

so new species emerge and later become extinct. However, new varieties emerge slowly, perhaps over hundreds of thousands of years, and a hundred thousand years is a long time in politics. For practical purposes, with large animals of long lifespan, the choice is only to conserve or destroy. To unthinkingly destroy species is vandalism. It assumes that they have no value except the price we put on them and the use we put them to. There are crude practical dangers in destroying plant and animal species. What trouble do we store up for ourselves in the future? What have we lost that we might have need of? More significantly there must be a respect for the fact of nature, for species as they are, as created by God. By their enjoyment of their own lives they show gratitude to their creator, they sing the song of creation. By our pollution and profane destruction we show our ingratitude. In our forgetfulness of nature, we forget our own nature, the earth from which we were formed. God did not create whales so that we might destroy them.

All life is created and sustained by God, and he desires all living things to flourish according to their nature. So the song of the whales, whatever it means, is a song of glory to God by being an expression of the joy of the creature. For human beings, for the stock of Adam and Eve, despite our ingratitude, God has given not just the possibility of flourishing according to our nature, but he has stooped down to speak his Word to us.

Over the Ashes

Gerard Loughlin

Hume, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida—these names can be made to evoke a certain history of thought, one that tells the rise and fall of foundationalist modernity. It is a history written as obituary: the death of God and the death of Man. The condition of the *postmodern* person is then like one living among a heap of rubble and ashes, wondering what 'comes after'.¹ But on looking up, such a postmodern may yet see hovering spirits.²

A couple of years ago, in the summer of 1990, the themes of such a

history and its aftermath were given an all too rare British voice at King's College, Cambridge, which was host to an important conference on the postmodern. It was a conference on contemporary Western culture and its religious subtexts. Entitled *The Shadow of Spirit*, the conference, at least in its plenary sessions, increasingly turned to the unavoidability of the ethical; to the irreducibility of spirit. This turning found a particular focus in the discussion—one might even say, the confrontation, the *differend*^b—between George Steiner and Don Cupitt. It is possible to gain some idea of the tension it produced by reading against one another, the artficed interrogations of Steiner's *Real Presences* (1989) and the manifestos that are Cupitt's most recent works.⁴ For Steiner, the pleasures and freedoms of the 'market' (so naively championed by Cupitt in Keynes' Hall) are no defence against the darkness of the 'final solution'; the darkness of a culture that thinks itself only human, conceiver of an absolute and arbitrary power.

Postmodernism, which thinks itself after the demise of the modern in the flames of the Shoah and of Hiroshima, cannot avoid the question of the ethical, the priority of the political—the query of spirit. The question comes to postmodernism as the question of its ingredient relation to a genocidal culture. How is it to negotiate Nietzsche's legacy? The allegation that Paul de Man had, in his youth, in Belgium, between 1940 and 1942, published articles in *Le Soir* and *Het Vlaamsche Land* in support of Nazism, opened deconstruction and the postmodernist quest to the moral outrage (real or simulated) of its critics and, unavoidably, to the question of its complicities and responsibilities. For De Man was the famous Yale professor whose subtle and dark disinterrings of, among others, Hölderlin and Heidegger, had made him the doyen of American deconstructionists—though De Man came late and never uncritically to deconstruction. Now he was revealed as having displayed what Derrida calls an 'ideological configuration' in alliance with 'the very worst': the contagion of anti-semitism.

The unveiling of De Man's past was already a motif for postmodernist thought, or at least for that thinking which pictured itself as coming at the 'end' of philosophy. Heidegger, for one, had already gone before.⁵ The 'war' about De Man's war-time writings coincided with a renewed attention to the question which Heidegger—father, as some would say, of deconstruction itself—had already made irreversible for Western culture. So that Jacques Derrida, master of deconstructions, and friend of De Man, was obliged, invited and summoned, to disinter and muse upon, not just De Man or Heidegger, but the very culture that gave rise to and still comes after the unthinkable, as itself caught in that unthinkability.

'Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War' (1988), and *De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question* (1987 ET 1989) are two results of his reflections.⁶ They are not isolated works, but take their place in a developing conversation, in particular with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *La fiction du politique* (1987 ET 1990) and Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger et 'les juifs'* (1988 ET 1990), both of whom, in the wake of Victor Farias's *Heidegger et le nazisme* (1987 ET 1989), felt called to re-open and re-ask the question of Martin Heidegger's silence on the 'final solution'; that mute silence which lets nothing be heard, as Lyotard says. 'A leaden silence'.⁷

For the Christian theologian these works also take a place among those texts that trouble the tradition of Christian effects, re-opening and keeping open, the question of the Christian cause. Christ's own life and death, and all that has flowed from it—the horrendous actions in Christ's name, in the power, as his followers have believed, of the spirit Christ sent them—has called and calls, and will continue to call, for a questioning of both effect and cause. Here, for example, one may think of Donald MacKinnon's troubling reflections on the dark theme of the disparity between gospel and witness as it notoriously came to light, in different ways, in the persons of Kittel, Frege and Paul Tillich.⁸ But here is not the place to respond to the question of Christian responsibility—could one say 'divine' responsibility?—for the horrors unleashed upon the world by the project of Christ's Church. It is a question that one might frame, borrowing the concluding question of Derrida's *Memoires for Paul de Man*, as a question for the Church to itself: 'Who knows what we are doing when *donnons au nom de l'autre*'?

Derrida's *Of Spirit*—the text of a lecture given in March 1987 at a conference on Heidegger organized by the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris, together with additional footnotes—reminds us all of what cannot be avoided: the question 'of ghost, of flame, and of ashes. And of what, for Heidegger, *avoiding* means' (1). Derrida, in this essay on Heidegger and Nazism, seeks to mark the 'continuity of a tradition in those places where the thematics of fire, hearth, guard and nation cross' (136). Already the magnitude, centrality and unavoidability of such a marking, as yet again the European tribes unsettle and interrogate their national identities, is all too pertinent and evident, even as these very powers and their unruly offspring speak of a 'new world order', born in the conflagrations of their own making.

This book, as one might expect, is all too teasing, infuriating and exhilarating, all too serious for this short piece to no more than mark, in its turn, a few of Derrida's themes and undertakings. Above all, it is not possible to interrogate Derrida's presentation of Christianity so as to

indicate how his tenacious and tortuous commentary on Heidegger's poetic/philosophic meditations alone makes plausible the suggestion that Heidegger does indeed descry the essence or spirit of Christianity at its origin, and thus leaves open precisely this question.

Derrida's essay takes for its plot Heidegger's welcome to and entertaining of *spirit*, after many years of avoiding it. It is concerned with Heidegger's change of (political) tactics, 'moving from a deconstruction to a celebration of spirit' (65). Typically, Derrida's reading focuses on the dramaturgy of Heidegger's quotation marks and what is at stake in these 'typographical marionettes' (66). 'As early as *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger takes up the values and the word "spirit", simply in *quotation marks*' (23). 'Even when it is admitted, the word is contained at the doorstep or held at the frontier, flanked with discriminatory signs, held at a distance by the procedure of quotation marks' (29). And then, in 1933, the quotation marks are raised in a 'spectacle of academic solemnity': the *Rectorship Address* (31).

Spirit is the being resolved to the essence of Being, of a resolution which accords with the tone of the origin and which is knowledge. And the *spiritual world* of a people is not the superstructure of a culture, and no more is it an arsenal of bits of knowledge and usable values, but the deepest power of conservation of its forces of earth and blood, as the most intimate power of e-motion and the vastest power of disturbance of its existence. Only a spiritual world guarantees the people its grandeur. For it imposes the constraint that the constant decision between the will to grandeur on the one hand, and on the other the *laissez-faire* of decadence, give its rhythm to the march our people has begun toward its future history. (Heidegger, *The Self-Assertion of the German University in Of Spirit* 36)

Magnificent, chilling, ludicrous! What is this thing with the 'German people' (with Europe, the West, the Occident?), or more properly, with the 'German language' they inhabit (or is it, the language that inhabits them)? For Heidegger truth is given in Greek and German, and better in German than Greek—because the most powerful and the most spiritual of languages. Derrida writes of Heidegger's grounding of the relation of the German people to Being in the destiny of language, that 'according to one's mood, it calls forth either the most serious or the most amused reflections. (That's what I like about Heidegger. When I think about him, when I read him I'm aware of both these vibrations at

the same time. It's always horribly dangerous and wildly funny, certainly grave and a bit comical.)' (68).¹⁰ It is indeed both grave and comical that, for Heidegger, in the last instance, German is 'the only language in which spirit comes to name itself' (71). Derrida calls this a 'fabulous truism' (72).

But what is this spirit that names itself in German, that comes to itself in this language and in this people and their destiny? Is it the spirit of metaphysics, of the 'systematic philosophemes of Hegel, of Schelling, but also, for a certain dimension of his saying, of Hölderlin' (79–80)? Is it the 'unconditioned absolute which determines and *gathers* every entity . . . thought, thinking itself . . . truly spirit inasmuch as, thinking the essential, it gathers—which it does by *thinking itself*, thus finding itself at home, *close up to itself*' (76)? Not quite. Derrida seeks the resonance of spirit in Heidegger along a dividing line, a partition, on the other side of which are 'those *Dichter* who are the same Hölderlin, the same but another, and Trakl' (80). This is the thought, touching both sides of the line, of a return, of a going out so as to come back, of a coming back so as to go out; it is nostalgia and homelessness. It is also fire, a motif that crosses that of return. It is the return of fire, of its coming from the future. Hölderlin, for Heidegger, is the poet on the return path from his walk towards the fire (81). For Derrida's Heidegger, German *Geist* is other and more originary than Greek or Christian *pneuma*. 'Seized by German idiom, *Geist* would rather, earlier, give to think flame' (82).

But what is spirit? In his last poem, *Grodek*, Trakl speaks of the "burning flame of spirit". Spirit is what flares up and it is perhaps only as such that it blows. Trakl does not understand spirit primarily as *pneuma*, not spiritually, but as the flame which flames, it raises, it displaces, it takes out of reach. The burning up is the radiance of a reddening glare. What burns itself up is Being-outside-itself which illuminates and makes shine, which also, however, can devour tirelessly and consume everything up to and including the white of the ash. "The flame is the brother of the palest" is what we read in the poem *Verwandlung des Bösen*. Trakl envisages "spirit" on the basis of this essence which is named in the originary meaning of the word "Geist", for *gheis* means: to be thrown, transported, outside itself.

(Heidegger quoted in *Of Spirit* 97–8)

Fire, flame, returns to itself as that which inflames itself, as that

which catches and gives fire: spirit in-flames. This thought comes from converse between thinker and poet, Heidegger and Trakl, and in this conversation language itself speaks. For Heidegger, Trakl, in his saying of *Geist*, crosses the limit of onto-theology: allows us to think such a crossing. The soul is that which returns, which goes returning, towards the morning, towards that which comes before, 'towards the earlier' (89). The soul follows the stranger, returning to that which is yet unborn, returning from night to dawn. The end precedes the beginning. And this return of the soul, this journey of the stranger, is *geistlich*, spiritual. 'A movement towards that more than matutinal *Frühe*, this more than vernal initiality, the kind which comes even before the first day of spring, before the principle of the *primum tempus*, comes the day before the day before' (92). And this is promised, is promise, as that which gives, which speaks. Language promises, promises itself, but always, immediately, breaks its promise. 'Language always, *before any question*, and in the very question, comes down to the promise. This would also be the promise of *spirit*' (94).¹¹

This attempt to say spirit, this poetic thinking of *Geist*, is not, for Heidegger, that of Christian thought, which is always Platonic-Christian thought, thought of spirit as *Geistige*, of that which opposes the material, that which, in Platonic-Occidental language, becomes the rational, the intellectual and the ideological (95). And yet Heidegger, Derrida mischievously notes, said all this in 1935, at least literally, in the name of that very 'misinterpretation and degradation of spirit' he wanted to condemn, using the very word he later reviled, *geistig*. Thus 'the distinction between the letter and something else (for example the spirit) has precisely no pertinence here other than a Platonic-Christian one' (96)!

Not *Geistlichkeit*, not *Geistigkeit*, *Geist*. Spirit in-flames. Not, Derrida tells us, figure or metaphor. Precisely the difficulty here is the proper meaning of these terms.¹² Derrida offers only *traits* as markers to the reading of Heidegger he proposes; incisions within the flame (97).

(1) Not the denial of *spiritus* and *pneuma*, but their dependence on *Geist*: 'the immense semantics of breathing, of inspiration or respiration, imprinted in Greek or Latin . . . are less originary' (99).

(2) The irreducibility of the German language.

(3) Evil is lodged within spirit, has its provenance in spirit; not in the 'metaphysico-Platonic *Geistigkeit*', the other of

matter, but in its ghost. 'Evil is always the evil of a spirit. Evil, and its malignity, is not the sensible, the material. No more is it of a simply 'spiritual' nature ('geistiger' *Natur*). Evil is spiritual (*geistlich*)' (Heidegger, cited 103).¹³ (One remembers Barthes' epigram: *La langue est fasciste.*)

(4) 'Spirit—in flames—deploys its essence . . . according to the possibilities of gentleness and of destruction' (102).

(5) The trait of spirit itself; its return to itself, its self-return and inscription: fire-writing. The return of spirit to the soul, where it re-writes itself, a division and doubling, so that in sadness there is adversity; and this, the trait gathers.

For Derrida, Heidegger's attempt to wrest Trakl's originary spirit from Christianity is forced: 'the gestures made to snatch Trakl away from the Christian thinking of *Geist* seem to me laborious, violent, sometimes simply caricatural'—so that this originary spirit, this '*origin-heterogeneous*' *Geist*, is the origin of Christianity, 'the spirit of Christianity or the essence of Christianity' (109).

At the end of his book Derrida imagines a 'scene between Heidegger and certain Christian theologians' (109), and these theologians agree with Heidegger ('Yes, precisely, that's just what we're saying'). But is this agreement a cause for celebration, or should it be considered worrying, troubling, a possible source of consternation? Heidegger, after all, is the guardian of the 'sacred fire'; the *Hüter* of the burning wind; the one who forgets that to speak of *pneuma*, *spiritus* and *Geist*, is also to speak of *ruah*. The one who forgets that his 'linguistico-historical triad', his 'intra-translational-triangle' of Greek-Latin-German, the space that *Geist* inhabits, forecloses against that which 'Greek and then Latin had to translate by *pneuma* and *spiritus*' (100). And this is not a forgetting of another, earlier beginning, a proper origin, but a forgetting that, in Lyotard's words, 'thought is without beginning and unfounded, that it does not have to "give place" to Being, but is owed to a nameless Law.'¹⁴

Heidegger, after all, is one, at least one, of the trees in the forest under whose boughs, 'growing like a mushroom in the silence of a European forest', grew the 'very worst'. 'In their bushy taxonomy', these trees 'bear the names of religions, philosophies, political regimes, economic structures, religious or academic institutions. In short, what is just as confusedly called culture, or the world of spirit' (109-110).

Derrida's theologians are all too plausible ('In its program or its

type, this meeting (of poet/philosopher and theologian) has not, moreover, failed to occur'—109). 'But what you call the archi-originary spirit, which you claim is foreign to Christianity, is indeed what is most essential in Christianity. . . . When you speak of promise, this *Versprechen*, of a more than matutinal dawn beyond a beginning and an end of history, before and beyond East and West, do you realize just how close to us you are? . . . You say the most radical things that can be said when one is a Christian today' (110–11). Heidegger's reply? 'I am opposing nothing, especially not Christianity . . . I'm simply trying . . . to think that *on the basis of which* all this is possible. . . . I simply said, *Geist* is not *first of all* this, that, or the other' (111–2). Derrida calls this thinking of *more* by thinking *nothing more*, Heidegger's retreat, which is at the same time a going towards, not towards a recognition or a content, but towards what remains *origin-heterogeneous*, across the limits of onto-theology. Derrida's Heidegger: 'The entirely other announces itself in the most rigorous repetition. And this repetition is also the most vertiginous and the most abyssal' (113).¹⁵ And the theologians agree. It is what they are wanting to say also. 'The spirit which keeps watch in returning will always do the rest. Through flame or ash, but as the entirely other, inevitably' (113).

This is where Derrida leaves the matter. There is more to be said, but it is not said here. The question of spirit—as Lacoue-Labarthe, Lyotard and Derrida, in very different ways, receive and remember it—remains unavoidable.

- 1 See *Who Comes After the Subject?* ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor & Jean-Luc Nancy (Routledge 1991).
- 2 'I once said, perhaps rightly: The earlier culture will become a heap of rubble and finally a heap of ashes, but spirits will hover over the ashes'. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Basil Blackwell, 1980) 3e.
- 3 On the 'differend' see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Manchester University Press 1988). See further Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (Routledge, 1991) and Geoffrey Bennington, *Lyotard: Writing the Event* (Manchester University Press, 1988).
- 4 See George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Faber, 1989) and, from among Don Cupitt's yearly productions, *Only Human* (SCM Press, 1985); *The Long-Legged Fly: A Theology of Language and Desire* (SCM Press, 1987) and *What is a Story?* (SCM Press 1991).
- 5 See Victor Farias *Heidegger et le nazisme* (Verdier 1987 ET 1989) and the symposium on Heidegger and Nazism in *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989) 407–88, edited and introduced by Arnold I. Davidson. It contains contributions by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, Maurice Blanchot, Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe and Emmanuel Levinas.
- 6 Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington & Rachel Bowlby (University of Chicago Press, 1989). Derrida's essay on De Man, printed in *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1988) 590–652, is reprinted in the revised edition of Derrida's *Memoires for Paul de Man* (Columbia University Press (1986) 1989). See also Shoshana Felman, 'Paul de Man's Silence', *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989) 704–44.

- as well as the essays by Jean-Marie Apostolides, Marjorie Perloff, Jonathan Culler, W. Wolfgang Holdheim, Jon Wiener and John Brenkman & Jules David Law, in response to Derrida on De Man, and his response to them, in *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989) 765–873.
- 7 Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the Jews'*, trans. A. Michel & M. S. Roberts (University of Minnesota Press (1988) 1990) 52. See also Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*, trans. C. Turner (Basil Blackwell (1987) 1990). While forgiving Heidegger much that he said, Emmanuel Levinas could not forgive him what he didn't say: 'Doesn't this silence, in time of peace, on the gas chambers and death camps lie beyond the realm of feeble excuses and reveal a soul completely cut off from any sensitivity, in which can be perceived a kind of consent to the horror'. Levinas, 'As If Consenting to Horror', trans. Paula Wissing, *Critical Inquiry*, 15 (1989) 485–8 (487).
 - 8 See Donald MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology* 5 (SCM Press, 1979) 129–37.
 - 9 On the spirit of Europe see further Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael B. Naas (Indiana University Press, 1992).
 - 10 Simon Critchley takes Derrida's 'vibrations' to refer to 'two determinations of Spirit, one belonging to onto-theology or metaphysics . . . the other pointing towards a more originary and non-metaphysical thinking'. Critchley continues that 'the movement of Heidegger's thinking oscillates *indecisively* between these two possibilities, and it is this very indecision that fascinates Derrida'. Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Basil Blackwell, 1992) 191–2. But I think it clear that the 'vibrations' are those of Derrida's 'serious' and 'amused reflections' on Heidegger. One doesn't know whether to laugh or cry at the 'responsibilities' Heidegger interweaves: 'that of our people, that of the question of Being, and that of our language' (*Of Spirit* 68).
 - 11 It is here that Simon Critchley, after John Sallis, opens his own discussion of *Of Spirit*. It is not the question which opens and is the order of thinking. With, in and before the question is that which gives the question, the promise of language. 'Language always, *before any question*, and in the very question, comes down to the promise' (*Of Spirit* 94). In this '*yes* before all opposition of *yes* and *no*' Critchley finds deconstruction's affirmation of responsibility, an opening to the ethical. See *The Ethics of Deconstruction* 190–200; and John Sallis, 'Flight of Spirit', *Diacritics*, 19 (1989) 25–37.
 - 12 'It is not a figure, not a metaphor. Heidegger, at least, would contest any rhetoricizing reading. . . . everything comes back to this difficulty' (*Of Spirit* 96).
 - 13 On Heidegger's location of evil within a metaphysics of 'being' rather than of 'will' see further John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Basil Blackwell, 1990) 301–2.
 - 14 Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the Jews'* 94.
 - 15 'Heidegger pursues the near-impossible task of occupying the vantage point of the repetition of Being itself, its endless happening as the "difference" of the various historical epochs, the various cultural orderings. And the final elimination of any residual idea of a human "essence", or human "transcendence", which once for all reflects the "truth" of Being itself, points to a shift of attention from an always absent and unknown Being to the constant "fall" of Being into an ontic condition. . . . Every being which has inevitably lapsed into "presence" precludes, through its arbitrary and groundless insistence on some preferences and some values, the sublime perspective of infinite difference which is the (non) point of view of Being itself. . . . If the "fall" is original, and pertains to the first principle, then salvation can only be the endless repetition of falling, the "eternal return" of what is both revealed and violently occluded' (Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 299–302).