How one must first distinguish between artworks.—All that is thought, written, painted, composed, even built and sculpted, belongs either to monological art or to art before witnesses. Among the latter is also to be reckoned even that illusory monologue art which includes belief in God, the entire lyric of prayer: because for a pious person there is no solitude—we were the first to make this discovery, we the godless. I know no deeper distinction in the entire optics of the artist than this: whether he looks toward the emerging artwork (toward “himself”—) from the standpoint of the witness or “has forgotten the world”: as is the essence of every monological artwork—it rests on forgetting, it is the music of forgetting.

—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, Die fröhliche Wissenschaft
Preface

Genius is the intellectual obsession of our time, and monologue is one symptom of the disorder. Monologues of solitude and madness have reached epidemic proportions. This book confronts modernity by reviewing Western traditions of genius and monologue, inspiration and individuality, from a rhetorical standpoint. A person no longer has a genius, a guardian spirit; twentieth-century myth suggests that an especially creative person is a genius. Ancient mythology has not disappeared but has been turned inward.

From biblical narratives to modern literature, as the prophet becomes the man of genius, invention displaces divine inspiration. Yet transcendent ideas continue to guide the modern genius, whose creative exertions never secure autonomy. Although the contemporary persona of the genius rings hollow, no original figure can be severed from the masks it has successively worn: the guise of the prophet, the poetry of imagination, the rhetoric of consciousness. These are not movements in a continuous historical narrative, but turning points that disrupt an elusive continuity.

Despite my disclaimers, some readers will misunderstand Genius and Monologue as a history of ideas. The opening chapters on Greek and Hebrew traditions are not gestures toward comprehensiveness; I have merely focused on certain recurrent configurations in the Western rhetoric of inspiration and individuality. I employ the methods of rhetorical, not historical, criticism. Without intending to narrate an
intellectual history, I interpret emblematic linguistic and literary forms that are linked to the philosophy of genius and the literature of monologue. Intertextual relationships make this a drama in which words are the central characters.

Part One, Philosophy of Genius, begins with Socrates' "divine sign," a precursor of the Latin guardian genius. Biblical and midrashic traditions supplement the Greco-Roman context through their representations of angels and satan as divine emissaries. Eighteenth-century aestheticians such as Shaftesbury, Addison, Young, and Kant revive and transform these ancient origins. The classical conception of a supernatural guardian spirit is gradually supplanted by modern ideas of an individual extraordinary mind. Following Husserl's phenomenology, which may represent the last possible struggle to maintain a monadic consciousness, monological subjectivity is deconstructed by Heidegger and Derrida.

Part Two, Literature of Monologue, examines paradigmatic literary monologues in drama, lyric, and narrative. For pre-Shakespearean soliloquists, solitary speech is linked to prayer and guilt. Shakespeare's soliloquists, after they lose the communicative relation to God, encounter radical psychological anomalies at the threshold of reason. Coleridge's conversation poems transform the contemplative voice into an independent, lyrical form, but his visionary poems disrupt this apparent continuity. Poe's mad narrators extend the range of first-person fiction—toward the abyss. Diverse conventions of internal monologue culminate with Joyce's Mollylogue, in which stream of consciousness cedes to stream of text: "Language speaks."

Quotations are central to this intertextual study. In a rhetorical analysis, however, the distinction between "use" and "mention" of words is sometimes difficult to maintain. Literary motifs combine themes and the words that embody them. Textual analysis has the appearance of a mosaic in which every tile is a word, a tessera from previous contexts. The mortar of quotation marks is everywhere essential, yet not always perceptible.

All translations in this book are my own except where otherwise indicated: I have chosen to perform this first interpretive act myself. In responding to the uniqueness of each original text, my translations and commentaries are intended to return the reader to the sources, cited in the footnotes. I also mention existing translations when they
are especially useful, and offer page references to those translations even when the English version quoted here is my own.

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K.F.

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