derrida but de Man himself often refers to puns, in which they use his name, starting from the obvious 'man,' through 'demand' to 'domain' or 'demesne' – moreover, as an anagram in 'madness.'

> and confers upon it the power of speech. Voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, *prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*).[33]

Relying on the chain of the main ideas in de Man's Wordsworth reading, the "tropological spectrum" starts from the sun metaphor, and through the eyes it ranges, or curves to the tongue and the ability of speaking. Its vaulting curve, at the same time, refers to the movement of the sun (the trope of light) on the horizon and to the perceptive and reading human eyes. Thus, the de Manian *prosopopeia*, of which reading "assumes the face," becomes the trope not only of autobiography, but also of reading. Derrida also regards the figure as de Man's "central metaphor," which "looks back and keeps in memory, we could say, clarifies and recalls . . . everything."[34] The figure becomes de Man's commemorative, or rather "sepulchral inscription" and later/now Derrida's monument as well.[35] In his "White Mythology" Derrida names the heliotrope as the dominant metaphor of philosophy since everything turns around light, the natural light of truth. The trope of the central metaphor, revolving around the sun, that is, being a *helios-tropos*, signifies at the same time the movement of the sun and the movement of turning towards it.[36] Thus, in the metaphors of a text, the rhetoricity of language is outspoken, or rather comes to (day)light, if we read the Derridian text with the help of de Man's prosopopeia.

Yet we should not forget about the reflective structure of reading and face-giving. The rhetorical figures, besides being the "the solar language of cognition"[37] and giving-face as textual tropes, are likely to assume a form, take a turn and deface. As de Man sums up: "[o]ur topic deals with the giving and taking away of faces,"[38] and he, with pleasure, utilises the meanings of the words deriving from *face* and *figure*. The expression of *defacement* in the title is related to the word, mask, which appears in the definition of prosopopeia, and it also recalls the problem of fiction vs. autobiography. According to Cynthia Chase, though "Autobiography As De-

33. Paul de Man, "Autobiography As De-Facement," in Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 67–81, p. 76.

34. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 27.

35. Derrida was alive when I started to write my essay in 2004. And now, in 2005, Derrida's *Mémoires* can also be read as his own sepulchral monument.

36. Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the text of Philosophy," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 207–272.

37. De Man, "Autobiography As De-Facement," p. 80.

38. De Man, "Autobiography As De-Facement," p. 76.

Facement" masterfully represents the disturbing effects caused by the dependence on figurative language, a 'perceptible' explanation is given in another de Man text titled "Wordsworth and the Victorians."[39] In this text, besides the frequent usage of the terms, face and face-making, de Man – almost compelling the reader to make a *face – effaces*[40] the difference between Wordsworth's rhetoric and his own. He quotes that passage from the third book of "Prelude," where the poetic eye / I while observing the various forms of nature "[c]ould find no surface where its power might sleep" (3.164).[41] Interpreting the line, de Man puns on the hidden *face* within *sur-face*, and he draws a parallel between the coming to the *sur-face*, the unexploited figurative richness of the text and the trope of face-giving: "The face, which is the power to surface from the sea of infinite distinctions in which we risk to drown, can find no surface."[42] We are to really feel that there is no resting place / surface for our understanding, and in a pun, in the twinkling of an eye, the reading of de Man's central metaphor, the prosopopeia, becames questionable.

In another text of *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, titled "Shelley Disfigured," in which de Man analyses Shelley's last and fragmentary *The Triumph Life*, we can again meet the key figures of the above-read "defacing" text. Yet here the textual plasticity is given not by the gravestone, or the epitaph inscribed on it, but by architecture and statuary: Rousseau, who greatly influenced Shelley's way of thinking, is presented as a stiffened statue with empty eyesockets. De Man places the allegory of Narcissus in the focal point of the text while paying attention to the sun-imagery of the poem. In his analysis, the movement of sunrise and sunset, together with the associated human activities – as birth/death, waking/sleeping and remembering/forgetting – are shown not in their disjunctive detachment, but in their intertwining (inter)relation. The lines – "So sweet and deep is the oblivious spell; / And

39. Cynthia Chase, "Giving a Face to a Name: De Man's Figures," in *Decomposing Figures: Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 82–113.

40. I happily recall the verb, effaces, in a de Manian statement about the effacement of memory. See earlier in the present paper.

41. Quoted in Paul de Man, "Wordsworth and the Victorians," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 83–92. p. 92. The whole passage runs: "an eye / Which, from a tree, a stone, a withered leaf, / To the broad ocean and the azure heavens / Spangled with kindred multitudes of stars, / Could find no surface where its power might sleep" (*The Works of William Wordsworth* [Wordsworth Editions, 1994], p. 651).

42. De Man, "Wordsworth and the Victorians," p. 92.

whether life had been before that sleep"[43] – in a Platonic way reveal that human awakening is connected with the state of coming into the world (birth). Accordingly, they claim that our life is characterised – and sealed – by a slumber, in which, quoting de Man, "a deeper sleep replacing a lighter one, a deeper forgetting being achieved by an act of memory which remembers one's forgetting."[44] Meanwhile, in the poem, the trope of light does not follow its right path on the sky – Shelley's sun is rather suspended as a pending question awaiting the answer. De Man brilliantly finds the appropriate metaphor: while in Wordsworth's works the sun usually "hangs" in the air,[45] in Shelley's poem the sunlight glimmers from time to time as if it could be seen through a veil. In the reading, the play of the light with its appearance and disappearance refers to the uncertainty of human life and the lack of true knowledge, which de Man calls the "t*antal*izing" "play of veiling and unveiling."

Having bound and fastened the threads, de Man shows us the central knot, where the problems of "knowledge, oblivion and desire hang suspended."[46] In the lyric passage chosen by de Man and placed in the centre, "the 'silver music' of oblivion" can be heard and its scene is coloured by the brightening light of the sun, the crystalline mirror of the water and Iris's "many coloured scarf," that is, the rainbow or the iris.[47] The metaphorical chain marks the line of the blazing sun – the reflective surface of the water – the rainbow/iris, and, finally, there is the iris of the eyes reading the lines. In the centre of the interpretation (or every interpretation), Narcissus's *figure*, that is, the floating image of his face mirrored/reflected in the water can be seen. More exactly, Narcissus's look, the iris of his eyes, gives the tropological centre of prosopopeia. Looking back, de Man claims that "[t]he sun, in this text, is from the

43. The quoted passage goes: "So sweet and deep is the oblivious spell; / And whether life had been before that sleep / The heaven which I imagine, or a hell / Like this harsh world in which I wake to weep, / I know not" (*The Works of P. B. Shelley* [Wordsworth Poetry Library, Wordsworth Editions, 1994], p. 458).

44. Paul de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 93–123, p. 105.

45. Paul de Man, "Time and History in Wordsworth," in *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism: The Gauss Seminar and Other Papers* (The Johns Hopkins UP, 1993), 74–94, p. 79. According to de Man, the floating instability of the earth, due to the frequent usage of the words, *hung* and *hanging*, becomes vertiginous in Wordsworth's poetry.

46. De Man, "Shelley Disfigured," p. 106.

47. "A shape all light, which with one hand did fling / Dew on the earth, as if it were Dawn / Whose invisible rain forever seemed to sing // A silver music on the mossy lawn, / And still before her on the dusky grass / Iris her many coloured scarf had drawn." Quoted in de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," p. 108.

start the figure of this self-contained specularity. But the double of the sun can only be the eye conceived as the mirror of light."[48] The sun, similarly to Narcissus, can "see" only the reflection of his image/light in the water, and the mirroring surface of the water functions as a mirror and the looking eye. The sun-eye with the rainbow (iris) becomes seeing, while the water of the fountain as a mirroring surface makes it visible. That is, reading prosopopeia, the text functions as the mirror of the interpreter, in which it can be seen that Shelley is reading Plato, Rousseau and himself, or that de Man is reading Shelley – who is reading Plato, Rousseau and himself – and himself, or as the reader is reading de Man, who is reading himself and Shelley – more exactly, as Shelley reading Plato, Rousseau and himself – and herself. In this mirror-play "the text serves as a mirror of our own knowledge and our knowledge mirrors in its turn the text's signification."[49] With this statement, we have already started to remember and write a story that, of necessity, can be turned over by the insight of figurality in the twinkling of an eye.

Now just remember, in his earlier writing de Man characterises the rhetorical figures by saying that they always say something other than they mean; and here he sums up: "[l]anguage, as trope, is always privative."[50] Nevertheless, the reader's life-forgetting and floating textual reverie/musing is drastically interrupted by the awareness of the text's "monumentality." The mythical Narcissus pines away in his desire for self-knowledge, Rousseau is petrified, the poet drowns, and the text – like other masterpieces of romanticism – *recalls* the atmosphere of a cemetery. Yet the illusion-breaking moments of irony are again forgotten, thus, the tropes are suspended, then later interpreted – in facing and defacing. According to de Man's *demand*, "to read is to understand, to question, to know, to forget, to erase, to deface, to repeat – that is to say, the endless prosopopeia by which the dead are made to have a face and a voice which tells the allegory of their demise and allows us to apostrophise them in turn. No degree of knowledge can ever stop this *madness*, for it is the *madness* of words."[51] In its mo(nu)mentalization, reading gives a face, then listens to the voice-from-beyond-the-grave, from which, in our case, such characteristically de Manian puns can be heard as *demand* or *demise*.

In the disjunctive allegorical readings of figuration, we always should embed the moments of the ironical turnings/reversal, or rather we should *face* the risk that we

48. De Man, "Shelley Disfigured," p. 109.
49. De Man, "Shelley Disfigured," p. 112.
50. De Man, "Autobiography As De-Facement," p. 80.
51. De Man, "Shelley Disfigured," p. 122. Italics are mine. See footnote 32.

cannot tell when an allegorical reflective disjunction leads to facing or to defacing. Although Werner Hamacher regards "read!" and "understand!" as de Man's imperatives, he accepts that "no allegory can grasp the incidences of irony by which it is disrupted, none can catch up with the positing violence of the imperative, but each one – for each one remains exposed to its positing – must undertake the attempt to translate it into a cognitive content. . . . Ironically, the imperative – of language, of understanding – allows no decision whether it is to be allegorical or ironic."[52] De Man's allegorical readings and Derrida's psyche-promise about the coming of the other reveal the same: the possibility, or rather the impossibility of the understanding of the other. The undecidability of the question can be represented by a metaphor taken from Genette, namely, the revolving door (*tourniquet*), of which the vortical/whirling and accelerating motion borders on insanity. In his *Mémoires* Derrida also quotes the important passage from de Man's "Autobiography As De-Facement": "The specular moment that is part of all understanding reveals the tropological structure that underlies all cognitions, including knowledge of self. The interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge – it does not – but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is, the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions."[53]

In other words, self-understanding in autobiographical texts (actually, all texts are self-understanding) heightens the swirling motion of tropes and makes the mirror-play more spec(tac)ular. The word *tourniquet* translated as "whirligig" in de Man's text signifies not only turning around, but also rolling over and over – stirring and returning endlessly. The picture of the revolving door reminds us of *psyché*, the revolving mirror, while in the verb, *tourniquer*, the endless reflection of mirrors is recalled.[54] The vertiginous dizziness is caused by the endless chiasms of the allegorical disjunctions and the ironical reversals of the figures. The rhetorical revolving mirror is called into play by de Man's "trope of tropes," irony, which is "unrelieved *vertige*, dizziness to the point of madness."[55] In the third lecture of

52. Werner Hamacher, "LECTIO: de Man's Imperative," trans. by Susan Bernstein, in *Reading de Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 171–201, p. 199. See also in *Entferntes Verstehen: Studien zu Philosophie und Literatur von Kant bis Celan* (Frankfurt an Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 151–194, pp. 192–3.

53. De Man, "Autobiography As De-Facement," p.71. Also quoted in Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 25.

54. In the French verbs, *tourniquer* and *tourniller*, and the noun, *tourniquet*, the root is given by the verb, *tourner*, that is, to turn or revolve.

55. De Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," p. 215.

his *Mémoires* (titled "Acts") Derrida, in a rather lengthy footnote, comments on the above quoted sentence:

> [we could play here on the French word 'vertige': as we say in French, it makes one's head turn (*il fait tourner la tête*), and it is the experience of a turn – that is, of a trope which cannot stop turning and turning around (*tourner et retourner*), since we can only speak of a (rhetorical) turn by way of another trope, without any chance of achieving the stability of a metalanguage, a metatrope, a metarhetoric: the irony of irony of which Schlegel speaks and which de Man cites is still an irony; whence the madness of the regressus ad infinitum, and the madness of rhetoric, whether it be that of irony or that of allegory: madness because it has no reason to stop, because the reason is tropic].[56]

In Derrida's expressive "whirligig," spinning the de Manian statement and recalling the motion of Genette's revolving door, the reader has the feeling as if she were to swallow her own tongue – the mnemonic or amnesiac source of all the troubles. In Wordsworth's short lyric poem that has been referred to several times in my text the turning of the tropes is intensified to extremes. By the end of the work, we are forced to be "rolled round" together with the globe and the dead beloved in the allegorical remembrance of the mourning man, while this revolving is guaranteed by the ironic interrupting moments of forgetting. In the poem the beginning state of slumber fetters, more exactly, "seals" the interpretation. The word, seal, is frequently used in de Man's texts, consequently, it often appears in *Mémoires*, where Derrida remembers de Man. He speaks about (sealing) wax in connection with Mnemosyne's activity, then about stamps and later about a mark or signature – "as if the ironic moment were signed, were sealed in the body of an allegorical writing."[57] The key (and the lock) to *Mémoires* is de Man's seal and at the same time his name, sign, or signature will be the trademark of the irony of allegory. Thus, Derrida is mistaken, or rather speaks ironically, when – assuming the irony hidden in the de Manian allegorical readings – claims that irony hardly helps us tell the story. On the contrary, being aware of the ironic force in the power of allegory, we must declare: only irony can help us proceed with our story.[58]

56. Derrida, *Mémoires*, pp. 152–153.

57. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 84.

58. "It is the power of allegory, and its ironic force as well, to say something quite different from and even contrary to what seems to be intended through it" (Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 74). This quotation foreshadows the rest, or refers back to the previous ideas in my text, and it

In *Mémoires*, however, we can also read about whether it is possible to find the source of the two fountains, Mnemosyne and Lethe, and to arrive at an anamnesis of an ancient time concept. So to say, to arrive at the slumber of timelessness, since the work is "sealed" by the cause of its writing: Derrida writes it for the dead de Man, and in his memoirs his own work of mourning is expressed. Therefore, the metaphor of the seal leads us to the immediate context of the work, namely, (Derrida's) work of mourning; more exactly, to the impossibility of mourning and its allegorical-ironical narcissism. According to de Man, "[t]rue 'mourning' is less deluded [and] [t]he most *it* can do is to allow for non-comprehension."[59] In the statement, the italicised *it* emphasises that true "mourning" is only a tendency which actually denies the truth of mourning. Derrida also thinks that the Freudian "normal" work of mourning is unsuccessful as it operates with the other's interiorization, that is, with the abandonment of the other's otherness. Whereas, true mourning is the impossible work of mourning, which will be successful if it fails: it is "an aborted interiorization [and] is at the same time a respect for the other as other, a sort of tender rejection, a movement of renunciation which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us."[60] In Derrida's mourning de Man's texts become the prosopopeia of the-voice-from-beyond-the-grave and the rhetoric of the allegorical remembrance.

Thus, connecting the de Manian true "mourning" with the promise of "Psyche," we can understand what Derrida means by "true (work of) mourning." It is not "the most deadly infidelity[,] that of a *possible mourning* which would interiorize within us the image, idol, or ideal of the other who is dead and lives in us," but "that of the impossible mourning, which, leaving the other his alterity, respecting thus his infinite remove, either refuses to take or is incapable of taking the other within oneself, as in the tomb or the vault of some narcissism."[61] That is, in true mourning one tries to keep the dead at the other side of the revolving mirror/*psyché*, and starting the endless mirroring, he tries to 'allow the other to come in his otherness' – or rather, let the other go, disregarding interiorization. Nevertheless, these questions,

provides disturbing insights concerning *aletheia*. What is hidden in the story? Certainly, (an)other one(s)!

59. Paul de Man, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 239–262, p. 262. Italics are in the original; also quoted in Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 30.

60. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 35. On the Derridian work of mourning see Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascal-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

61. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 6.

though they help to proceed with the story, will return from time to time haunting; the figure of Narcissus is *unforgettable* since all the time he is (at) the other (side of the mirror). Even if we think that we make an effort to give the leading part to the other in "impossible mourning," it again demonstrates our narcissism – just like in this sentence. With his promise in "Psyche" and the (promised) endless mirror-play, Derrida exactly attempts to move away from it/himself and, in his withdrawal, he tries to get closer to the other. Remembering the other, he wants to go beyond the mirror of speculation, over the narcissistic structure, of which "ruses, mimes, and strategies can only succeed in supposing the other – and thus in relinquishing in advance any *autonomy*."[62]

I do not intend to discuss the possibility and impossibility of the work of mourning. Now I simply accept Derrida's summary that in normal mourning "Narcissus, who turns back to himself, has returned"[63] – there is nothing extraordinary in it. However, Narcissus taken as an allegory gathering and then spreading the other figures, is also only a figure: only a returning (*revient*) ghost. As the artist of memoirs says: "The ghost, *le re-venant*, the survivor, appears only by means of figure or fiction, but its appearance is not nothing, nor is it a mere semblance."[64] That is, while the true impossible mourning can work without rhetoric and silently accept death, in the recollecting texts we become living dead conversing with ghosts. I again refer to the ending of Wordsworth's poem, where the ironic moment(s) of the awakening, recollecting the previous forgetting(s), interrupt(s) the continuity of allegorical remembrance and dreamlike mourning. In his earlier cited writing, Hamacher also points out that understanding, that is, reading as "the allegory of the linguistic imperative is an endless work of mourning the traumas inflicted by irony."[65] So far nice things have been written about death since, as we know about writing, it is capable of disguising the dead as living, giving lively colours to the corpse, the mask and (dis)simulation.[66] The remembering texts are haunted by the rhetorical figures, which remind us of de Man's, Derrida's and, in time – actually, always already – of our own remembrance (and oblivion).

"Müssen dafür Worte, wie Blumen, entstehn"; poetic words are supposed to bloom like flowers – in de Man's reading of the Hölderlin passage, we can hear,

62. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 32. Italics are in the original.

63. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 66.

64. Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 64.

65. Hamacher, p. 199. I slightly altered the translation – see in the original p. 193.

66. See about the meanings of writing in Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 61–172.

paradoxically, the true nature of language. Opposed to the natural origin of flowers, words can only originate *like* flowers, always like something else. To quote de Man's summing statement: "For it is in the essence of language to be capable of origination, but of never achieving the absolute identity with itself that exists in the natural object."[67] In the ironic reflections of the allegorical unfolding, it *turns* out about the textual flowers of rhetoric: they are dead. Contrasted with the (seemingly) 'lifelike' heliotrope recalled in Derrida's "White Mythology," in our texts we have mostly read about "the forgotten heliotropes that beyond all nostalgia mime death with the apotropaeic mask of stone and treasure whatever light they have been granted."[68] Actually, looking for the figurality of the Derridian "solar language," all the time we have been revolving around the pseudo-heliotrope – the narcissus. Although the heliotropic metaphors seem to move round the sun they can only turn round themselves. Derrida claims that, on the one hand, a metaphor always embodies its own death, on the other hand, it is capable of sublation (cf. *Aufhebung*) and becoming a dried flower in a book.[69] In our collection of (dried) flowers, in our anthology,[70] we can only collect figure-phantoms, that is, the (dead) flowers of rhetoric. Reading about these figures, we enter the world of the dead, where as mythical death-flowers, asphodels,[71] the sepulchral flowers are blooming and unfolding their stories. And even if we know about it, suspending our doubts, we start to remember again and again. And looking in the mirror, we try to see the other – always already allegorically and from one ironic moment to the next.

67. Paul de Man, "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 1–17, p. 6.

68. Dirk De Schutter, "Words Like Stones," in *(Dis)continuities: Essays on Paul de Man*, ed. Luc Herman, Kris Humbeeck and Geert Lernout (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989), p. 108.

69. Derrida, "White Mythology," pp. 271–272.

70. Derrida also mentions that the Greek word *anthologia* originally meant flower-collection. See in "White Mythology," p. 272.

71. The Greeks planted the asphodels near tombs, regarding them as the form of food preferred by the dead; they also believed that there was a large meadow overgrown with asphodel in Hades (mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey*, XI.539, XI. 573 and XXIV.13). The flower itself belongs to the liliaceae, together with the narcissus. See Rose, pp. 88–90.