

Timely Memory and Textual History: Geoffrey Hartman's Refiguration of Love

By love subsists
All lasting grandeur, by pervading love;
That gone, we are as dust.
(William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* XIV 168-170)

The claim that the concept of memory has, since the nineties of the last century, come to occupy a significant place in literary studies is unobjectionable enough. It is, however, less clear why the rise of memory – at the expense of history – as a reigning paradigm in literary studies came at precisely that time. In a by now canonical pseudo-paradoxical pseudo-explanation of this phenomenon, Pierre Nora (1989: 7), at the beginning of his article “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*”, wrote that “[w]e speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left”. In Nora’s account, this increase in speech about memory coincides with a raising of consciousness:

Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. (ibid.)

Nora’s translation of historical continuity into speech, however, can only deliver its ‘profound truth’ at the cost of a drastic linguistic curtailment:

The fact that only one word exists in French to designate both lived history and the intellectual operation that renders it intelligible (distinguished in German by *Geschichte* and *Historie*) is a weakness of the language that has often been remarked; still, it delivers a profound truth: the process of carrying us forward and our representation of that process are of the same kind. (ibid.: 8)

The avoidance of the German distinction thus enables Nora to ignore the reduction of a difference in kind in favour of a reduction of degree, and this in turn enables a self-serving ambiguity that is then invested in the notion of ‘lieu de mémoire’, which is said to “originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives” (ibid.: 12). This sense of deliberate creation also serves as a description of the historian, i.e. someone engaged in the intellectual operation of rendering lived history intelligible as a ‘lieu de mémoire’: “The historian is one who prevents history from becoming *merely* history” (ibid.: 18).¹

¹ Cf. Siskin (1988: 47-53) on the elimination of kinds and the positing of degrees as “a rationale for the making of a literary institution manned by unique, creative geniuses and especially trained critics.” In these pages, Siskin also situates Geoffrey Hartman in these terms.

The privilege of the student of memory, then, in what Nora terms 'the afterlife of memory' – "no longer quite life, not yet death" (ibid.: 12) – is to possess the "capacity for metamorphosis" of mere history: his "most fundamental purpose" is "to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial," "all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs" (ibid.: 19). The timeliness of memory studies, then, derives from their unique capacity to endow the dead data of mere history with the life of meaning. It is, however, hardly irrelevant that this capacity of the student of memory to serve as a 'lieu de mémoire' is entirely dependent on a confusion with his object of study – the 'lieu de mémoire' in the past – which becomes possible only with the deliberate forgetting of the German articulation of their difference in kind. Put otherwise, the claim that memory studies is able to "materialize the immaterial" depends on a historical continuity that deliberately forgets a linguistic distinction available in the German language and thus the very material reality of the German language itself.

The very first sentence of Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning's article in this volume may point to a similar unease in establishing a chronology of memory studies:

Ever since the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and the art historian Aby Warburg published their pioneering works on the significance of social frames and medial representations of cultural memory [...] interest in the social, cultural and medial dimensions of individual and collective memory has significantly increased, reaching a peak point in the decade preceding the millennium. (Erll/Nünning in this volume: 11)

As in Nora, the absence of an explanation for this historical peak is obscured by the indication of continuity ("ever since"). As in Nora, this glosses over the hardly immaterial reality of the rupture in this continuity – indexed, for instance, by the unmentioned fact of Halbwachs' death in 1945 in Buchenwald.

In order to more properly assess the enabling role of the forgetting of the dead data of mere history in the exaltation of the relation between memory and literature, I will focus in the rest of this article on Geoffrey Hartman's 1997 book *The Fateful Question of Culture*. This book, which won the prestigious Wellek Prize for comparative literature in 1998 because, according to the jury, it offered "a nuanced and timely meditation on culture", makes, in the figure of William Wordsworth, arguably one of the most remarkable claims for the role of literature in the representation and the construction of collective memory – not, however, as we will see, without continuously avoiding significant aspects of the issue inherent in the German language and history in a way not dissimilar from my two introductory examples. I will show how the textual history of this claim illustrates the strategies of avoidance in the advocacy of the turn to memory in literary studies.

In *The Fateful Question of Culture*, Hartman draws on the spectacular conclusions in his interpretation of Wordsworth in his landmark *Wordsworth's*

Poetry 1787-1814, which appeared in 1964. At the time when English feudalism was being uprooted by the onslaughts of the first Industrial Revolution – so goes Hartman's first claim – Wordsworth managed to give "representation to what in English culture was previously unrealized or semi-articulate" (Hartman 1997: 7). And because – and this is Hartman's second claim – "the work of a great artist can have a strong and long-range impact on the way we look at ourselves as a culture," this "significant" "imaginative" representation (ibid.: 13) "achieves a precarious cultural transfer (*translatio*) of English rural life" (ibid.: 7), which "helped to create the sense of a particularly English culture" (ibid.: 13). This solid construction of a national culture, rooted in the country, then allayed the fear of the loss of feudal stability in a newly industrialized society, and thereby prevented the melancholic conversion of this loss into "the virulence of a nostalgic political ideal centering on rural virtue, which led to serious ravages on the continent" (ibid.). In other words, Hartman (ibid.: 74) indicates that Wordsworth's mimesis of a previously "only half-perceived and half-created mode of life" (ibid.: 73) – something German romanticism decidedly failed to achieve – did nothing less than save England from National Socialism.

In the context of the relation between literature and memory, this monumental thesis poses two related questions. First, how precisely is this Wordsworthian mode of representing a dying culture distinctly "significant"? How is this representation a "significant" mimesis of memory? And second, how is this significance transferred to the culture it helps to create? How does it help to shape a distinctly English collective memory? According to Hartman, Wordsworth's representation of this transferred "pastoral culture" allows it to "fade into memory before it has emerged into maturity" (ibid.: 76). Its fatal loss, in other words, is pre-empted by an act of *successful mourning*, and thus preserved in memory, which prevents its inflation into Teutonic melancholy and the genocidal virulence that goes with it.² Rephrased in these terms, Hartman's claim comes to sound something like this: *Wordsworth's poetry is the creation of an object, whose passing a culture (that this poetry itself*

² Freudian psychoanalysis has been an important focus for Hartman since at least 1973. Freud's "Trauer und Melancholie", on which I base this distinction between mourning and melancholy, repeatedly tropes melancholy as a failed representation (*Vertrittung*, see Hartman 1997: 206, 209). This is said to cause "einen Zwiespalt zwischen der Ichkritik und dem durch Identifizierung veränderten Ich" (ibid.: 203). While writing *Wordsworth's Poetry*, Hartman (in 1962) published "Romanticism and 'Anti-Self-Consciousness'", which describes a similar split in terms of a hypertrophied consciousness. He there illustrates "this perilous nature of consciousness" with the figures of "Cain, Ahasuerus, Ancient Mariner, and even Faust" who are "separated from life in the midst of life, yet cannot die" (Hartman 1970: 303). In the very passage in *The Fateful Question of Culture* – which gets its title from the end of Freud's *Das Unheimliche in der Kultur* – where Hartman (1997: 8) makes his claim about Wordsworth, this condition returns as "the modern pilgrim" in the "Age of Transition". As my conclusion will show, it is no coincidence that Nora positions his project in the afterlife of memory, 'no longer quite life, not yet death', a predicament inaugurated, as we have seen, by a raising of consciousness.

helped to create) can successfully mourn, which thereby saves this culture from the trauma of its undoing in nostalgic melancholy. In order to understand this mode of "significant transmission" (Hartman 1997: 72) – which will closely connect our two questions – in Wordsworth's poetry, I will trace the materials of its textual history, and I will turn to Hartman's 1964 book *Wordsworth's Poetry* and read it as a refiguration of this mode of successful mourning. This reading seems to be reinforced by the book's self-presentation as, precisely, a work of mourning; published in 1964, it is dedicated to the memory of Erich Auerbach, one of Hartman's teachers. Auerbach, who had died in 1957, was, of course, also the writer of *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, which, according to Hartman (1980: 235), is "[p]erhaps the only true literary history we have". This memorial dedication will then later allow me to highlight the role of that book in Hartman's interpretation of Wordsworth's mode of mimetic representation, and its decisive role in the prevention of the decline and fall of the rest of the West.

Before Auerbach entered the stage, Hartman had already attempted an interpretation of Wordsworth in the first chapter of his 1954 debut *The Unmediated Vision*. Wordsworth's poetry is there characterized by "the conflict of intense matter-of-factness and passionate fiction, of the human and the enthusiastic imaginations [...] of the remission of the relational will and its assertion" (Hartman 1954: 8). This conflict, which will later be rephrased as that between nature and imagination, is always already overcome by the reconciliation of both parties in a transcendent "principle of generosity" (ibid.: 9), in "the dialectic of love between man and nature" (ibid.: 8). The continuity of nature and imagination is always guaranteed by their contiguity within an encompassing principle of love, and Wordsworth's poetry can thus proceed by the figure of what Hartman terms "incremental redundancy", in which "the quality of a thing redounds on the thing it qualifies and is perceived as its very cause" (ibid.: 22); this figure, in which a quality comes to be posited as a cause, involves "a synecdochal procedure and is actually a kind of metonymy" (Bahti 1979: 602). In these metonymies, then, "the part of the whole appears greater than the whole of which it is a part" (Hartman 1954: 22). But again, this metonymic overreaching can never become a violent transgression of nature, because imagination always acts "through a transcendent, pure principle of love" (ibid.: 38). Because of this transcendent guarantee, poetry is, for Hartman, always *intrinsically in relation* and, therefore, no potentially threatening "incitement to relational thinking remains" (ibid.: 39). There is no need for the single poem to establish relations or reference for, as poetry, it is generically an affirmative "metaphysical statement" (ibid.: 38).³

³ The purely affirmative blindness to negativity of *The Unmediated Vision* was later dismissed by Hartman (1975: 4) as "in retrospect, not a solution but a form of heroism". As early as 1955 and 1961, Hartman moved towards an appreciation of the negativity of literature in two articles on Blanchot (which, incidentally, introduced Blanchot's work to America). Importantly, the tension between affirmation and negation is, again in 1961, played out in "Virginia's Web", an article on Virginia Woolf, who is also the subject of

The first consequence of the imposition of this metaphysical framework is that the question of a distinctly 'significant' mode of representation cannot be posed: because poetry is subsumed under the principle of love, the poetical statement is always by default "intrinsically significant" (ibid.: 39). Therefore, in the third chapter of *The Unmediated Vision*, this framework can also be applied – without too much violence – to an interpretation of the poetry of the distinctly non-English Rilke. A second, and equally limiting consequence of the metaphysical framework is its daunting historical irrelevance: written less than ten years after the Holocaust, there are good reasons to question the ontological soundness of an eternal unifying principle of love that assures the generosity of the relation between man and nature. It is this threat of the loss of the relevance of literary significance that will mournfully be contained in Hartman's rereading of Wordsworth ten years later, in *Wordsworth's Poetry*, a book which, as noted, also presents itself as a remembrance of Erich Auerbach.⁴ It is the book's casting of Auerbach in the role of the warrantor of the link between significant representation and historical relevance – of the possibility of, first, articulating literary significance, and second, allowing that literary significance to become historically significant – that will guide my reading of it as an attempt to rewrite *The Unmediated Vision* into historical meaning.

Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* was written during the Second World War, and published in English in 1953. In his epilogue, Auerbach describes the subject of his book as "the interpretation of reality through literary representation or 'imitation'" (Auerbach 2003 [1953]: 554). The mode of literary representation he singles out as significant is that which treats "realistic subjects" "seriously, problematically, or tragically" (ibid.: 557). As such, in the words of William Calin (1999: 465), this significant representation is the privileged "artistic expression" of "our human conscious and unconscious apprehension of reality, our attitude to-

⁴ "The Brown Stocking", the last chapter of *Mimesis*, which opposes Woolf's affirmation of 'the random moment' to the fascist exploitation of the fear this randomness generates in the modern world (Auerbach 2003 [1953]: 550-552). Complementing Auerbach's emphasis on affirmation, Hartman (1970: 81) calls for interpretation to also "reconstitute the negative". The dialectic of nature and imagination in *Wordsworth's Poetry* can be read as an extension of the tension between these principles and is, as will be shown, again played out on the ground cleared by Auerbach.

This intrinsic positivity of poetry is a central tenet of New Critical dogma. For instance, W.K. Wimsatt (1970 [1954]: 240): "Sheer disvalue [negativity] in an ontological sense, complete, substantive chaos or disorder, is not conceivable [...] Our experience of the painful, the evil, and the ugly is not actually negative". Also Cleanth Brooks (1947: 178-9): "[The unity of poetical structure] is a positive unity, not a negative; it represents not a residue but an achieved harmony". It is the unquestioned assumption of this critical dogma of the unparaphrasable positivity of poetic statement, which the 1954 Hartman tapped into (see the previous note), that explains the early American reception of *Mimesis* as a "socialist" work (see Auerbach 2003 [1953]: 570), and Hartman's recourse to it in his attempt to regain historical significance.

wards the world". Its respect for the particulars of reality (cf. Auerbach 2003 [1953]: 572) as "incomparable historical vantage point[s]" (ibid.: 553) allows the literary representation to represent the *historical truth* of its moment and thus manages to 'pre-form our understanding of the world' and to shape the society it represents (cf. Gronau 1979: 65-67). Because the individual author-subject is part of the continuity of history and historical truth, his most faithful expression of historical truth becomes at the same time the most adequate mimesis of it (cf. Costa-Lima 1988: 489-490). It is this adequacy, then, that links the significant mimesis of memory to its significant historical role in the shaping of a collective memory.

This unquestioned assumption of the truthfulness of historical particulars can best be explained by reference to Auerbach's earlier (importantly, pre-Second-World-War) essay "Figura". In this text, Auerbach (1984 [1938]: 29) constructs an opposition between allegorical interpretation and the Christian exegetical principle of the *figura* – more commonly referred to as typology: against the former's spiritualization of historical content into an ahistorical, eternal realm, the *figura* distinctively maintains the historical particularity of the two events it connects by interpretation: the first event is "something real and historical which announces something that is also real and historical" (ibid.). In the *figura*, the first event "signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first" (ibid.: 53), and it stubbornly insists on the historicity of both the sign and that which it is made to signify (ibid.: 54). For Auerbach (2003 [1953]: 199), it is Dante who exemplarily allows the transcendent "Christian idea of the indestructibility of the entire human individual" – which guarantees the truthfulness of this figural transfer – "to produce an almost painfully immediate impression of the earthly reality of human beings". Dante's mode of representation is, in other words, most true to the historical particularity of its object. So true, in fact, that at the end of the Dante-chapter in *Mimesis*, this powerful earthly reality appropriates the figural paradigm that had guaranteed its significance: in Dante's *Inferno*, the first event is said to "proclaim its independence" from its interpretation: "Figure surpasses fulfillment, or more properly: the fulfillment serves to bring out the figure in still more impressive relief" (ibid.: 200).

This amounts to a quite spectacular claim about the culturally constructive power of poetry: it is Dante's singular achievement to allow the intrinsic significance of figural mimesis to survive itself, that is, to survive the death of the God who grounded its significance. It is the singular achievement of real-ist representation to transfer transcendent figurality into a significant mode of, in Laszlo Géfin's (1999: 29) words, historically "immanent refiguration". The history of the representation of Western reality after Dante, when it gradually moves into the era of the novel, aspires "to a deontologized semiotics of immanence, but it still contains [the authority] of the renounced system" (ibid.: 39). Far from allowing history to decompose into meaningless dead data, the mimetic expression of history will now ground the meaning of history in history itself (ibid.: 31).

The American philosopher Mark C. Taylor, in his brilliant book on 'the hermeneutics of the death of God', *Erring* (1984), terms this immanent re-grounding of the transcendent logos in the subject and in history 'atheistic humanism'. In his analysis, figural interpretation presupposes 'the logos doctrine', in which logos is 'the creative principle of cosmic order'. This identification of the Logos with God assures that the relation between figure and fulfillment "is *discovered* rather than *fabricated*". As the primal *ground* and enduring *substance* of all created order, the logos is the principle of unity that underlies all experience" (Taylor 1984: 59) – in a way not all that different from Hartman's principle of love. What the maintained "belief in the representational truth of isolated particulars" then assures is the transfer (*translatio*) of this figural truth to history, or, in other words, the possibility of salvaging this figural interpretation for a post-Christian society (cf. Green 1982: 37). In Auerbach's bid to make sense of the post-Christian West, the role of Christ, as the supreme figural incarnation of meaning in history, is replaced by history itself, and the transcendent warrant of eternal life is replaced by "man's human quality through time" (ibid.: 40). The *figura*, in other words, is figurally refigured as refiguration.⁵ What I would now like to show is how this logic of subjective and immanent refiguration in Auerbach's defence of the enabling role of literary representation in discovering historical truth, and in constructing Western culture in accordance with it, appears in *Wordsworth's Poetry* – how, in other words, this refiguration allows Hartman to rewrite the dialectic of nature and imagination after the loss of the transcendent guarantee of their loving reciprocal generosity.

Hartman's 1964 effort to rewrite his 1954 work on Wordsworth is announced by a 1962 article, "A Poet's Progress", the harbinger of the thesis contained in the later *Wordsworth's Poetry*, but still an attempt to argue from within the confines of the metaphysical framework. And whereas *Wordsworth's Poetry* copies this article almost verbatim, the 1964 rendition does display two significant changes. First, whereas the forwarded thesis acknowledges the imagination's reach beyond mere 'incremental redundancy', the metaphysical framework only allows this to be phrased in terms of transcendence: we read, in 1962, how the poet's discovery of "the autonomy of his imagination" "means a transcendence of Nature" (219-220). Second, the later recovery of nature, which in 1954 was "immediate and transcendent" (Hartman 1954: 21), is said to be a recovery of nature as a "mediation" of, presumably, the principle of generosity; Wordsworth's return to nature is "an experience with an external, though no longer immediate, world" (Hartman 1962: 222). In 1964, this external experience is rewritten as "an internal feeling, not an external image" (Hartman 1971 [1964]: 45). What we get, then, is the rewriting of a nature mediating a transgressively transcendent imagination in terms of *immanence* and *inwardness*. This is an eminently Auerbachian re-grounding of post-figural meaning in history and the subject. In *Words-*

⁵ For a reading of *Mimesis* as the fulfillment of the figure of figurality, see White (1996).

worth's Poetry, the new medium that guarantees significance will then have to be discovered on an eminently horizontal historical plane. In other words, instead of a vertical reaching out toward a given transcendent love in a metonymic accretion of incremental redundancy, the immanent framework, which has to ground its own significance, forces Wordsworth into a metaphorical scheme: Wordsworth, Hartman (1971 [1964]: xxiii) writes in his preface, has a "unique style, in which metaphor [...] is a generalized structure rather than a special verbal figure".⁶ And, we can now add, not just a special verbal figure because an exemplary historical refiguration. Metaphor, of course, means *translatio*, or transfer. Wordsworthian transfer, as we have seen, will be made by Hartman to mean a pre-emption of historical trauma. A brief consideration of Hartman's reading of a passage from Wordsworth's *Prelude* will show how Hartman presents Wordsworth's pre-emption of trauma.

The instance of the recovery of significance on the historical plane occurs, predictably enough, in the narrative of the ascent of a mountain, in the Simplon Pass passage from the sixth book of *The Prelude*.⁷ In this passage, we find Wordsworth walking in the hope of encountering the Alps, only to be informed by a peasant that he has actually already crossed them without recognizing them (*Prelude* VI: 557-591). This loss of nature causes a "melancholy slackening" (*Prelude* VI: 617) which is then, in the text of *The Prelude*, followed without transition by the compensatory discovery of the imagination:

I was lost;
 Halted without an effort to break through;
 But to my conscious soul I now can say-
 'I recognise thy glory.' (*Prelude* VI: 596-599)

The mutual exclusiveness of nature and imagination this sequence presents is obviously not very helpful for the point of their recovered reciprocity that Hartman wishes to make. And neither is it, apparently, for the point Wordsworth wished to make, as the text of the sixth book continues by connecting nature and imagination in an allegorical scheme: after the invocation of the imagination, we get a description of a nature that has regained significance, and the reason for a recovery of meaning in nature is explained by its

Characters of the great apocalypse,
 The types and symbols of eternity,
 Of first, and last, and midst, and without end. (*Prelude* VI: 638-640)

As the allegorical way of allaying the fear of "traumatic breaks" in nature that Hartman (1971 [1964]: 42), after Auerbach, has to overcome, this is, obvi-

⁶ For an account of metonymy and metaphor as "rhetorical models for the major intellectual elements of *The Prelude*" congenial to my analysis, see Arac (1987: 73-74). On the question of a 'unique style', see especially note 9.

⁷ Cf. (Joseph 1965: 309): "In a way, the whole book might be considered as an immensely complex and ramifying essay on two climactic texts from *The Prelude*, the crossing of the Simplon Pass in Book VI and the ascent of Mount Snowdon in Book XIV".

ously, a sequence that has to be read away. And authorized by the Auerbachian fiat to refigure the ground of meaning in historical subjective experience, which is adequate mimesis *quia* faithful expression, Hartman manages this by rescrambling this sequence in accordance, not with its order in the poem, but rather with its order of composition. Because of its earlier date of composition, then, the marshalling of the characters of the great apocalypse can be dismissed as "circumvent[ing] abrupt illumination", that is, denying the traumatic break rather than mournfully acknowledging it (Hartman 1971 [1964]: 63). And after an intermediary stage, the invocation of the imagination, as the last stage of composition, can be recognized as the trauma's later successful immanent refiguration. That is, Wordsworth's existential development we are now allowed to read starts with a fatal denial of the trauma, then moves on to the subduing of that trauma by its blending with nature – which is still roughly the position of the 1962-revision of *The Unmediated Vision* –, and, finally and triumphantly, Wordsworth's existential development ends in the poetic overcoming of this dependence on nature.⁸ Imagination is the *fulfillment* of the disappointment of the loss of nature, because it refigures itself as interpretation: "the interpretive moment construct[s] its own landscape for the illumination to blend with" (Hartman 1971 [1964]: 3). Wordsworth's poetry thus successfully manages this transfer of the metaphorical authority to ground continuity by establishing itself, in the place of nature, as the new medium: the sequence, in Hartman's words, "provides a clear case where immediacy acts as a medium, which is as good a description of poetry's effect as any" (*ibid.*: 68).

In conclusion, I now want to recall some aspects of the textual history of the construction of the 1964 Wordsworth, for this will allow for a better perspective on the inflated claim of its 1997 follow-up, and on the timeliness of memory studies more generally. As has become clear, the reading of Wordsworth as the achievement of a precarious transfer is enabled by the conversion of the narrative of *The Prelude* into the experience of its composition, which is authorized by Auerbach's equation of faithful expression with adequate mimesis. Because this compositional history of the poetry culminates in

⁸ This tripartite compositional scheme combines the Snowdon and the Simplon Pass passages. I have left out Hartman's reading of the former for want of space. There is a parallel movement in the textual history of Hartman's one other favourite passage from *The Prelude*, the passage on the Boy of Winander, which became the object of several reciprocal misreadings between Hartman and Paul de Man. In this passage, the earlier version sees the boy afflicted by a "sudden shock of mild surprise", which is later softened to "a gentle shock of mild surprise" at the very moment that the description of the boy is supplemented by a scene of interpretation portraying the poet mourning at the boy's grave (see *Prelude* V 389-421). These parallel displacements of trauma into interpretation are not highlighted by de Man or Hartman. As their readings of the Winander passage have become crucial moments in the genealogy of trauma studies, an important subfield in the study of literature and memory, a reading of this remarkable symmetry might augment the relevance of Hartman's Wordsworth for a better positioning of the interrelation of memory and literary studies.

the figural fulfillment of trauma in its refiguration as imagination, i.e., interpretation, i.e., the poetry itself, this reading of the compositional history allows the poetry to valorize itself. By figuring itself as the interpretation of the sequence by which it is generated, the poetry can be valorized as a historically significant transfer; Wordsworth's "interpretive moment" becomes a singularly non-traumatic and therefore "incomparable historical vantage point" (Auerbach 2003 [1953]: 553) that can be invested with the significance of Hartman's claim in *The Fateful Question of Culture* that Wordsworth's significant representation of a previously only half-created form of life achieved a precarious historical transfer.

But what the refiguration of the *figura* does not allow us to forget is, quite simply, that Hartman's interpretation of Wordsworth's poetry's self-interpretation as an interpretation is itself first of all an interpretation, that is, a self-interpretation of the interpreter (Hartman) as the *discoverer* rather than the *fabricator* of historical significance. It is then because Hartman, as we have seen, in his ambition to salvage the (historical) significance of literature, has to adopt this refigurative scheme, that his interpretation of Wordsworth's interpretation of poetry as interpretation necessarily positions Hartman himself as the safeguard for this authority. Paraphrasing Nora, this means that the literary critic is one who prevents poetry from becoming *merely* dead signs. Hartman (1971 [1964]: xiv) describes Wordsworth's authorization of his interpretation in terms of his "unusual sense of vocation", which consists in the conviction that "[h]e alone stood between us and the death of nature to imagination". This is not all too different from a critic's conviction that he alone stands between poetry and the next Holocaust. It is what Paul Bové, in his analysis of the career of Erich Auerbach in his book *Intellectuals in Power*, calls the self-legitimizing image of the individual critic in heroic or sublime terms (Bové 1986: 103). We can now understand why, for Bové, this image is Auerbach's most important legacy for post-war American criticism.

What this textualization of history should not blind us to is the fact that it in no way warrants the claim that this significant mimesis *pre-empt*s the traumatic undoing of significance. Hartman can read Wordsworth's mode of representation as successfully mourning the loss of old England, i.e., as significant, only because he interprets Wordsworth's poetry's self-interpretation as interpretation, that is, as having itself done the work of mourning. This, however, in no way interferes with the status of Wordsworth's mode of representation as a reaction to the trauma actually suffered at Simpton Pass, a representation that allows the trauma's forgetting by refiguring it. And what the textual history of *Wordsworth's Poetry* itself makes readable is Hartman's construction of Wordsworth as a reaction to the trauma of the loss, somewhere between 1954 and 1964, of literary significance guaranteed by transcendent love. The 'fewest signs' of these textual histories, then, to return to Nora's terms, do not necessarily force us to 'capture a maximum of meaning', but rather allow us to correct the temporality of Hartman's thesis: it is not so much the case that poetry constructs an object that will pre-empt poetry's

undoing, it is rather that *poetry is itself an object that is reconstructed in order to forget its traumatic undoing*, that is, the loss of its historical significance. Re-phrased only slightly, this means that poetry is not so much a 'lieu de mémoire' as the construction necessary to allow the interpreter to survive its death. Memory becomes the name of the connection with a living past that allows a dying discipline to survive the death of its object.

At the end of "Trauer und Melancholie," Freud names as one of the signals for the conversion of melancholy into successful mourning the capacity to "give up the [lost] object as worthless" (Freud 1982: 211). Hartman achieves this mourning of the loss of literary significance by giving it up as Germany: Hartman (1971 [1964]: xx) writes of a character in one of Wordsworth's poems, "were he to ride out of the poem it would be into trauma", which can really be understood as "were he to ride out of Wordsworth's England it would be into Germany". This topography establishes the survival of poetry as the guarantee of the trauma's infinite postponement: as soon as we leave the realm of English poetry, a repetition of the German trauma is no longer excluded, and it is at that cost that we deny the significance of Hartman's thesis. The temporal relocation of trauma that the textual history of this claim gives us to read, however, shows that Germany has been there all along, and has only temporarily been rebaptized as England. It shows, to quote the words of the Wellek Prize jury again, that the composition of "a nuanced and timely meditation on culture" is bought at the cost of the denial that less nuanced *unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* have not pre-empted the death of the *Kultur* on whose spectral survival the very meditation on culture depends.⁹ Against the threat that the end of poetry will mean that the trauma may happen again, the only consolation is to realize that since, say, the first Industrial Revolution, or the death of God, or Auschwitz – that is, since times now literally immemorial – the trauma has not ceased to happen.¹⁰

⁹ Before stating his Wordsworth-thesis, Hartman, in *The Fateful Question of Culture*, uses Nietzsche's second *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtung* to move from the confusion of "cultural with racial and of cultural with nationalistic-political" to "the link of the idea of culture with 'style'": "style as a quality that permeates the habits and mentality of a people" (Hartman 1997: 6). Hartman also mentions the fact that the "antidemocratic cult of genius" Nietzsche's redefinition of culture invites was exploited by Nazism (ibid.: 7), only to go on to employ it in his claim "that the work of a great artist can have a long-range impact on the way we look at ourselves as a culture" (ibid.). This move, I have shown, is symptomatic for the whole of Hartman's argument.

¹⁰ In his essay "Darkness Visible", Hartman comments on the "quasi-geological rift" that the Holocaust has occasioned "between representation and reality" (Hartman 1996: 46). In a footnote to this passage, the transcending of Germany into Europe makes clear that quasi-geological more properly means crypto-geographical: "Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, a distinctly European book written in exile and published in 1946, may also derive some of its appeal from still being on the far side of that rift: it foresees something that has already happened" (ibid.: 57n17).

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