Genius and Monologue
Introduction

I

English "genius" retains traces of an intertextual history that transforms and introjects the archaic, mythological daimôn. Following Greek sources, Roman religion posits that every man has a genius, a familiar spirit; eighteenth-century aesthetics maintains that a great poet has genius; and today an extraordinarily creative person is a genius. The mythological past has been covered over by an exaggerated faith in subjectivity, individual speech, "monologue." While no pure genius can be quarried from buried strata, research may discern residues of opposing rhetorical systems that have generated particular surface formations. Analysis of literary and philosophic texts suggests, for example, that subjective monologue is a transformation of theological genius.

Ancient religions characteristically refer to frequent communications between divine and human realms. In the Greek context, Hesiodic daimones are essentially spirits, mediators between gods and men. Homer employs the singular daimôn more abstractly, implying an indefinite notion of divinity or fate. Distinct versions of the daimôn conflict within Plato's dialogues, and Socrates' daimonion is a nodal point at which Plato revises the prevailing traditions of Hellenic spirituality. The daimonion, Socrates' customary divine sign or voice, hov-
ers between divinity and subjectivity, inspiration and internal speech. Ever since Plato’s philosophical biography, literary texts have confronted the tensions between monologue as prayer (dialogue with God) and as solitary contemplation (dialogue with oneself).

Ancient Hebrew texts refer to malachim, angels or divine messengers, mediators between God and men. In a monotheistic framework, angels take the place of pagan minor deities, and Philo explicitly identifies Greek daimones and logoi with Hebrew malachim. Whereas Plato’s texts displace plural daimones by singular daimôn or daimonion, Hellenized Judaism drifts in the opposite direction: postbiblical commentaries and legends expand the role of angels and demons, as in the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and satan.

Angels and demons permeate the Judaic and Christian traditions, until the Enlightenment contests all figures of manifest divinity. Enlightened philosophers propose an ideal of the rational, self-contained subject that dispenses with transcendent assumptions, while English aesthetics specifically displaces the theological dimension of genius. Joseph Addison appropriates the ancient word at the same time that he modifies its use, while Lord Shaftesbury equates the experience of a daimôn, or genius, with soliloquy. To the extent that eighteenth-century aestheticians retain religious concerns, they characteristically introject the divine: Edward Young, for example, writes of genius as “that god within.” In the associationist tradition that revises and radicalizes Young’s conjectures, William Duff and Alexander Gerard understand genius as a psychological faculty. Mythical ideas of genius as mediator between gods and men cede to the popular call for original artistic creation through genius.

Seminal works of twentieth-century philosophy implicitly approach the new genius—subjectivity in language—through a dialectic of “transcendence” and “immanence.” Edmund Husserl explicates the monadic or immanent sphere of consciousness by excluding the transcendent, such that only the transcendental ego remains. Based on Husserl’s phenomenological method that grounds consciousness by limiting transcendent perception, existentialism briefly recasts genius in the guise of the authentic self before language merges with this last divinity. While Heidegger’s early work interprets the transcendence of Dasein, his later writings move toward a nostalgic rediscovery of the divine Logos.

Transformations of genius have replaced divine selection by indi-
individual speech, but monologue has also eroded as a basis of subjectivity. Following the brief ascendancy of internal monologue, contemporary fiction and literary theory question the traditions that rely on this phenomenon. Modern thought thus attains its current impasse, defiant of transcendent genius and skeptical of the imminent monologue that remains. The monological subject has been unsettled or decentered by a world purged of all possible foundations. Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida respond to this aporia through modified notions of transcendence in language.

II

Mono-logos means "solitary speech."

Monologue is not primarily a fact of human solitude but rather a mode of linguistic individuality. Ordinary, externalized discourse is the background for deviant, internalized discourse that may perform a semantically isolated idiolect. On the level of discourse, monologue is a turn away from dialogue. The language of an individual is monological to the extent that it deviates from dialogical conventions of speech. Such swerves are essential to formal innovation, but our task is to understand, not to evaluate, literary monologues.

The monadic subject has developed together with a monological conception of thought. No longer divine, logos grounds the speaking subject as an originator of propositions and narratives, meanings and illusions. The isolated self does not exist first in order to create its individuality afterward, however, because the "I" comes into conscious existence through languages of inwardness. The modern self strives for autonomy, although the speaking subject never exists in isolation: however insular a monologue may appear to be, it depends on interaction with communicative dialogue.

Extraordinary language philosophy comes into being when, unable to secure its authenticity, the singular subject allies itself with phenomena of linguistic deviance. Radical mono-logos arises as a divergence from norms of ordinary dialogical language; internal speech is only the most familiar form of solitary language, distinct from and yet associated with semantically isolated modes. While internal speech

1In this book, "deviant" and related terms are used descriptively, without pejorative connotations. The norms themselves are in flux and are not entirely insulated from what is perceived as abnormal.
is not necessarily deviant, literary monologues are typically bound up with difference, as if the monologist had an inherent tendency to deviate. At the same time that monological swerves produce illusions of individuality, the achieved individual expressions threaten communal norms and tend toward meaninglessness.

European literary traditions of monologue, linked to the representation of thought, recapitulate philosophical and theological explanations of genius. In the beginning only God is capable of monologue, but sin and satan generate new possibilities for monological speech at a distance from God. The monologist steers a course between divinity and madness through English literary works from pre-Shakespearean drama to modernist fiction. While medieval and Renaissance plays retain the link between solitary speech and prayer, Shakespeare's schemers and meditators introduce diverse modes of deviant monologue. Marlowe and Shakespeare imply both the metaphysical and the psychological forms of soliloquy, but dialogue with God drifts toward an internal dialogue. S. T. Coleridge's conversational poetry responds to Hamlet's soliloquies and exemplifies the Romantic discourse of a speaking subject. Hints of the transcendent remain, however, and the sober conversational pretense begins to dissolve when supernatural and unconscious worlds threaten to take control. E. A. Poe's tales represent extremes of the determined villain and mad monologist, yet the subjective certainty of his speakers is disarmed by a perverse reflex.

The development of narrative internal monologue also moves between the poles of genius and monologue, the transcendent and the immanent, external forces and the independence of the subject. Arthur Schnitzler in particular shows that internal speech cannot escape implicit dialogues. Stream of consciousness in works by James Joyce flows into the stream of language as a transcendent muse. Even the postmodernist scene of writing, in which a text appears as its own monologue, derives from this line of development: discourse cannot secure a realm of isolated subjectivity. These readings are in no way comprehensive but represent a limited number of intertextual rela-

---

tionships in which literary monologue reveals a monological history of creative deviations.

In the critical tradition starting with Hédelin d’Aubignac, dramatic soliloquy is considered problematic from the standpoint of realism. Denis Diderot questions whether unrealistic soliloquies are acceptable in drama, while others defend and redefine dramatic soliloquy. The aside is a further form of staged self-address, often linked with audience address. Dramatic soliloquies frequently approach a relationship to divinity, if not to deviance and madness. The conversation poem transforms the conventions of dramatic soliloquy, and first-person narrative may assume similar monological forms.

To varying degrees, literature of monologue purports to represent internal speech, but modernism tends to undermine mimetic illusions in favor of a writing that recognizes itself as such. While most monologues imply a first-person speaker, first-person narrators in particular tend to merge self-reflectively with their texts. On one level, internal monologue fictionally represents internal speech, the linguistic aspect of consciousness. Stream-of-consciousness technique reproduces a fictional stream of consciousness, including internal speech and pre-

---

3 Hédelin d’Aubignac, La pratique du théâtre (Amsterdam: Jean Frederic Bernard, 1715), 230. Denis Diderot, Discours de la poésie dramatique, ed. Jean-Pol Caput (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1970), 91. See also Friedrich Düsel, Der dramatische Monolog in der Poetik des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts und in den Dramen Lessings (Hamburg: Leopold Voss, 1897), 2–4; and H. M. Paull, “Dramatic Convention with Special Reference to the Soliloquy,” in Fortnightly Review, 71 (1899), 863–70. J. J. Engel, “Über Handlung, Gespräch, und Erzählung,” in Schriften (Berlin: Mylius, 1802), vol. 4, pp. 190–94; and Hans Sittenberger, “Der Monolog,” in Das litterarische Echo, 15 (May 1, 1900), 1033–41. The seminal work of Friedrich Leo, Der Monolog im Drama: Ein Beitrag zur griechisch-römischen Poetik (Berlin: Weidmann, 1908), differs from most in that it distinguishes between soliloquy, self-address, and monologue. Modern English does not preserve this distinction, but we may wish to differentiate between soliloquy as physically isolated speech, retaining self-address and monologue for more radical forms of semantic solitude. Leo notes that, in Greek drama, self-address develops later than soliloquy. In The Soliloquy in German Drama (New York: Columbia University Press, 1915), 3, Erwin W. Roessler understands dramatic soliloquy as “a passage in a drama in which a character is alone upon the stage and speaks to himself, believing himself to be alone.” He emphasizes the difference between dramatic forms that represent “solitude as a condition” and those that depict “aloneness as a fact.” See also Wolfgang Schadewaldt, Monolog und Selbstgespräch: Untersuchungen zur Formgeschichte der griechischen Tragödie (Berlin: Weidmann, 1926), 29.

linguistic elements. Both internal monologue and stream of consciousness tend to merge with the stream of textuality, however, to the point of renouncing mimetic pretenses.

Definitions begin to erode as we approach particular literary works. "Monologue" remains a general term denoting physically or semantically solitary speech acts that deviate from dialogical norms.

III

Genius and monologue initially appear to constitute a simple antithesis on the order of inspiration and individuality, divinity and subjectivity, God and man, or spirit and language. But both genius and monologue contain internal tensions, and the two do not signify on the same level of discourse. Genius is both transcendent and immanent spirit by virtue of the introjection that transforms a Roman mythological figure into a category of modern psychology. Monologue may be understood either as a static opposition to communicative dialogue or as a dynamic swerve away from prior conventions of discourse. In the first case, monologue is the factual solitude of isolated speech that is not addressed to another. More significantly, monologue signals the active break from norms of ordinary language and is thus allied with innovation, deviant discourse, and creativity. Monologues often strive to evade norms, although pure monologue, in the sense of a linguistic mode that has entirely freed itself from otherness, is an impossibility.

Monologue is, then, a set of literary and rhetorical forms that represent and accomplish individuality. As individuality is both a linguistic and a subjective phenomenon, individual language is not merely "the language of an individual." Before assuming anything about speaking individuals, we must understand how speech itself can be individualized, and how texts produce the appearance of individuality.

Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*, based on the terminological categories of "language" (*langue*) and "speech" (*parole*), facilitates an understanding of individual language, deviance, and originality. Saussure never wrote a linguistics of speech, which would have been relevant to the problematics of monologue, but the boundaries of his research provide direction for further exploration. He characterizes speech most broadly as an act of discourse and further
explains the physical utterance by reference to individual thoughts that occasionally permit verbal freedom. For Saussure, then, speech is primarily a physical and psychological act of expression. If Saussure's general description of speech links the speech act to individual acts of will, then individual language appears to occur in conjunction with a personal or individual thought. Post-Saussurian linguists for the most part begin from this psychological premise, yet the exclusive association of speech with individual thought leads away from analysis of linguistic individuality.

In recognition of the subsystems of language, post-Saussurian linguists often refer to "individual language," formed by specialized conventions and systems that govern an individual's speech. This individual language is an intermediary term in the discussion of collective language and specific speech acts. In one sense, the individual language may be only a selection from existing forms of discourse. From the standpoint of psychological theory, Sigmund Freud writes of clichés that repeat themselves throughout our lives, and not only "a lover's discourse" follows predictable patterns. To view individual language as either an unchanging norm or as a discrete psychological capacity is analogous to conceiving language as a single essence. An individual's speech follows predictable patterns, but this network of linguistic strategies does not constitute a closed system. In contrast to the traditional and fully formed locutions, original combinations of speech deviate from systems or conventions of usage. An individual language may be understood as a repertoire of common or uncommon discourse types; individual speech depends on a break from established repertoires. A deviant speech act may become a fashionable communal norm or dialect variation, when an innovative swerve from previous standards is repeated and stabilized.

Dramatic, poetic, and narrative forms of monologue are closely associated with the use of deviant literary techniques, at the boundary


between socially accepted and socially censored discourse. The potential for constituting an original discourse type structured around an unfamiliar code is evident in the development of internal monologue and stream of consciousness in twentieth-century literature.

IV

Writers on genius have always feared that personal limitations may make their subject inaccessible. Can only an ingenious subject know genius as an object of analysis? Does genius only express itself indirectly, without revealing its essence?

"Genius" is first of all a word, and these pages approach an intertextual history of inspiration and individuality by working from linguistic clues. Modern genius is a nebulous construction over unstable foundations. How must we understand the linguistic mechanisms that have generated modern philosophy of genius and literature of monologue? No attempt has been made here to provide a linear intellectual history or even to trace direct lines of influence in the transformations of genius and monologue, for contrasts are often more significant than continuities.

"Unit idea," "key word," and "master trope" seek to name what they themselves are, in diverse intellectual traditions. Much depends on the different ways of conceiving thought that they imply. In contrast to the methods of conventional history of ideas, *Genius and Monologue* examines Western inspiration and individuality by uncovering key words and rhetorical mechanisms that give rise to dominant ideology. If the unit idea presupposes an essentialist conception, the key word is connected with a functionalist approach to meaning in relation to linguistic usage, and the master trope forms part of a rhetoricist method.

Traditional intellectual history, typified by the writings of Arthur Lovejoy, relies on the assumption that essential ideas can be distinguished and defined. Despite changing forms of expression, the Chain of Being, the Good, and the Just are taken to provide solid ground for the inquiry into unit ideas. Central human experiences, we like to believe, have not changed substantially during the course of cultural development. Conventional history of ideas, then, presumes access to immutable signified conceptions beyond the configuration
of signifying expressions. Based on essentialist notions of stable meaning, intellectual history sometimes quests for unifying ideas.

A more pragmatic type of research, suggested by the work of Raymond Williams, focuses on key words that predictably recur in connection with ideology. According to the modified assumptions, signified conceptions must be understood in terms of shifting means of signification. Like keys, words function to open up ways of encountering the world. Ideas cannot remain stable, as our worldview is created and revised by a kaleidoscope of changing word configurations. This functionalist conception of meaning emphasizes the manifestations of thought. Genius and Monologue examines key terms—"genius," "monologue," "daimon, daimones, daimonion, malachim, logoi, satan, "transcendence," and "immanence"—that reveal much about diverse theological and philosophical systems. Because these key words are discussed from a linguistic standpoint, they stand in implicit quotation marks throughout the present book.

The new rhetorical criticism, practiced by critics as different as Kenneth Burke and Paul de Man, dispenses with essentialist presuppositions by emphasizing the efficacy of master tropes, figures of speech that engender and dominate meaning. Beyond the control of subjective ideas or intentions, tropes determine signification. In view of this rhetorical power, essential ideas and functional keys fade into positions of subsidiary importance: tropes give rise to tropes, generating the appearance of structures and systems of thought. From a rhetorician's standpoint, Genius and Monologue deals with the introjection of genius and the prosopopoeia that creates illusions of monologue. An inward turn represents God within man, while the trope of masks gives a voice and a face to internal speech.

This book does not present a conventional history of ideas, but considers key words and literary forms associated with inspiration and individuality. Rather than seek to conquer some paradise of stable meanings, I offer a guided tour through pathways of the Western tradition, with only one certain end: a review of rhetorical landscapes or textual topoi with interested fellow travelers. Because these revisionary routes demand an agile guide, specialists may resent the wanderer who declines to linger in their chosen domain, while other people wish the pace were faster. The reader need not start at the beginning and may prefer to skip from chapter to chapter in accordance with personal preference. The relationships between texts are essential.