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Creating States: Studies in the Performative Language of John Milton and William Blake

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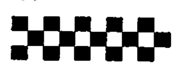

PROLOGUE

Words, Worlds, Acts, and Visions

This is an essay exploring the way certain writers do things with words. The writers are, primarily, John Milton and William Blake, and what they do is put into words a consciousness of divine inspiration or an experience of expanded perception, asking the reader to accept their utterance as emanating from a transcendent authority either external or internal to the self. Their language, in presenting itself as inspired or visionary, posits two related moments of effectual discourse: the poets themselves have heard a voice that alters their perception of the world, and they set out to communicate this verbal experience in a way that will leave their audience with a changed vision. They face the challenge of discovering or inventing a language and a scene of discourse within which the experience of vision might be communicated, and through which its impact on them might be transformed into a creative effect in the external world.

Thus far, the performative power of visionary language would seem to depend on the poet's more or less conscious imitation of a model of language central to Western religious tradition, a tradition in which the term *Logos* names in a unique way the performative dimension of its central text. In the Bible, Logos is the divine force which creates the world, the incarnate force which fulfils the role of hero in that world, the inspirational force which guides the writers of the text, and the kerygmatic or declarative force which moves its readers. Yet literary criticism of the past three decades has attacked Logos as a limited concept, challenging the notion of a transcendent Word by demonstrating that words derive meaning only from their place in a differential structure of signifiers, or that signifiers have no determinate meaning but are irredeemably alienated from signifieds, or that structures of words have meaning only insofar as they reflect and construct the operations of history. The notion of a Word that performs

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independently of signifying structures or historical circumstances – and, for that matter, the notion of capitalizing the word 'Word' – has been condemned as a mystification perpetuated by those who refuse to take account of cultural specificity and materialist concerns.

I began this investigation with the conviction that, with due respect to post-structuralist and new historicist insights, a writer's consciousness of operating within a theological and literary tradition that privileges certain models of utterance as uniquely creative or effectual must manifest itself in some identifiable way in the order and orientation of words which that writer produces. I still maintain that the writing of visionary poetry is a distinctive activity, and this book is in part a study of what distinguishes visionary language on the level of authorial presence, voice, address, and reference. But as I worked through this study, it became apparent that the claims of certain post-structuralist and historicist approaches also had their place in it. Not only is it impossible for the texts of Milton and Blake to escape their different historical contexts, but many of the texts of both poets are specifically oriented toward the historical moment as the arena in which their utterances are to have an effect. Milton's prose is shaped by the ecclesiastical, legal, and economic discourse of his contemporaries, and even in *Paradise Lost* his concept of inspiration is modified by the linguistic structures characteristic of secular texts. Blake's shorter prophetic books belong to the 1790s genre of radical tractate literature; the influence of popular rhetorical forms and the language sanctioned by societal institutions makes itself felt throughout his work. Milton and Blake go through a parallel evolution from writers of political and anti-prelatical tracts to poets who, having failed in their attempts to alter historical circumstances through a direct address to their contemporaries, reaffirm their faith in individual visionary consciousness – *while continuing to use the forms of a socially or politically performative language*. As these writers are doing things with the Logos, they are also doing things with the political, social, and institutional discourses of their respective societies.

I believe that contemporary theories of performative language address these historical concerns in a way that allows for compromise, or at least beneficial coexistence, with Miltonic inspiration and Blakean creativity. Speech-act theory maintains that words do things, but makes this effectiveness contingent on a complex of factors including the conventions accepted by the relevant sociopolitical community, the circumstances in which words are uttered, the identity of the speaker and the relationship between speaker and hearer, and the grammatical form of the utterance. These criteria are by no means consistent, even in the major formulations

of speech-act theory by J.L. Austin and John Searle, and scholars who have adapted Austin's and Searle's principles to linguistics, literary criticism, political science, and other fields have multiplied definitions and examples of when and how speech can be an act.

In what follows, I attempt to develop a speech-act approach which addresses the distinctiveness of visionary language, and which can therefore make possible a more rigorous study of the often vague or naïve concept of visionary poetry. My first chapter sets out the theoretical background, surveying existing forms of speech-act criticism in order to draw out their underlying assumptions about utterances and their contexts. I argue that theories of performative language have gone in two basic directions: toward a focus on societal discourse and power structures as the factors which define verbal performativity, on the one hand, and toward an emphasis on the power of language to posit or create autonomously, on the other. Different as they seem, the two approaches, which I term 'sociopolitical' and 'phenomenological,' are at times compatible. When they are not, it is precisely the distinction between them that can help to uncover the functioning of language in the visionary text. The chapter concludes by outlining a number of philosophical and linguistic models which allow for the intersection of the sociopolitical with the phenomenological performative, focusing, in particular, on the creation of subjectivity in language. In the second chapter, I approach this theoretical discussion from a different direction, by arguing that *both* types of performative language are already implicit in the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis, a text that has even more relevance than has been supposed for the development of a visionary tradition in Western literature.

The remainder of the book seeks to illustrate the significance of the sociopolitical and phenomenological performative, of the scene of discourse and subjectivity in language, through readings of two central poets in the visionary tradition in English literature. In chapters 3 and 4, I address what I take to be two cruxes in Milton's concept of visionary language: first, his self-presentation as an inspired writer in the prose works, which ironically employ the discourse of law and economics; secondly, the model of divinely creative language in the invocations and the account of creation in *Paradise Lost*, a model which is more limiting and hierarchizing, thus more *political*, than Milton may intend. The remaining chapters are devoted to Blake and concentrate on the paradigm of performative language he inherits from Milton and the Bible, a paradigm which, as he is aware, conflicts with the operation of language in his social and political environment. Chapter 5 traces the move from inspired and ideally commu-

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nicative language to institutional and repressive language in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, and chapter 6 examines an analogous conflict between poetic utterance and the restrictiveness of the sociopolitical performative in *The Book of Urizen* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.* The final chapter brings together visions of divine creation and verbal performance from Blake's major epics, culminating in an analysis of the compromise between sociopolitical and phenomenological utterance in establishing the authority of speakers in Blake's *Jerusalem*.

While working on this book, I have received generous financial, collegial, and personal support from many directions. I respectfully acknowledge the assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which provided funding for research and travel, and the Canadian Federation for the Humanities, which provided a grant in aid of publication. The staff of the Princeton University Library, the Bodleian Library, the Fitzwilliam Museum, the Tate Gallery, and the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum were most helpful in allowing me to consult their Blake collections. The Departments of English and Modern Languages and Literatures at the University of Western Ontario have provided many kinds of support, particularly some excellent secretarial assistance, and Thomas M. Lennon, as Dean of Arts, has been unfailingly encouraging and helped me cope with the concurrent demands of research and teaching.

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A few sections of this book have appeared in the form of articles: part of chapter 2 as 'Speech Acts and World-Creation: The Dual Function of the Performative' in the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 20 (1993); part of chapter 3 as 'Meddling with Authority: Inspiration and Speech Acts in Milton's Prose,' in *Spokesperson Milton: Voices in Contemporary Criticism*, edited by Charles W. Durham and Kristin P. McColgan (Susquehanna UP, 1994); and part of chapter 4 as 'Creation, Subjectivity, and Linguistic Structure in *Paradise Lost*: Milton with Saussure and Benveniste' in *English Studies in Canada* 20 (1994). I am grateful for permission to reprint material from these sources.

I could not wish for more congenial colleagues than those I have at the University of Western Ontario, and I would particularly like to thank Richard F. Green, J. Douglas Kneale, Martin Kreiswirth, John Leonard, Balachandra Rajan, and Tilottama Rajan for their suggestions and constructive criticism. My colleagues have shown great tolerance in listening and responding to a number of work-in-progress excerpts from this project which I presented as internal papers, and I have also learned a great deal from audiences of papers I presented at the Fourth International Milton Symposium, the First Southeastern Conference on John Milton, the 1992 History of European Ideas Conference, and the inaugural conference of the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism.

Finally, John Kozub's inestimable contribution begins with his suggestion for the title, and it goes on from there.

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Performative Language and Visionary Poetry

While speech-act theory *per se* is relatively uncommon as a primary approach to the interpretation of literature, its terms have been so widely disseminated in literary and cultural study that 'performative' can now be used loosely to describe discourse which is operative in society and establishes a social construct, or even, following Paul de Man, to denote the rhetorical dimension of language in general. For both these reasons, this chapter and the following one will work toward a somewhat more technical definition of 'performative' which is specifically relevant to the reading of visionary texts. This will not be an exclusive definition which recognizes only utterances that have an immediate, clearly definable effect in the world (such as 'I call this meeting to order'); even the founders of speech-act theory were ultimately unsatisfied with this limited range of meaning. Rather, the exploration of speech-act theory in this chapter will trace through its various manifestations a few focal points which the theorization of performative language shares with the language of visionary poetry. These are, primarily, the specific utterance (*parole*) and its discursive context, the authority of the speaker, and the role of language in the creation of subjectivity.

Parole and Its Contexts

Most literary scholars are by now acquainted with the basic principles of J.L. Austin's theory of performative language, presented by the philosopher in the 1955 William James lectures at Harvard University and published after his death as *How to Do Things with Words*. Austin tried to account for philosophers' difficulties in analysing certain kinds of sentences according to the logic of true-false propositions by isolating a category he called the

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speech-act theory introduces to Saussurian linguistics and to the philosophy of language. Whereas Saussure privileged *langue*, the abstract structure which makes possible the use of a language by individual speakers, over *parole*, the concrete and unique utterance, and whereas analytic philosophy tends to study propositions independently of their discursive context, speech-act theory demonstrates that the circumstances surrounding actual utterances play a crucial role in the functioning of a linguistic system. A competent speaker has internalized not only a system of grammar and vocabulary, but also a system of conventions whereby certain words or phrases used in certain situations or by certain speakers have a determinable significance, which may be quite different from that dictated by grammar and vocabulary alone. We recognize the difference in the meaning and force of 'OUT,' for instance, when it is shouted by an umpire standing behind home plate, when it is written on one of two swinging doors, and when it is addressed to a dog by a woman with arm and index finger extended.

Austin (and, even more self-consciously, Searle) begins with the apparent desire to develop universally valid systems for identifying performatives and their effects. But every definition they attempt must rely so heavily on the context of individual utterances that it becomes, ironically, a 'system' of the unique and contingent. While Austin's insights have been interpreted by many of his followers as a rule-governed system that allows individual utterances to function as illocutions, it is significant that Austin himself was never able to develop a full-fledged theory of speech acts. Rather, the arrangement of *How to Do Things with Words* as a succession of red herrings, or blind alleys through which the performative-constative opposition is followed, and the repeated failure to discover a stable standard by which this opposition can be measured, highlights the importance of the unreliable and ultimately indeterminable facet of utterances: the speech situation. Because the significance of circumstances and context is built into the definition of the speech act, it has been virtually impossible for either philosophers or linguists to develop a comprehensive and reliable theory of performative language.[1]

1 The work of John Searle is the most ambitious attempt to construct a universal theory, and it is an enterprise which Searle aligns, somewhat defensively, with the Saussurian study of *langue*: 'It still might seem that my approach is simply, in Saussurian terms, a study of "parole" rather than "langue." I am arguing, however, that an adequate study of speech acts is a study of *langue*' (*Speech Acts* 17). Several scholars, however, have expressed their uneasiness with Searle's theory, particularly as it applies to speech acts in literature and fiction; my own reservations will appear over the course of this book. Moreover, in shifting the focus from *parole* to *langue*, and in attempting to formulate a general theory of speech acts which will address fundamental problems in the philosophy of language, Searle has had to introduce concepts which are so general that they are of limited usefulness in analysing individual utterances in specific contexts. The best example may be his universal concept of intentionality, according to which an illocutionary act is defined in part by the speaker's intention to perform that illocutionary act.

The Speaker as Performer

Given the importance of the speech situation in Austin's philosophy of speech acts, it is perhaps not surprising that the central problem of his theory, from the point of view of literary critics, is also a problem of context. This is Austin's famous, or infamous, exclusion of non-serious speech, and of utterances in plays or poems, from the province of speech-act theory:

> ... a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy ... Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (*How to Do Things* 22)

The limitation imposed by Austin has functioned as a challenge rather than a deterrent to literary critics; in fact, it has been the starting point for almost all of the most significant critical essays on the speech-act hypothesis. In 'Signature Event Context,' Jacques Derrida bases his deconstruction of Austin on the charge that the 'ordinary language' which Austin analyses is marked by the deliberate exclusion of utterances perceived as marginal, parasitic, or non-serious. By disallowing the citation of performative utterances in non-standard circumstances, Austin is banishing to a '*ditch* or external place of perdition' a dimension of iterability which must be recognized as intrinsic to the performativity of language (*Limited Inc* 17). Defensively, John Searle responds that Austin was not making a metaphysical exclusion but rather suggesting that non-serious speech acts were not the best choices to begin with when developing a theory of standard cases ('Reiterating the Differences' 203–5); but the accuracy of this claim hardly dispels the objections of deconstructionist critics since Searle only sustains the hierarchical logic of normal and supplementary cases. Jonathan Culler supports Derrida's contention that 'the iterability manifested in the inauthentic, the derivative, the imitative, the parodic, is what makes possible the original and the authentic' (Culler 120), adding that Austin's insistence

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on seriousness seems to contradict his preliminary claim that performative utterances do not require a serious intention on the part of the speaker. Culler is led to the conclusion that he claims Austin tried to avoid: that illocutionary force is determined by the ungraspable totality of context affecting a particular utterance, including those elements which render the context non-serious or non-standard. Far from an explanatory system, this view of performative utterances would end in a proclamation of the indeterminacy of meaning, since 'meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless' (Culler 123).

Other critics who comment on Austin's rejection of the non-serious, or the controversy between Derrida and Searle which developed out of it, virtually all rely on some version of the same argument: that the context which defines an actor's or poet's role is analogous to that which defines the role of any speaker whom Austin would recognize as a serious agent in the real world. Mary Louise Pratt and Barbara Johnson both respond in a way which seems entirely consistent with Austin's priorities. They maintain that all speakers in the everyday world are to some extent acting a part, a situation that becomes most explicit when someone speaks '*as* Prime Minister' or '*as* a trained professional.' Johnson points out the irony of excluding explicitly dramatic situations from a theory that undertakes to explore 'speech acts' and the 'performative' aspect of language (65–6). She brings the question of seriousness to bear on the interpretation of all performative utterances, and gestures toward the enormous implications of such an inclusive concept of performativity for our understanding of societal organization:

> The performative utterance thus automatically fictionalizes its utterer when it makes him the mouthpiece of a conventionalized authority ... Behind the fiction of the subject stands the fiction of society, for if one states that society began with a prohibition (of incest) or a (social) contract, one is simply stating that the origin of the authority behind a performative utterance is derived from a previous performative utterance whose ultimate origin is undeterminable. (60)

Mary Louise Pratt's argument is more relevant to the speech-act theory of H.P. Grice than to Austin, but she also emphasizes the extent to which speech-act philosophers assume that speakers are 'authentic, self-consistent, essential' subjects, while in reality 'people always speak from and in a socially constituted position,' a position that is constantly shifting ('Ideology' 62–3). Stanley Fish, finally, stresses the significance but also the indeterminateness of context, arguing that we have to infer intentions and

meanings no matter whether the speaker is on a stage or face to face with us: 'If by "stage utterances" one understands utterances whose illocutionary force must be inferred or constructed, then all utterances are stage utterances, and one cannot mark them off from utterances that are "serious" ' ('With the Compliments' 705).

Fish's assumption that Austin excludes fictional and dramatic speech because it does not allow for full presence, and thus seems more difficult to connect with an originating intention, deviates somewhat from Austin's original statement. It is not at all clear that by 'stage utterances' Austin *did* understand utterances whose illocutionary force must be inferred across a distance; rather, what disturbs Austin about words spoken in a play is that they do not have the same performative force as words spoken outside the drama, and that the actor is not committed to or by the words he or she utters. Austin's non-seriousness is not Fish's non-presence, and yet Fish's response to Austin is analogous to those of the other critics cited above. All of them attempt to out-Austin Austin; if he focused on *parole* by calling attention to the societal conventions that allow utterances to function in particular circumstances, they argue that the serious/non-serious distinction highlights precisely the significance of *parole*, because it demands that contexts be investigated even further. Situating an utterance in a non-standard context reveals the assumptions we make about the authority, agency, and intentions of the speaker in understanding any speech act. Conceding, with Austin, that context is the determining element of illocutionary force, these critics defend drama and play-acting as one type of context that can offer especially valuable insights into the workings of performativity.

The analysis of fiction, or what to do with structures of words in which reference to external reality is suspended and which do not perform the illocutionary acts that the same words would in a real-world situation, is a further ramification of the problem of context. 'Walt Whitman does not seriously incite the eagle of liberty to soar,' Austin writes, content to dismiss poetic uses of language from his theory for the time being (*How to Do Things* 104). Yet the apparent anomalies caused by performatives in fictional contexts are unavoidable for critics whose particular concern is imaginative literature, and whose struggles with referentiality may cause them to sympathize with the note of frustration in R.A. York's statement that 'poetry ... often seems to represent a type of conspicuous futility in language' (21). The question of performatives in fiction has been taken up in very different ways by Barbara Herrnstein Smith, who proposes that imaginative literature is the fictive representation or imitation of real-world discourse; by John Searle, who believes that fictional writing invokes a set of

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'horizontal conventions' which suspend the 'vertical conventions' normally governing the relation between language and the world; and by Wolfgang Iser, who concludes from a similar analysis of horizontal and vertical conventions that fiction reorders the real-world functions of language and uses them to create a context for its own interpretation. The linguistic and philosophical problem of reference adjoins speech-act theory at this point, along with the question of world-making as it has been formulated by both philosophers and narratologists.[2]

Utterance and Context: Two Directions for Analysis

Given a focus on the individual utterance and its unique context, it is possible to formulate two types of interpretive approaches to the literary text based on speech-act principles. One approach privileges the audience and context of the literary utterance, while the other privileges the speaker and the act of utterance itself. The audience-centred approach, first of all, concerns itself with those elements of context that determine the performative force of an utterance at a particular place and time, where 'utterance' may refer either to words spoken by characters within the text or to the text itself as illocutionary act. In either case, this approach is likely to bring the historical context of the work to bear on interpretation. To the extent that performative force depends on the conventions and institutions of the society within which an utterance operates, speech-act theory legitimizes the study of social discourses contemporary with a given text.[3]

But the uniqueness of *parole* also has an ahistorical, phenomenological dimension. Considered as the utterance of an individual poet, the literary text constitutes a postulate which may elicit belief, willing suspension of disbelief, or some other commitment, depending on a set of variables which include the generic and grammatical structure of the utterance and the status of the speaking voice. This second type of speech-act reading analyses the way the literary utterance both depends on, and constructs, the authority of the speaker or poet.

2 See, for example, recent work by Henry Staten, who builds on the philosophy of Hilary Putnam and Saul Kripke; Thomas G. Pavel, who provides connections between speech-act theory, world-making, and fictionality; and Mario J. Valdés, who explores the application of the philosophy of world-making to the reading of literature, though without explicit reference to performative language.

3 An essay like Sandy Petrey's 'The Reality of Representation: Between Marx and Balzac,' which analyses the performative nature of social representation in fictional and non-fictional texts of the nineteenth century, makes the affinities of this approach with new historicism and cultural materialism particularly clear.

As a preliminary way of isolating the issues involved in establishing the poet's authority to make a performative utterance, we might compare the case of real-world performatives that derive their effectiveness from the unique identity of the speaker (or writer), such as the signing of a cheque or the giving of consent during a wedding ceremony. As Derrida has demonstrated, these acts are less straightforward than they seem. The effectiveness of the signature depends on both uniqueness *and* iterability; the signature on a cheque is valid because it was performed by a specific individual, but it is verifiable precisely because it can be reproduced, or checked against any number of identical signatures by that individual. It is, Derrida argues, a fundamentally paradoxical gesture, insofar as it registers the absence of the subject but also holds fast to the subject's having-been-present at a specific time in the past (*Limited Inc* 19–20). What is more, Derrida's meditation on the American Declaration of Independence reveals that the authorizing signature must be regarded as an event which at once depends on *and* brings into being the identity of the signatory. The Declaration guarantees the freedom of 'the people,' while 'the people' simultaneously guarantees the Declaration by signing it as a free agent: 'The signature invents the signer' ('Declarations' 10). Analogously, the authority of the poet and the speech act of uttering a poem must be regarded as interdependent. The visionary poet, in particular, stakes the effectiveness of his or her utterance on a claim to divine inspiration, or an event which confers special powers of perception and understanding, but this claim only has meaning insofar as the audience believes, and thus ratifies the effectiveness of, the poetic text. Credibility, moreover, is likely to depend on the author's ability to echo or iterate conventions of invocation and prophetic speech that have been used by other poets in the tradition. The poet's authority, even his or her subjectivity, is as much a function of the utterance as a guarantor of it.

These two approaches to the literary text are roughly parallel to two types of speech-act theories which some critics have identified, distinguishing between those which define illocution in terms of external or pragmatic circumstances, and those which seek formal or intrinsic criteria for defining illocutionary force.[4] Austin set the pattern for both these projects by attempting to pin down the performative first in terms of external societal conventions (such as the existence of an accepted procedure for the performance of the speech act), then in terms of internal grammatical criteria

4 Stanley Fish makes this distinction at the end of 'With the Compliments of the Author' (720–1); see also chapter 3 of *Speech Acts and Literary Theory*, where Sandy Petrey outlines and distinguishes some important speech-act theories using similar criteria.

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(such as the ability to make the performative quality of any utterance explicit by rephrasing it to include a verb in the first-person present). More importantly, for the purposes of this book, the two speech-act approaches tend to generate two substantially different forms of speech-act criticism. Critics who concentrate on context or sociohistorical environment usually focus their attention on speech acts *in* the literary text, while those who study poetic authority and the phenomenological status of utterance usually regard the text itself *as* a speech act. In the first type of theory, the critic analyses speech acts within the world that the text creates or imitates; this may or may not involve comparisons between the things that are done with words by characters in the text and things done with words in an external sociopolitical environment. In the second category, the critic treats the whole of the text as, or at least by analogy with, a speech act, analysing it as the utterance of an individual author, again with or without taking into consideration the author's historical moment. The two approaches lend themselves, furthermore, to the study of different genres. Speech acts in the text become a subject for analysis when the text is expansive enough to create a world of verbal acts in a social context, and especially when the world within the text imitates an actual society, as in the realist novel or neoclassical drama. The text as a whole presents itself most readily as a speech act, on the other hand, when it is the utterance of a single speaker who is trying to effect something through his or her utterance, as in most lyric poetry. While they are related in various important ways, the distinctiveness of these approaches has not been emphasized strongly enough and the resultant confusion has made it difficult to distinguish the projects of critics who have allied speech-act theory with widely divergent critical stances.

In the rest of this chapter and throughout the book, I will be using the terms 'sociopolitical performative' and 'phenomenological performative' to distinguish the two approaches I have outlined. Here, *sociopolitical* refers to an utterance which more or less explicitly derives performative force from the speaker's (and audience's) position within a societal institution (the church, the law, the class system), as well as a mode of interpretation which analyses performative utterances by appeal to historical, political, or institutional circumstances. But literary critics also use the term 'performative' in a different sense, to refer to an author's ability to 'create' reality through poetic or fictional utterance, independently of societal conventions but in accordance with literary conventions that ascribe creative (or visionary, or prophetic) authority to the speaking voice and elicit the reader's or hearer's assent. This type of utterance, and the corresponding interpretive

approach, is here called the *phenomenological* performative, since its concern is the positing of phenomena whose existence is determined, not by historical reality, but by some other set of criteria. As I will argue in the following chapter, the recurrent paradigm for the phenomenological performative, in speech-act theory and in visionary poetry, is divine creation by the word. If performative utterances in poetry do not create phenomena of the same order as does the divine word, they may nevertheless lay claim to a similar type of performativity: non-conventional, extra-societal, deriving from the will or intentionality of the speaker alone.

Speech Acts in the Text

Austin's exclusion of utterances spoken by an actor on stage has been undermined to the extent that speech-act theory has made its most considerable and productive impact on literary theory in the study of drama. As a form in which speaking and acting are inseparable, which invokes generic conventions as well as the behavioural conventions of the society it portrays, and which takes place in a public context, drama has proven a valuable illustration of the way social reality is both created and reflected by verbal exchange. Sandy Petrey has observed that there is a direct correlation among a society's dependence on formal or prescribed utterances, the amount of (neo)classical drama it produces, and the openness of the drama (and the society) to speech-act analysis (*Speech Acts* 109). Thus Louis XIV's France, Golden Age Spain, and Elizabethan England have provided the material for both the earliest and the most searching essays in speech-act criticism.[5]

Analysing speech acts performed by characters in a play is conceptually unproblematic. It might even be said to evade Austin's stricture against non-serious utterances by considering the world of the drama as if it were the real world, and giving the characters credit for the seriousness of their utterances under those circumstances. Thus when Lear says to Cordelia, at the beginning of Shakespeare's play,

> Here I disclaim all my paternal care

5 Two of the most important critiques of speech-act theory and its relation to literature, Stanley Fish's long essay on *Coriolanus* ('How to Do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech-Act Theory and Literary Criticism,' in *Is There a Text* 197–245) and Shoshana Felman's book on Molière's *Don Juan* (*The Literary Speech Act*), focus on dramatic texts. See also Elias L. Rivers, ed., *Things Done with Words: Speech Acts in Hispanic Drama*, a volume of essays resulting from a seminar held at Stony Brook in 1984 on speech-act theory and Golden Age drama, and the work of Richard Ohmann, especially 'Speech, Literature, and the Space Between.'

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Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee, from this, for ever (1.1.113–16)

the declaration is an explicit and bona fide speech act on the part of King Lear, even if it is true (as Austin feared) that the *actor* playing Lear has not disowned the actress playing Cordelia. Studies of speech acts in fiction encounter a greater number of methodological problems, because the illusion that the text delineates a separate reality is often complicated by the presence of a narrative voice which reminds the reader that there are at least two contexts in which the words of the novel can function – as utterances of characters, or utterances of an author in the real world. When we read the first words of *Moby-Dick*, 'Call me Ishmael,' to whom is that directive addressed and by whom is it spoken? Is the illocution best described as a conversational self-introduction by a fictional character, a preliminary orienting statement by the author, or the author's act of positing a fictional character and a fictional world? At what point and on what basis do we decide among the possibilities? Critics who analyse illocutionary force in fiction tend to feel the need for a more or less fully developed theoretical framework to help distinguish the situations of author and narrator, reader and implied audience, and to help define the mode of reality to which language in fiction refers.[6]

6 The need for these distinctions is evident throughout Mary Louise Pratt's *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*, which adapts Searle's notion of rules or appropriateness conditions governing verbal behaviour and, more specifically, H.P. Grice's theory of the Co-operative Principle governing ordinary conversation, in order to define the 'literary speech situation' and propose it as a basis for the interpretation of narrative. Pratt's book plays a fundamental role in opening up the possibilities that speech-act theory offers for the reading of narrative. In her view, the literary speech situation encompasses the previously unacknowledged relationship of 'literary' narrative to a wide range of 'non-literary' genres. Her methodology establishes the relevance of numerous aspects of a narrative's context, including the implied cooperative relationship between author and audience, the various kinds of pre-selection that a narrative must go through before it reaches publication, and the fulfilment or violation of generic norms.

On the other hand, the work of Sandy Petrey represents a solidly Austinian approach to speech acts in the novel. Petrey's readings of nineteenth-century French realist fiction in its sociohistorical context focus attention not only on the way a societal context allows speech acts to function, but also on how speech acts constitute and bring a community into existence in the first place. Petrey's essays on Balzac ('Castration, Speech Acts, and the Realist Difference,' 'The Reality of Representation') are an important example of the critical approach I define in this chapter as the sociopolitical reading of performative language.

Nevertheless, speech acts in fiction, particularly realist fiction, provide important examples of how performative language functions in the context of sociopolitical conventions. To begin to illustrate the significance of performative language in the world of the novel, we might draw an example from nineteenth-century fiction which is more or less contemporary with Blake's very different use of words in *Jerusalem*, the subject of the final chapter of this book. From the opening pages of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, the determining factors in plot development and character motivation are marriage and inheritance, aspects of life in society which are regulated by two of J.L. Austin's prime examples of speech acts, the wedding ceremony and the will. The centrality of these and other verbal declarations is attested by the fact that the tensions and conflicts in the novel are driven by discrepancies between private sentiment and public statement. Elinor and Marianne Dashwood both risk the tragic consequences of an emotional attachment which is not ratified by a formal engagement. Throughout the novel Austen plays on the ambiguity of the term 'engagement,' which refers to involvement in social, business, or financial activity, but also to a state specifically defined by a man's spoken proposal and a woman's spoken acceptance. Marianne's suffering is a direct consequence of Willoughby's failure to say the words which would alter her status from private sweetheart to acknowledged fiancée. The significance of such a declaration as a publicly sanctioned speech act is tellingly summed up in the nineteenth-century euphemism 'to speak' for a man's formal declaration of love and proposal of marriage.

The performative power of declarations in a society where the power structure is so extensively determined by marital alliances and lines of inheritance is reflected by Austen's satirical account of the way Mrs Ferrars, disapproving of her son Edward's engagement to Elinor Dashwood, first declares him no longer her child, then reinstates him to the status of son, but not to that of elder son, even though he is her firstborn and even though she has meanwhile disavowed her younger child, Robert:

> After a proper resistance on the part of Mrs Ferrars ... Edward was admitted to her presence, and pronounced to be again her son ... [H]ere it plainly appeared, that though Edward was now her only son, he was by no means her eldest; for while Robert was inevitably endowed with a thousand pounds a-year, not the smallest objection was made against Edward's taking orders for the sake of two hundred and fifty at the utmost; nor was anything promised either for the present or in future ... (Austen 362–3)

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Carried away by the socially constitutive power of speech acts, Mrs Ferrars uses her authority as head of the family and controller of its property to translate her private indignation into public declarations. The humour of the passage relies on the obvious futility, in one sense, of Mrs Ferrars's histrionics; she will have an elder son Edward and a younger son Robert no matter what she says. Yet her declarations do have the effect of altering Edward's and Robert's legal status as heirs, a fact which obviously has real consequences for the condition of their lives. As the object of Austen's satire, Mrs Ferrars's pronouncements expose the ironic discrepancy between physical reality and social reality, or what Searle calls brute facts and institutional facts, even more clearly than do the ordinary societal speech acts (engagements, marriages, wills) that the nineteenth-century novel portrays.

Yet the study of performative language in the novel easily slides over to the subtly different question of the text's status as speech act. In *Speech Acts and Literary Theory*, for instance, Sandy Petrey cites an example from *Jane Eyre* to demonstrate how an utterance can work within the world of the novel analogously to the way it works in ordinary life, but then deduces from this example that 'comparable conventional agreements produce fictional characters and their fictional world' (*Speech Acts* 10). Suddenly, attention shifts from conventions of societal behaviour to conventions of fiction-writing, from relationships between characters in the novel or persons in the real world to relationships which connect the two realms to one another. Petrey's allusion to a contract between author and audience introduces a substantially different approach to speech-act interpretation, one that raises considerably more complex questions concerning the ontological status of literary texts.

The Text as Speech Act

While questions of author-audience relationship have been addressed in terms of the novel by Mary Louise Pratt and others, the concept of the text as authorial utterance has special relevance for lyric poetry. Speech-act studies of poetry are still relatively uncommon, however, and present methodological challenges of their own. It is less obvious than in the case of the drama or novel that speech-act theory is even relevant to the interpretation of poetic texts. When Wordsworth proposes the language really used by men as an alternative to poetic diction, he does not necessarily share the assumptions of twentieth-century philosophers who turned their attention to the operations of ordinary language, and even a fundamentally

dialogical genre like the Coleridgean conversation poem is far removed from the one-on-one dialogue that is the explicit or implicit model of most speech-act linguistics. The term 'literature,' which came into vogue in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, originally referred mainly to poetry and designated a type of discourse removed from the verbal operations of 'society,' a word which came into its modern use more or less simultaneously. That the twentieth century has in large measure upheld the alienation of poetry from referentiality and societal action is illustrated by the pervasiveness of Archibald MacLeish's dictum 'A poem should not mean / But be' (41).

But if MacLeish's statement denies poetry an empirically referential and active role, it simultaneously affirms the poem's existence in a mode of reality distinct from that of the empirical world. The sense in which a poem can 'be' is not the sense in which, for instance, a tree 'is': one would be tempted to call the poem's mode of existence intransitive, if that term could be meaningfully applied to the copula. Poetic discourse posits reality in a self-reliant and self-reflexive way that does not appeal to either reference or perception, if those are our ordinary ways of establishing existence in language and in the physical world. What Roland Barthes has said of modernist writing could be said of poetry in general: its mode of existence is analogous to that evoked by the middle voice in Greek grammar, in that it exists 'for its own sake,' independently of a subject-object distinction (Barthes 20). Yet to describe poetic discourse as independent of reference and the criterion of truth is to echo Austin's original definition of performative utterance. Performatives may be dependent on societal convention, but they have a referential autonomy that seems tantalizingly similar to the status of poetry in its ability to posit existence.

The popularity of Mallarmé among critics who explore the function of poetry as performative language demonstrates the tendency to associate this type of performativity with a positing which appears to turn away from history and reference.[7] But a few critics have also used Mallarmé's work to demonstrate the interaction between literary positing and social action. In an essay which examines the performative dimension of Mallarmé's poem 'Salut,' Steven Winspur offers more specific terminology than most critics for the study of literary texts as performative utterances, referring to them as 'text acts.' Winspur attempts to establish the centrality of text acts through a move that repeats Derrida's inversion of the hierarchy of speech

7 See, in particular, Barbara Johnson's 'Poetry and Performative Language: Mallarmé and Austin' (52–66) and Derrida's 'The Double Session' (*Dissemination* 173–286).

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and writing in *Of Grammatology*. He proposes that 'text acts ground their speech-act cousins, and not the other way around':

> Our actions are always grounded in preexistent textual models (whether these be poetic, journalistic, filmic, or whatever), and the power of certain literary texts ... resides precisely in their *recasting* the performative force inherent in such models. (Winspur 184)

Winspur's main example of a text which recasts performative force in this way is 'Salut,' one of Mallarmé's many 'circumstantial' poems which translates an actual utterance (the poem was delivered as a toast during a banquet on 15 February 1893) into a text that celebrates the performative force of all poetry, thus demonstrating 'the *continuation of life* ... that comes through our *actions* with words' (Winspur 180). Winspur is primarily interested in showing that both speech-act theory (recast according to Wittgensteinian principles) and poetry (recast according to Mallarméan example) are fundamentally ethical activities. Central to his argument is the demonstration that Mallarmé's poetry moves from historical circumstance (the 1893 toast) to text act (the ahistorical performativity of the lyric poem) while revealing the 'textual' or rule-governed basis of all public action. In the terms I have outlined above, this means that the speech-act dimension of Mallarmé's poetry involves a deliberate synthesis of the sociopolitical performative with the phenomenological performative. The historical circumstances in which 'Salut' is originally uttered are interdependent with the performativity of lyric poetry in general, a performativity which the text both invokes and establishes.

Like Winspur, I find that the attempt to determine what kind of speech act a poem is leads back to Wittgenstein, whose *Philosophical Investigations* raise so many of the central concerns of speech-act philosophy *avant la lettre*. Wittgenstein's analysis of imagining is a kind of synecdoche of his entire project in the *Investigations* of undermining the idea that meanings of words exist as object-like entities in the mind. Wittgenstein brings us to the realization that our ordinary concept of the 'mental image' has a mimetic basis: it depends on an unrecognized analogy with sensory perception of an empirical world. This misconception, in turn, is brought about by the 'grammatical movement' by which we impose a subject-object structure on the experience of imagining:

> You have a new conception and interpret it as seeing a new object. You interpret a grammatical movement made by yourself as a quasi-physical phenomenon which you are observing. (§401)

The delusory parallel that we draw between sensory perception, the subject-object structure of language, and the mental image is exposed when we compare the experience of imagining with the experience of pain perception (although the grammatical parallel between *eine Vorstellung haben*, 'having an image,' and *Schmerzen haben*, 'having pains,' does not come through adequately in English translation).

Two further ramifications of the concept of imagining present themselves, which together provide a basis for adapting Wittgenstein's discussion to the context of poetic utterance. First, Wittgenstein redirects his definition of imagining back toward an analogy with perception, but specifies that it is like 'a new way of looking at things' (rather than, as above, 'seeing a new object'). Described in this way, the relationship of the mind to the world has explicit aesthetic overtones:

> But there is an objection to my saying that you have made a 'grammatical' movement. What you have primarily discovered is a new way of looking at things. As if you had invented a new way of painting; or, again, a new metre, or a new kind of song. (§401)

Imagining, by this account, is analogous to genre, or to the artist's perspective in a work of art, in that it brings into existence a unique way of seeing but not a visual or actual object which one might speak of owning or exchanging. If I imagine a room, Wittgenstein suggests, I may 'have' a 'visual room,' but the word 'have' can only be understood by analogy with its ordinary use: I do not possess the visual room, nor can I walk around in it or point to it. The image exists in the mind the same way as it exists in a verbal postulate, independently of possession, reference to reality, proof, disproof, or even the propositional form which would make the conditions of truth or falsity meaningful.

Secondly, Wittgenstein proposes that imagining might be characterized as a distinctive way of speaking:

> 'It's true I say "Now I am having such-and-such an image," but the words "I am having" are merely a sign to someone *else*; the description of the image is a *complete* account of the imagined world.' – You mean: the words 'I am having' are like 'I say! ...' You are inclined to say it should really have been expressed differently. Perhaps simply by making a sign with one's hand and then giving a description. (§402)

Our habitual form of expression when we communicate the idea of imagining is 'I am having ... an image' ('Ich habe ... [eine] Vorstellung'), but

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Wittgenstein invalidates the literal (or even metaphorical) meaning of the formula and reinterprets it as a conventional discourse marker which has the effect of calling attention to the description that is to be given, as if by a hand signal or an ejaculation like 'I say!' ('Jetzt Achtung!'). The implication is that the description will be understood in a different register from ordinary language. Wittgenstein's way of characterizing what we do when we imagine renders imagining homologous with many kinds of speech acts, in that we recognize certain expressions as performative by the presence of conventional formulas such as 'I promise that' or 'I declare,' expressions which, among other things, give what follows the status of a *dictum* rather than a *factum*. This introductory formula, which includes a verb in the first-person present, alerts us to the subjectivity of the utterance and indicates that it needs to be understood in a different register from constative or referential statements.

The ability of language to posit, and the equivalent status of postulate and image, is most apparent in a poem which maintains an ambiguous relationship to empirical reality, because (like Mallarmé's 'Salut') it simultaneously evokes the moment of its composition *and* emphasizes the gap separating that moment from the present of our reading. By the same token, the text simultaneously highlights and renders ambiguous the distinction between ordinary language and literary language. Take, for example, Keats's final haunting fragment:

> This living hand, now warm and capable
> Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
> And in the icy silence of the tomb,
> So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
> That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood,
> So in my veins red life might stream again,
> And thou be conscience-calm'd. See, here it is –
> I hold it towards you. (Keats 503)

Beginning with a deictic 'this,' the text appears to ground itself in present reality, connecting the *manu*script itself (the poet's 'hand' in the sense of 'handwriting') to the body and the consciousness that produces it. As a speech act uttered by a living Keats, the poem would do just that, but as a text act its impact is reversed so that it marks, instead, the temporal gap separating us from Keats, who is dead. The hand was necessarily warm at the time of writing, but it is cold at the time of reading, whether that is 1898 (when the fragment was first published) or the present. From the reader's

perspective, the conditional sentence which makes up most of the text ('would, if it were cold ...') has become a constative reality (it *is* cold). The illocutionary force of the lines is that of a threat, or perhaps a perverse promise, that the poet's dead hand will haunt the living reader, but in the act of reading the lines that threat is actualized and the promise fulfilled. A series of insistent monosyllables –'see here it is' – constitutes the moment of most intense reality or of most intense imagination, depending on whether the words refer to the simple gesture of extending a hand, a conventional token of societal bonding, or to the conjuring of a ghostly hand through the language of the poem. The fragment ends with an explicitly dialogical formulation, 'I' and 'you' eerily joined by an 'it' which refers to both the living hand and the dead one. 'It' is also the text itself, handed to us so that it may be actualized – 'brought to life' – during our encounte with it.

Unlike the case of the realist novel, the role of speech-act theory in th reading of 'This Living Hand' is not to implicate the text in historic conventions or discourses, but rather to de-historicize it by strangely super imposing the moment of writing onto the moment of reading. In both thes moments the language of the poem is invested with performative force, bu its function as the speech act of a living poet is disconcertingly incommer surate with its function as a text act. The constative and performativ dimensions of the text seem, in fact, to change places when the lines a read as a specific utterance by a historical Keats and when they are read as a de-historicized lyric. Moreover, the literary genre of the fragment is far from definite; it may be a reproachful lyric addressed by Keats to his lover Fanny Brawne, or the speech of a character in an uncompleted historical drama. The illocutionary force of the lines, particularly the frame of reference for deictics and the performative or constative function of the verb 'is,' varies depending on the generic context in which the lines are placed.

The disjunction between performatives in ordinary language and the phenomenological performative comes into clearer focus still in William Carlos Williams's poem 'This Is Just to Say,' a text which directly invokes the categories of speech-act theory:

> This Is Just to Say
>
> I have eaten
> the plums
> that were in
> the icebox

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and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

Like 'This Living Hand,' the poem is grounded at the beginning and the end in lived reality and, through the copula, in the category of being: 'This *Is* Just to Say / I have eaten'; 'they *were* delicious.' The past tense is significant: the plums being no more, their existence and affects, on which so much depends, can only be posited and imagined. In prefacing the utterance with the combined title and first line 'This Is Just to Say,' Williams makes the performative dimension of his language explicit. As Austin demonstrates in *How to Do Things with Words*, even a statement that appears constative ('The cat is on the mat') is revealed to be a speech act when the implicit first-person subject and verb are explicitly expressed ('I state that the cat is on the mat'). 'I state that' and 'This Is Just to Say' lift the utterance out of the realm of true-false propositions by reminding us that what follows is not a universal truth, but a circumstan-tial utterance limited by a historical context and a conceptual frame of ref-erence. Elsewhere, Williams reveals that the poem began as an ordinary (and presumably truthful) note to his wife, and the context-dependence of performative language is highlighted by the difference in the status and function of the same utterance when it appears in a note taped to the refrigerator and in a volume of poetry. In its poetic incarnation, Will-iams's attempt 'just to say,' or to posit, 'is' all that takes place, and the poem reveals how much – in everyday life, in poetry – depends on the act of just saying.

Williams's entire text may be read as an elaboration of the self-referen-tial 'This Is' with which it begins; the poem, in other words, simultaneously presents and explains what 'this' which we are reading is. 'This Is' serves as the Wittgensteinian gesture that calls attention to an imaginary conception, and warns the listener that the language describing that conception must be understood in a different register from ordinary language. Here, 'This Is' alerts the reader that the copula is not to be understood as referring to existence in the real world, but that we must concede to it the power of establishing an independent reality ('this *is*'). As a deictic, 'this' can only be actualized within a specific scene of discourse – a fact that calls attention to the ephemerality of positing, which occurs only in the instant in which a reader encounters the poem, in the non-existent moment of presence and presentness when 'this' is 'here' with us 'now.' On the other hand, the self-referentiality of 'this' renders the utterance completely irrefutable, since it refuses to rely on non-subjective points of reference. ' "I" is not the name of a person, nor "here" of a place, and "this" is not a name,' Wittgenstein writes; 'it is characteristic of physics not to use these words' (§410). Deictics are only for discourses which can stand the intrusion of subjectivity. Emile Benveniste points out that it is easy to imagine a long linguistic text such as a scientific treatise in which deictics like 'I' and 'you' never occur, essential as they are to virtually all spoken discourse (217–18). They are also essen-tial, I would argue, to poetic texts which attempt to ground the performa tivity of their language in an authority located in the writer's individua consciousness.

Sociopolitical versus Phenomenological Performatives

In identifying and delineating what I take to be two different speech-ac approaches to the literary text, I have implied that they may lead to ver different, at times incompatible, conclusions. This divergence may b demonstrated most clearly through a brief comparison of readings o Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* by two critics who have little in common apart from their mutual reliance on the terms of speech-act the-ory: Gavin Edwards, whose analysis of performative language in 'London' leads to a characterization of Blake as a politically engaged critic of his society; and Samuel Levin, whose reading of 'Holy Thursday' demonstrates his conviction that poetry is a mimetic speech act in which we can only participate by a complete and willing suspension of disbelief.

For Edwards, first of all, Blake's poem 'London' is 'overwhelmingly con-cerned' with social and political acts, and (not unlike *Sense and Sensibility* in the reading outlined above) revolves around the institutions of 'Church, Law, property, generational inheritance, and marriage' (Edwards, 'Repeat-ing the Same Dull Round' 28). Edwards notes that the speech acts of char-tering, banning, cursing, and marking occur in the poem in forms other than the first-person present, or as 'deactivated' performatives ('charter'd'; 'marks,' 'ban,' and 'curse' as nouns). This suggests that the poem describes a situation in which institutions have already imposed labels on individu-als, although those individuals collaborate in their own 'marking' by

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accepting the conventions which continue to give institutional utterances their performative force. 'London,' in this reading, is concerned with 'the power of discourse to effect (in both senses) the development of physical life and human relationships' (31), and the relevant context for interpretation includes the debate between Burke and Paine on the nature of charters, as well as contemporary market relations and the condition of London's oppressed. Edwards's reading concludes with a focus on the 'complicity of the Observing "I" ' in 'London' (40), which he reads as a manifestation of the crisis of objectivity and identification in eighteenth-century writing and which points to the necessity of regarding literature as social discourse: 'We are beginning to define the historically specific position that literature may have held among other forms of social relationship, specifically its overwhelmingly, and perhaps crucial, ideological function, its role in the forging of manacles' (39).

There is a world of difference between Edwards's conclusions, framed in the vocabulary of new historicism and cultural materialism, and Samuel Levin's interpretation of a Blake poem as speech act. Levin concurs with Richard Ohmann that a poem should be regarded by both poet and reader as an imitation or mimetic representation of a real-world illocutionary act. His own contribution to the analysis of poem as speech act is the identification of a conventional gesture or formula that parallels Austin's 'I state that' or Wittgenstein's 'I say!' The 'higher sentence' that makes the illocutionary force of a poem explicit is, according to Levin, 'I imagine myself in and invite you to conceive a world in which ...,' a formula that we may infer as the preamble to any work of imaginative literature (150). This form of reading (as I have suggested is true in general of readings which treat the entire text as a speech act) is most appropriate to the lyric, 'the type of most personal and private expression' (155). More specifically, Levin implies that a speech-act reading of this sort focuses attention on the vatic element in literature, since the imaginative lyric represents the kind of illocutionary act 'that we associate with the seer, the *vates*, the vessel, the sibyl, the kind of act attributed to someone inspired with unnatural powers' (154).

In order to demonstrate the difference between the illocutionary force of a poetic text and that of ordinary language, Levin employs the same technique used elsewhere by John Searle (*Expression and Meaning* 61–70) and Barbara Herrnstein Smith (272), of placing a literary text – here, Blake's 'Holy Thursday' from *Songs of Innocence* – side by side with a non-fictional passage. His conclusion is that if we as readers are to render the poem a totally successful speech act, we must accede to its intended perlocutionary effect by suspending our disbelief and assenting to the reality created

by the poetic utterance. Levin takes this conclusion to an extreme by suggesting that we have not completely suspended disbelief as long as we still read metaphors as metaphors; if we are truly to enter the poet's world, and thus render the poem's implied preamble effective, we must consider figurative language literally true. This is, in effect, to elide the distinction that has just been drawn between poetic discourse and ordinary language, to suggest that a poem's claim goes beyond that of a posited reality to an existent reality, something that can only come about through a kind of transcendent (in Levin's term, 'unnatural') power. The discrepancy with Edwards's speech-act reading of 'London' is glaringly evident. Where Edwards implicates the poem more and more deeply in contemporary political and social discourses, Levin sees the poem as leading out of the everyday world into its own imagined reality; while Edwards's Blake is a[n] observer and social commentator, Levin's Blake is a mystic and magician.

The comparison is skewed by the fact that Edwards's essay represents [a] much more concentrated study of Blake than does Levin's, but it should [at] least be clear that a reading of the text as phenomenological speech a[ct] does not coexist complacently with an analysis of sociopolitical spee[ch] acts in the text. Instead of referring to an existing historical context, perfo[r]mative utterances in literature may seem to create a world in defiance [of] the existing one, to demonstrate the poet's imaginative independence fro[m] the social conditions of his or her utterance. Yet my attempt in this book [is] to bring the two speech-act approaches together, not by eliding differences, but by demonstrating how the sociopolitical performative and the phenomenological performative interact in specific texts, with or without the author's awareness that this is happening. The two types of performatives may appear in confrontation with one another, the poet trying to oppose or resist the discourse of institutions with a speech act that derives authority from private visionary consciousness. They may also converge within the same utterance, since language, even when used with a conscious appeal to visionary tradition, is necessarily implicated in, perhaps limited by, contemporary social and political discourses. Milton and Blake express their consciousness of inspiration with varying degrees of awareness that they are simultaneously employing verbal formulas and forms of address derived from the rhetoric of law, economics, or politics. The speech-act model focuses attention on the positions from which these poets are speaking and the authority behind their words – and on the way these positions and sources of authority shift over the course of their careers. Milton and Blake have in common the attempt to use language to alter the behaviour of their contemporaries at a critical historical juncture.

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When these attempts fail, their response is to retain the rhetoric of declaration and personal and public address and use it to create ideal audiences, like Milton's Adam and Eve in conversation with Raphael or the four groups of readers to whom the four chapters of *Jerusalem* are addressed. This aspect of Milton's and Blake's writing provides a unique insight into the interference between sociopolitical and phenomenological speech acts, as well as the interdependence of language and reality and the way each of those terms performs the other.

The Integration of Sociopolitical and Phenomenological Performatives: Searle and Benveniste

Even outside of a literary context, it is possible to explore the distinction between the sociopolitical and the phenomenological performative by contrasting the speech act which manifestly depends for its effectiveness on the wielding of political or institutional power, on the official status of the speaker, and on the conventions accepted by a societal group, with the speech act which depends instead (in ways which still have to be defined more closely) on the consciousness and unique identity of the speaker and the conventions of language itself. Austin did not distinguish these categories; on the contrary, his identification of illocutionary force draws them together by suggesting that ordinary self-expression functions in the same manner as official declarations. Rather, the distinction has been brought about by Austin's followers in their attempts to establish reliable methods of categorizing the performative. Both John Searle and Emile Benveniste have advanced theories of speech acts which attempt to put sociopolitical performatives in a different category from perfomatives which rely on the intention or consciousness of the speaker and the rules of language. But, I would argue, the strict categorization breaks down in both cases and serves instead to demonstrate the interaction between the two kinds of speech acts. In the case of Benveniste, the relationship between socio-political and phenomenological performatives exposes a crucial connection between authority and subjectivity which is particularly significant for the discourse of the visionary poet.

John Searle has given direction to some literary-critical work on the performative by providing a more fully developed theory of illocutionary acts than Austin was able to, though Searle's theory also introduces terms and assumptions which radically change the emphasis of Austin's philosophy. Searle systematized speech-act theory by developing a taxonomy of illocutionary acts, in which possible illocutions are divided into five classes

based on the relationship of speaker to hearer and utterance to external world. For our purposes, the most intriguing of the five categories is the final class of declarations, which 'bring about some alteration in the status or condition of the referred to object or objects solely in virtue of the fact that the declaration has been successfully performed' (*Expression and Meaning* 17). This is the only type of performative in which the 'direction of fit' between word and world goes both ways: the world is immediately made to fit the words, and by virtue of this the words fit, because they now describe, the world. The examples Searle gives of declarations fall into two categories: an utterance may act as a declaration when speaker and hearer hold certain positions within an 'extra-linguistic institution,' or, in special cases, when the speaker is somehow outside the normal order of language altogether, as when God decrees, 'Let there be light.' What these categor have in common is the requirement of some authorizing power as a su plement to the rules of language alone. Leaving aside the very interesti second category of divine utterances until the next chapter, we may n that the first category corresponds to Austin's standard-setting examples performatives: solemnizing a marriage, baptizing a ship, giving orders t subordinate. In other words, Searle's standard declaration is a sociopoliti speech act. Yet Searle is uneasy enough about the role of the sociopoliti performative in Austin's theory to criticize Austin for giving too mu weight to institutional authority:

> Austin sometimes talks as if he thought all illocutionary acts were like this, but plainly they are not. In order to make a statement that it is raining or promise to come and see you, I need only obey the rules of language. (*Expression and Meaning* 7)

For Searle, the sociopolitical performative is a special category of illocutionary act, distinct from acts governed solely by the 'rules of language,' though he suspects Austin of having 'sometimes' conflated these categories. The distinction Searle makes here is in keeping with his habit of locating societal institutions outside the realm of language, referring to them repeatedly as 'extra-linguistic institutions.' These strict inclusions and exclusions suggest that Searle leaves out what is at least implicit in Austin – a recognition that societal institutions only exist insofar as they are created by speech acts (charters, vows, declarations of independence) and kept in existence by the exercise of verbal performativity. Conversely, the conventions or rules of language are inevitably affected by society and its institutions. Austin demonstrates this when he points out that only certain

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formulas are accepted for the performance of a speech act, even in ordinary language: one can, for instance, perform the illocutionary act of insulting someone, but not by saying, 'I insult you,' since that formula lacks collective acknowledgment (*How to Do Things* 30–1). Or, to use Searle's own example of making a statement, one might say that the rules of language are no longer sufficient to account for the illocutionary force of an ideologically charged utterance such as 'No means no.' Although the utterance does not require any extra-linguistic authority on the part of the speaker, its illocutionary force cannot be accounted for by the rules of language alone (according to which it would be a simple tautology); moreover, the illocutionary force is likely to vary depending on whether the speaker is a man or a woman, a judge or a stand-up comedian.

As Petrey writes, all Austinian performatives *are* of the 'extra-linguistic institution' (or sociopolitical) kind if the term 'institutional' is understood in its broader sense to mean 'all the protocols ... establishing and preserving a social formation' (*Speech Acts* 64). By breaking the bond between language and institutions, and making each responsible for separate categories of speech acts, Searle ironically highlights the fact that discourse and social action are not separated in Austin's theory, but rather placed on a continuum. In its original form, the theory of performative language makes it possible to consider the speech acts of Milton or Blake, like those of ordinary speakers, as *both* discourse in a societal context and manifestations of an intrinsic function of language.

A more specific connection between institutional and non-institutional performatives, but one with equally wide-ranging implications, is afforded by the work of the structuralist linguist Emile Benveniste. Benveniste's work, which finds applications not only in the field of linguistics but in philosophy, psychology, and anthropology, is relevant to speech-act theory because he developed, or at least proposed, his own notion of verbal performativity before coming into contact with the work of Austin and the Oxford school. While Benveniste's concept of the performative has been considered problematic and inconsistent by many scholars, his work also offers a powerful insight which can help consolidate different forms of the performative: that is, the idea of subjectivity in language.

To focus on the intrusion of the subject and the subject's temporal and spatial perspective is really to return to the notion of *parole* as the proper domain of the performative. In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin suggests only fleetingly that all performatives share a dimension of presence and presentness that is lacking from constative language: in all performatives, he writes, 'there is something which is *at the moment of uttering*

being done by the person uttering' (60). In the case of the explicit performative with a verb in the first-person present, this element of subjectivity is manifest ('*I* call this meeting to order'), but apparently constative statements are seen to be performative precisely when the subjective dimension is exposed ('*I* state that the cat is on the mat'). Written performatives such as wills and laws might seem to be exempt from this principle, yet even they manifest illocutionary force only when they are instantiated or applied in particular circumstances. The will requires a subjective 'I give and bequeath' as well as an assumption that a personal consciousness guarantees that 'I,' even though the person is no longer alive. Similarly, 'thou shalt not steal' acquires performative force from the fact that a reader or hearer encountering the utterance will assume the place of 'thou.'

The title and argument of Benveniste's 1958 essay 'Subjectivity in L guage' reveal the importance of this concept to his notion of the perfor tive. Like Austin, Benveniste begins by remarking on the asymm between some first-person formulations and other forms of the same v In beginning a sentence with 'I presume (that) ...' or 'I swear ...,' speaker converts a proposition into a subjective utterance. The utteranc equivalent to an act as a logical consequence of Benveniste's central te concerning the relationship of human beings and language: that lingui communication is possible only because every speaker is able to actua the system of language in a unique instance of discourse, an instanc which the subject itself is created:

> The utterance is identified with the act itself. But this condition is not given in the meaning of the verb, it is the 'subjectivity' of discourse which makes it possible ... This is a consequence of the fact that the instance of discourse that contains the verb establishes the act at the same time that it sets up the subject. (Benveniste 229–30)

Thus the act of swearing brought about by 'I swear that ...' depends on and participates in a more universal act, by which the subject itself is created through the subjective utterance.

In a later essay on 'Analytic Philosophy and Language,' Benveniste responds to Austin's theory by trying to define his notion of the performative more rigorously, particularly since he felt Austin had erred in watering down his definition of the performative to the extent that it ceased to exist as distinct from the constative. Yet Benveniste's own definition becomes slippery because he wants to make performativity relative to both the linguistic order and the social order but seems unable to reconcile the two.

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He first attempts a rigorous linguistic definition, according to which 'performative utterances are those in which a declarative-jussive verb in the first person of the present is constructed with a dictum' (234–5), but later seems to revoke this criterion in favour of a defining concept of authority: 'A performative utterance ... has existence only as an act of authority ... The criterion is here and not in the choice of verbs' (236). Once more, if less explicitly, phenomenological and sociopolitical performatives seem isolated into different categories.

While it would be difficult to eliminate all ambiguity from Benveniste's notion of the performative, which is in any case never developed more fully, some critics have oversimplified the contradiction between the linguistic and the social and missed the major point of Benveniste's definition,[8] which integrates the two types of performatives more closely than might appear at first. His linguistic criterion, to begin with, actually combines a verbal formula with the notion of authority, since it is assumed that a declarative-jussive verb can only be issued (or issued meaningfully) by a speaker with the requisite authority. This is strongly implied by Benveniste's examples of declarative-jussive performatives, all of which are utterances that belong in a political, legal, military, or other institutional context. Ironically, the essential role of authority in bringing about this class of utterance becomes clearest when Benveniste admits an exception: some utterances, such as 'The chair in Botany is declared vacant,' may lack the declarative-jussive verb 'because they are only implicitly attributed to *the authority entitled to produce them*' (235, my italics). Benveniste's first definition actually has as much to do with power as it does with grammar.

When Benveniste proposes a second possible class of performatives, it appears quite different from the first since it involves a type of utterance that 'does not emanate from a recognized power but posits a personal commitment for the one who utters it' (235). Yet the second type of performative turns out to be homologous with the first. What the two groups of utterances have in common is that they are 'authenticated' as acts. A performative always creates a new situation, and it is unique to a definite time and place; by virtue of these two properties, it is self-referential in the sense of 'referring to a reality that it itself constitutes by the fact that it is actually uttered in conditions that make it an act' (236) – an idea which parallels Searle's definition of declarations, in which the 'direction of fit' between words and world goes both ways. A performative, Benveniste reiterates at this point, 'has existence only as an act of authority.' Ben-

8 See, for instance, Petrey's critique of Benveniste (*Speech Acts* 43–7).

veniste's choice of words is misleading (since his *first* class of performatives, and not the present one, contains explicitly authoritative declarations), but he immediately qualifies his notion of 'acts of authority' as 'first and always utterances made by those to whom the right to utter them belongs' (236). Authority, thus defined, is more akin to *authorship*; it includes institutional power, but also the autonomy of the subject. Since I and no one else have the authority to swear, promise, or pledge myself, these 'personal' performatives are on an equal footing with those authorized by societal institutions.

The crux of the whole definition is subjectivity and the actualization of discourse. Benveniste disqualifies formulations that Austin would call performative, such as imperatives and warning signs, on the grounds that they do not invoke subjectivity by employing a first-person verb, and the are not self-referential (that is, they do not denominate the act that is to b performed). He cautions that the status of an utterance itself as act must nc be confused with the act that is likely to result from it, nor with the inte pretation (as of a warning sign) that is drawn from it by a reader or listene Benveniste's theory is valuable for the way it focuses attention not on pe locutionary effect, nor on the felicity of a performative utterance, but o the way performance occurs in the actualization of the linguistic systei and the creation of subjectivity in a particular instance of language use. H final statement in the essay 'Analytic Philosophy and Language' concerns his understanding of 'the very object of analytic philosophy': namely, 'the specificity of language in the circumstances in which the linguistic forms one chooses to study are valid' (238), where the terms 'specificity' and 'circumstances' reaffirm his commitment to *parole* rather than *langue*.

Authority and Subjectivity: Benveniste and Barthes

Benveniste's diverse linguistic studies all reflect his fascination with the way languages are constructed so as to allow individual speakers to appropriate the entire structure of *langue* to themselves in the here and now of utterance. Accordingly, he emphasizes the asymmetry between the first and second persons ('I/you') and the third ('he,' to which Benveniste refuses to accord the status of 'person' at all), as well as the asymmetry of verb forms, deictics, and concepts of being as they are reflected in the forms of the copula in different language systems. All these elements, which explicitly form the basis of Benveniste's notion of the performative and are implicitly contained in Austin's as well, are valuable in extending the notion of performativity to first-person forms – ranging from invocation to tractate literature – which are favoured by poets like Milton and Blake.

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Benveniste's claim is that the possibility of positing a subject linguistically has as its consequences both the ability to communicate in language and the existence of subjectivity itself. 'Language,' he writes, 'is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* by referring to himself as *I* in his discourse' (225); conversely, 'it is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone establishes the concept of "ego" in reality, in *its* reality which is that of the being' (224). The pronouns 'I' and 'you' have no meaning or referent except in actual instances of discourse, yet they are central components of all linguistic systems. In 'The Nature of Pronouns,' Benveniste adds to the 'I/you' category such forms as demonstratives ('this') and adverbs of time and place ('here,' 'now,' 'today,' 'tomorrow'), insisting that traditional accounts of deixis are not enough to explain the function of these parts of speech because they neglect the presentness and uniqueness of the instance of discourse, which is to say its dependence on the subject:

It is pointless to define these terms and the demonstratives in general by deixis, as is generally done, unless one adds that the deixis is contemporary with the instance of discourse that carries the indicator of person; it is from this reference that the demonstrative takes its property of being unique and particular each time, which is the uniqueness of the instance of discourse to which it refers. (219)

Wittgenstein, who italicizes the word 'this' with self-conscious frequency in *Philosophical Investigations*, also emphasizes the necessary component of presence in the deictic by asserting that demonstratives can never be without a bearer. It must always be possible to point to the referent of 'this': 'It might be said: "so long as there is a *this*, the word 'this' has a meaning too"' (§45).

The criterion of specificity to the moment of utterance differentiates 'I' and 'you' from 'he'; Benveniste habitually refers to the latter as a 'non-person' to emphasize that it is never dependent on the instance of discourse and can be replaced by other referential formulas ('Los,' 'the Eternal Prophet,' 'the father of Orc').[9] The same asymmetry obtains between 'here' and 'there,' 'tomorrow' and 'the day after.' One of many significant corollaries is that discourse-dependent terms resemble Austinian performatives in that they lack the referentiality and truth-value of constative statements: 'Since they lack material reference, they cannot be misused; since they do not assert anything, they are not subject to the condition of truth and escape all denial' (220).

9 In 'Relationships of Person in the Verb,' Benveniste reveals that his thinking about the third person parallels that of the Arab grammarians, whose terms for our first, second, and third persons he translates, respectively, as 'the one who speaks,' 'the one who is addressed,' and 'the one who is absent' (197).

Discourse-dependent pronouns and adverbs figure crucially in Milton's and Blake's assertions of authority, and the context of Wittgenstein's philosophy and Benveniste's linguistics makes it possible to identify in these utterances an invocation of presence and an attendant evasion of true-false conditions. Milton's introduction of '*my* advent'rous Song, / That with no middle flight intends to soar,' like the Blakean admonition 'Mark well *my* words,' constitutes both a construction of subjectivity and an assertion of the subject's authority. Keeping in mind Benveniste's notion of authority as the right to make a certain utterance, the claim that these lines contain might be paraphrased: 'The one saying this is I, and I am the one authorized to say it.' Visionary poetry in its entirety may be regarded as per[illegible]mative discourse in that it is a sustained act of asserting authority on [illegible] part of the speaker, a condition which is reflected on the level of gram[illegible]ical structure throughout the text, especially in the case of deictics and [illegible] copula. As Benveniste writes,

Any verb of speaking, even the most common of all, the verb *say*, is capab[illegible] forming a performative utterance if the formula, *I say that* ..., uttered unde[illegible] appropriate conditions, creates a new situation. That is the rule of the game. (2[illegible]

On the other hand, visionary poets are also victims of the subjectivity of language. An appeal to subjectivity is the only way to convey their sense of authority, yet subjectivity risks being exposed as always and only a function of language. In the same breath with the claim to authority comes an admission of limits: 'This can only be said by saying "I," and "I" only has meaning in terms of what is being said.'

The power and the limitations of the writing 'I' in both literary and historical discourse have been explored by Roland Barthes, who addresses the convergence of literature and linguistics in structuralist criticism in terms heavily influenced by Benveniste's insistence on subjectivity. Since the relations between the *scriptor* and language are actualized only in the moment of writing, the 'generating center of linguistic time is always the present of the speech-act' (Barthes 14), and we cannot assume that the subject actualized as 'I' in the discourse is the same as the person who existed before the instance of writing or the person who survives it (51). Though Barthes is thinking mainly of the modernist text which deliberately sets out to construct the writer, I would maintain that poetry in which the identity and authority of the 'I' is as central as it is in Milton or Blake is nec-

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essarily open to the same perils and possibilities, since it must also confront what Barthes calls the 'scandal' of discourse – the integral role of the pronoun, the 'most dizzying of the shifters' (20). Like their common model, biblical proclamation, the texts of Milton and Blake exist in a unique relation to temporality, referring equally to something that happened, something that will happen, and something that happens only and always in the instant of writing.

'It is in language that an expectation and its fulfilment make contact,' Wittgenstein writes (§445), commenting on the fact that the words 'he is coming' seem to mean both the same and different things when used on their own and when used in the sentence 'I expect he is coming.' His observation represents another approach to the difference between linguistic and actual existence: 'language abstracts from this difference, for it speaks of a red patch whether it is there or not' (§446). While Wittgenstein's aim is to liberate us from the idea that a mental image must accompany verbal expression ('as if one were to believe that a written order for a cow ... always had to be accompanied by an image of a cow' [§449]), Benveniste would demonstrate how the subjectivizing 'I expect ...' turns 'he is coming' from *factum* to *dictum*, from a proposition into an instance of discourse. The role of linguistic structure itself in bridging the gap between expectation and existence is also evident in the word-play of Wittgenstein's German sentence: 'In der Sprache berühren sich Erwartung und Erfüllung.' The sentence expresses the philosophical sense in which language does not distinguish between a 'coming' and a 'prospective coming,' but also the phonological sense in which the linguistic vessel 'Er——ung' can be 'filled' by either *warten* or *füllen*, anticipation or completion.

A further perspective on the fluctuations of being in language is afforded by Benveniste's distinction between verbs of existence, such as English 'to be,' and the 'copula function' which, in many languages, can be expressed by nominal sentences and other non-verbal constructions (e.g., Latin *omnis homo mortalis*, 'every man [is] mortal'). Benveniste recognizes the defining elements of the verb as the cohesive function ('to organize the elements of the utterance into a complete structure') and the generally unacknowledged assertive function ('endowing the utterance with a predicate of reality') (133). Verbs forge horizontal relationships between elements in the sentence as well as vertical relationships between the linguistic utterance and the nature of things: 'Added implicitly to the grammatical relationship that unites the members of the utterance is a "this *is*!" that links the linguistic arrangement to the system of reality' (133). This definition allows Benveniste to separate verbal *function* from verbal *forms* and justify the existence of nominal or pronominal constructions which have a copula function, since this function differentiates itself from the verb by the lack of an assertive 'this is.' Thus, a language which has both a verb for 'to be' and an alternative grammatical construction which fulfils the copula function can choose between a form of 'is' which implies existence in reality and one which does not.

These gradations of the postulate of existence form the background for a study of poetic creation and visionary poetry, a form of writing which places heightened demands on the reader to distinguish between different modes of existence: between utterances that purport to describe reality ('Milton is the author of *Paradise Lost*'), utterances which refer to an imaginative order ('Milton is in Beulah'), and utterances which escape referentiality altogether in the manner identified by Bertrand Russell ('Blake's three daughters are authors of *Paradise Lost*'). These questions are central to the issue of po[illegible] authority as well as to the distinction, and the continuity, between Milto[illegible] writer of serious political tracts and sacred history, and Blake as creator of imaginative universe and writer of ironic and hyperbolic prose. In a m[illegible] extreme way than historical discourse (a genre with which texts like *The R*[illegible] *son of Church-Government* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* still h[illegible] clear affinities), visionary poetry employs what Barthes has termed the 're[illegible]ity effect.' Barthes proposes that 'speech-act signs' – mainly deictics – evo[illegible] in all historical discourse a non-chronological, mythic, or cosmogonic ti[illegible]:

> ... the presence, in historical narration, of explicit speech-act signs tends to 'dechronologize' the historical 'thread' and to restore, if only as a reminiscence or a nostalgia, a complex, parametric, non-linear time whose deep space recalls the mythic time of the ancient cosmogonies, it too linked by essence to the speech of the poet or the soothsayer ... (130–1)

By the end of his essay 'The Discourse of History,' Barthes has reconceptualized speech-act signs in terms of the 'reality effect,' a concept that (it is not always remembered) relies on speech-act theory and speaks of the displacing of referentiality by authority:

> ... we can say that historical discourse is a fake performative discourse in which the apparent constative (descriptive) is in fact only the signifier of the speech-act as an act of authority. (139)

The identification of historical discourse as a 'fake performative' can both illuminate and be illuminated by the type of 'history' being written in *Para-*

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dise Lost or *Jerusalem*, where the present of the speech act and the writer's self-presentation as inspired creator act as guarantees of authority. In these narrative forms of visionary poetry, the focus shifts from what happened to the *telling of* what happened, who is telling it and why it is being told. The four passages of first-person address by the narrator of *Paradise Lost*, at the beginning of books 1, 3, 7, and 9, establish the fundamental direction of the narrative by inserting the composition of the poem itself into the structure of expectation and fulfilment that motivates so much in the poem, particularly its faith that a lost paradise may be compensated for by a 'paradise within thee, happier far.' In human life, expectation and fulfilment are separated by a gulf of experience; the expectation created within the poem, that humankind will live a life of obedience in Paradise, has its fulfilment indefinitely deferred. But the poet avoids the same error, not only because he justifies the ways of God to men where Adam and Eve questioned them, but because it is in his language that expectation and fulfilment make contact. The invocations set up a conditional situation – 'If answerable style I can obtain,' 'I may assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men' – and the narrative, by its very existence, enacts the fulfilment of that condition (i.e., in writing the poem Milton *does* obtain answerable style and justify God's ways). Even the most basic elements of linguistic structure contribute to the sense that the poem is the fulfilment of the very expectation that its language creates. Unlike its human protagonists, *Paradise Lost* as a verbal structure does not need to regain paradise, for on the level of language and grammar, by analogy with Wittgenstein's red patch, 'paradise' is present even in 'paradise lost.'

Blake's prefaces to four groups of readers in *Jerusalem* have a similar effect, setting up a rhetorical structure which ultimately helps make possible the fulfilment of his poetic vision in dialogue and declaration: 'And I heard the Name of their Emanations they are named Jerusalem.' Both the prefaces and the conclusion of the poem raise the issue of Blake's authority to bestow names and make declarations, and since the last word of the text is also its title, *Jerusalem* becomes a large-scale study in the autonomous and self-referential character of performative utterance. The final line of the poem, which reintroduces a personal 'I' but also performs the text's ultimate act of authoritative naming, is an indicator of the complex relationship between authority and subjectivity in the discourse of the visionary poet.

The Deconstructive Turn

As one of the most influential adaptations of speech-act theory to the study

of texts, the assimilation of the terms 'performative' and 'constative' by deconstruction generates a final perspective on the relevance of performative language to a study of visionary poetry. The encounter between speech-act theory and deconstruction has important implications for the intersection of the sociopolitical and phenomenological facets of performative language, despite the fact that deconstruction is often accused of turning its back on historical concerns. Sandy Petrey has voiced a particularly strong criticism of Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man for making the performative into a concept which designates 'language that, instead of effecting something within and outside itself at once, refuses all association with the outside to proclaim that its autonomy and self-absorption are inviolable' (*Speech Acts* 148). In its deconstructive incarnation, the tension between performative and constative becomes a malaise of language itself. Derrid focus, in his celebrated debate with Searle over Austin's theory of l: guage, is the dehiscence within language and consciousness that revealed when we realize that iterability or *non*-uniqueness is a necess: condition of performative utterance. In the highly adapted form of spee act theory incorporated in the methodology of de Man in *Allegories Reading*, the performative and the constative are, again, inherent qualit of language whose irreconcilability makes the functioning of the t impossible and possible at once.[10] Both approaches would seem to ign the societal orientation crucial to Austin and especially to his more historically and politically minded followers.

De Man's most famous use of speech-act terminology is in a reading of Rousseau's *Confessions*, where he concentrates on the episode in which Rousseau accuses the servant Marion of stealing a ribbon, a crime of which he himself is guilty. For de Man, the incident demonstrates the split between the performative and constative dimensions of language, since Rousseau's utterance of the name 'Marion' effectively fulfils the performative function of excusing Rousseau precisely because 'Marion' lacks any cognitive or constative meaning. But de Man's key point, that 'performative rhetoric and cognitive rhetoric ... fail to converge' (*Allegories* 300), is even more clearly illustrated by his discussion of Rousseau's political writings. The analysis of promising in the *Social Contract*, which sets out de Man's radical interpretation of constative and performative as something like semiology and rhetoric, is an important study of the intersection between the language of sociopolitical institutions and individual self-expression.

10 For further adaptations of a de Manian concept of the performative, especially in the context of Romantic literature, see Cynthia Chase and Andrzej Warminski.

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For de Man, Austin's distinction between the locutionary and illocutionary functions exposes the way language promises a cognitive, theoretical, or abstract truth which is always already undone by the actualization of the same language by an individual speaker (or writer) in a concrete speech situation (or text). What a text says must thus be set against what it does in literary history, and what it says about language and figuration set against its own figural structures and effects. The aporia de Man discovers in the language of Rousseau's *Social Contract*, which is equally explicit in any political use of language and is implicit in all language whatsoever, is that the structure or grammar of language itself renders meaning, in a particular referential instance, impossible:

> There can be no text without grammar: the logic of grammar generates texts only in the absence of referential meaning, but every text generates a referent that subverts the grammatical principle to which it owed its constitution. (*Allegories* 269)

This is de Man's paraphrase of a passage from the *Social Contract*, which is worth quoting because it reveals still more clearly that the problem lies in the tension between the system of language and the particular instance of discourse – *langue* and *parole*.

> Why is the general will always right, and why do all citizens constantly desire the well-being of each, if it were not for the fact that no one exists who does not secretly appropriate the term *each* and think of himself when he votes for all ...? Which proves that the equality of right and the notion of justice that follows from it derive from the preference that each man gives to himself, and therefore from the nature of man. (Quoted in *Allegories* 269)

The aporia of the legal text, which de Man considers a paradigm for the figural dilemma of any text, emerges from the conflict of general and particular will in the social contract and the impossibility of conceiving of the state as a metaphorical totalization of individuals. The expression of each person's individual will (the perspective of 'I') in terms of the collective will (the perspective of 'we') is illegitimate, but it is also, given the structure of the state and especially of language, inevitable. 'The general will is by no means a synthesis of particular volitions,' de Man writes (*Allegories* 261) – a statement reminiscent of Benveniste's frequent contention that, on the grammatical level, 'we' is, strictly speaking, *not* a first-person plural because it cannot be conceived of as a plurality of 'I's ('"we" is not a multiplication of identical objects but a *junction* between

"I" and the "non-I," no matter what the content of this "non-I" may be' [Benveniste 202]).

De Man argues that the identity of the individual and that of the state are defined by two distinct semiotic models. This is a profoundly political insight, despite de Man's insistence that he is purely interested in the textual implications ('We are not here concerned with the technically political significance of this text ... Our reading merely tries to define the rhetorical patterns that organize the distribution and the movement of the key terms ...' [*Allegories* 258]). But even as a principle of language de Man's insight is political, at least in the wider sense of politics defined by Petrey as 'the sum of the conventions that invariably make speech act' (*Speech Acts* 64). This aspect emerges when the parallel with Benveniste is developed further. Rousseau's, and de Man's, contention that each person will read or app[ly] the law in terms of his or her own subjectivity would be for Benveniste [a] commonplace that derives from the nature of *langue*. The symmet[ry] between Rousseau's phrase 'secretly appropriate the term *each*' and Ben[]veniste's claim that 'each speaker ... *appropriate[s] to himself* an entire lan[]guage by designating himself as *I*' (226) reveals Rousseau's dilemma to b[e] another version of the scandal by which language constructs subjectivi[ty] and yet pretends, as a system, to override the subjective. It is not surprisin[g], considering Benveniste's influence on Barthes, that de Man's argument [is] also reminiscent of Barthes's reality effect. The instance of (historical) discourse, Barthes claims, inevitably creates a signified, and the temptation is to elide the real-world referent with the signified so as to ('secretly'?) pretend that the discourse relates to the transcendental referent itself, while in fact it relates only to the signified (or, in de Man's terms, the referent it has constructed). In the present case, this means that the 'we' or 'collective "I" ' is a purely fictional signified generated by the social contract, though in order to act on the contract we must elide the difference between the 'collective "I" ' and the real-world referent, a collection of individual 'I's.

The language that these critics and philosophers have in common reveals that, whether the subject is real estate or the intellectual property of visionary poets, the issues involved are ownership and power. The 'appropriation' of a grammatical or legal system by the individual, especially in the French of Rousseau or Benveniste, indicates a concern with *le propre*, with property and control. Having dismissed the political from his essay, de Man finally allows it back in by using the *Social Contract* as a practical (i.e., performative) example of law-making in the concluding section of his essay, ultimately describing it as the kind of textual allegory that 'generate[s] history' (*Allegories* 277). The *Social Contract*, in de Man's reading,

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continues to promise political change even after it has deconstructed the validity of promising. The relevance of this example for the study of authority in visionary poetry is cemented by de Man's argument that the *Social Contract*, in making promises which depend on their own fulfilment, postulates a transcendent authority – God – as the metaphor of the law's origin, and thus casts the individual lawgiver as a usurper of divine voice. The writer's simultaneous assertion and usurpation of the divine authority that he postulates as the origin of his text brings about an unexpected resonance between de Man's reading of Rousseau and the readings of Milton and Blake in this book.

For thinkers as diverse as Benveniste and de Man, the performativity of language – the way it instantiates subjectivity, or the way it generates its own referent – disrupts the constative dimension of language as a suprasubjective structure. If this is a valid account of how language operates, what are the implications for poets who rely on subjectivity (both Milton and Blake emphasize the intrusion of 'I' into their discourse) and explicitly undertake the generation of a signified (both are attempting to create a world through language), but who also need to maintain contact between their language and the reader's world, and cannot ignore the stability and conviction that inheres in constative statement? My proposal throughout the readings that follow is that these conflicts come to the fore in the work of Milton and Blake when their inspired utterance, which idealizes truth and the transcendent authority of the divine or the imagination, confronts the discourse of institutions, which depends on the reality effect and derives its authority from societal convention. Different as these discourses appear, both hinge – in ways that may emerge as homologous – on the performative aspect of language. Therefore, the crucial stage of this encounter between theological and political discourses, manifested in the major epics of Milton and Blake, is the forging of a compromise between poetic utterance and societal pronouncement, to produce a visionary poetry which relies, sometimes uneasily, on a transcendent consciousness *and* a rhetoric determined by sociopolitical context. Milton writes with an awareness of the role of language in establishing economic and legal contracts in his increasingly bourgeois environment, while in Blake's work the conflict between inspired voice and the Austinian performative becomes the subject of ironic reflection. From the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, which contain a dark suspicion of the insidiousness of institutionally authorized language, to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which begins to articulate the different ways language can claim authority, to his epic attempts to turn performative utterance to his own advantage and reclaim a

voice that will have the authority once granted to inspiration, Blake's work may be read as a struggle to maintain the validity of individual voice in an age when institutions, not individuals, have control over speech acts. Yet the instantiation of subjectivity in language remains a constant challenge, for the poets as well as for their readers. As Milton modifies the biblical narrative of creation by adding deictics and second-person address, Blake punctuates his mythologizing narratives with 'here' and 'now' and 'Mark well my words'; reminding us always of the subjectivity and contemporaneity of verbal utterance, both of them recall to us the ultimate origins of the discourse of history in all our imaginations.

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2

Speech Acts and World-Creation

Die Bibel, indem sie sich selbst als Offenbarung betrachtet, muß notwendig die sprachlichen Grundtatsachen entwickeln.

Walter Benjamin

Supernatural Performatives

While taking into account the concern of some speech-act critics with the phenomenological dimension of poetic utterance, or the way poetry seems able to bring a world into being simply by positing it, the previous chapter located this concern within the context of a theory that regards the speech act primarily as a social construct. The present chapter begins at the other extreme, to delineate a model of performative language that may seem to have little in common with the Austinian speech act. This is the ideal performativity of divine language, epitomized in the Judeo-Christian tradition by God's act of speaking the universe into existence in the first chapter of Genesis. If the Bible as a whole is precisely concerned with the Word's entry into, its actions in and on, human society – a process which, I shall argue, begins as early as the *second* chapter of Genesis – it nevertheless opens with a model of performative utterance which pre-exists and transcends convention, operating instead as a pure expression of divine will. This ideal of a language which derives effectiveness from the consciousness of the subject and the intentionality of the utterance holds an irresistible fascination for both visionary poets and philosophers of language, often mastering their awareness that authority in human communication is dependent on power relations and the social contract.

John Searle makes room for the 'supernatural performative' in his taxonomy of illocutionary acts, in the extraordinary passage on declarations

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already alluded to in the previous chapter. Searle's definition of the declaration, and his normative examples, suggest that this category approximately corresponds to Austin's original intuition about what constitutes a performative. Like Austin's preliminary examples of performing a marriage, baptizing a ship, or making a will, Searle's declarations require 'a special position of the speaker and hearer' within 'such institutions as the church, the law, private property, [and] the state' (Searle, *Expression and Meaning* 18). His normative examples overlap with Austin's and include marrying, firing and resigning, appointing, excommunicating, christening a battleship, and declaring war. The declaration is the only one of Searle's five categories which does not involve a 'sincerity condition'; it contrasts, for instance, with the *assertive*, which expresses a psychological state of 'Belief,' or the *directive*, which expresses 'want (or wish or desire)' on the part of the speaker (*Expression and Meaning* 12–14). Therefore, the declaration is also the only one of Searle's illocutions which fully accords with Austin's original contention that an 'inward and spiritual act' is irrelevant to the existence of the performative, or that an illocutionary act is 'constituted not by intention or by fact, essentially but by *convention*' (*How to Do Things* 9, 128).

Yet the two exceptions with which Searle qualifies his definition fly in the face of Austinian theory. His examples of declarations which require no extra-linguistic institution are 'supernatural declarations,' such as 'Let there be light,' and metalinguistic declarations or 'declarations that concern language itself,' such as the giving of a definition or the bestowing of a name (*Expression and Meaning* 18). Sandy Petrey, for one, takes Searle to task for these exceptions, protesting that there is an unbridgeable dichotomy between Austin's speech acts, which function by virtue of a societal context, and God's speech acts, which function in the absence of society, convention, and even audience: 'divine beings are totally incapable of performative speech' since 'where God is, speech-act theory has nothing to say' (*Speech Acts* 63, 100). Petrey's distinction is valid and important, yet I am less content than he is with the conclusion that Searle's standard declarations and his exceptional cases are two categories of utterances that both do what they say, but 'have nothing else in common' (*Speech Acts* 63). Rather, I would like to pursue the fact that Searle's two exceptions correspond to those uses of language in the opening chapters of Genesis which have had the strongest influence on the history of philological thought: creation by the word, and acts of naming. Why does the Judeo-Christian account of human history begin with Searle's two non-institutional declarations – or, conversely, why does Searle feel the need to accommodate his

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theory of ordinary language so as to include the extraordinary cases of *fiat* and name-giving? How does this inclusion reflect on the standard declaration and its basis in societal institutions?

Genesis 1–3 in the Philosophy of Language

Searle is hardly alone among philosophers of language in looking to Genesis for instances of language use. Until the nineteenth century, while philology was still largely directed toward a study of the origin of language, the primary source for evidence of linguistic origins was Genesis 2:19–20, where Adam is given authority and ability by God to call each creature by its proper name:

> And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.
>
> And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field ...

The authority of Scripture gave rise to a belief in Adamic language, an original, motivated speech in which words expressed the essence of the things they named, but which was lost or corrupted either at the Fall or at the destruction of the Tower of Babel. In an overview of the history of the Adamic language hypothesis, Robert Essick traces the way serious appeals to the authority of Scripture degenerated, as early as the seventeenth century, into purely conventional citations of Genesis in the context of theories which were essentially secular in their analysis of mentalism, empiricism, and the arbitrary nature of signification (*William Blake* 40). Yet what is less often noted is that the fascination with Genesis survived the nineteenth-century evolution of philology into linguistics. If the biblical myth of creation began as sacred authority and lapsed into conventional allusion, it has become, perhaps involuntarily, a subtext and a well of imagery for modern linguistic and philosophical writing.

Since the nineteenth century, the philosophy of language has allowed the imagery of the Garden of Eden myth to infiltrate its account of language as social contract. In his argument about the contractual nature of language, the scandal of metaphor, and the primacy of lying in 'On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense,' Nietzsche juxtaposes the imagery of Genesis with images from the sphere of economics. His characterization of truths as defaced currency, 'coins which have lost their image and now can be used only as metal, and no longer as coins' (*Friedrich Nietzsche* 250), is one of the most famous instances of the common nineteenth-century comparison of linguistic signification to the arbitrary value-system that currency represents. Using a similar metaphor, Coleridge contrasts the everyday use of words as 'the *arbitrary marks* of thought, our smooth market-coin of intercourse with the image and superscription worn out by currency' with the kind of language which expresses the essence of either the subject or the object (*Biographia* 2.122). Like John Searle, Coleridge prefers a language which expresses individual consciousness, rather than one governed purely by societal convention, and he holds fast to a language 'used allegorically to body forth the inward state of the person speaking.' Nevertheless, the prominence of the image of money, an image drawn from the realm of institutional facts rather than the brute facts of physical experience, reflects the nineteenth century's concern with conventional or arbitrary signification. The metaphor of a monetary system also serves Saussure as an illustration of the concept of linguistic value (*Course* 113–14), though his preferred image in the *Course in General Linguistics* is the game of chess, an image which in turn becomes characteristic of twentieth-century language philosophy through Wittgenstein and his account of language games. The paradigm shift from coins to games signals, among other things, a twentieth-century recognition that language does not operate according to a single contract but according to many sets of rules related by family resemblance.

Yet the influence of the philological tradition and its appeal to Genesis makes itself felt even in Nietzsche's revolutionary essay when he addresses the question 'What is a word?' and promptly lights on 'the tree' and 'serpent' as words which illustrate the metaphoricity inherent in the grammatical and semantic structure of language. The biblical allusion is conspicuous in the German text, where Nietzsche chooses the unusual phrase *Genesis der Sprache* to refer to the origin of language, instead of the standard *Ursprung der Sprache*, which appears in the title of Johann Gottfried Herder's essay of 1770, and indeed in Nietzsche's brief essay 'Vom Ursprung der Sprache,' written exactly a century later. Moreover, the repetition of the initial *ge-* in the clause which follows provides a kind of visual echo of Nietzsche's unusual diction:

> Wie dürften wir, wenn die Wahrheit bei der *Genesis* der Sprache, der *Ge*sichtspunkt der *Ge*wissheit bei den Bezeichnungen allein entscheidend *gewesen* wäre, wie dürften wir doch sagen: der Stein ist hart: als ob uns 'hart' noch sonst bekannt wäre und nicht nur als eine ganz subjektive Reizung! (*Werke* 3.2.372; my italics)

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(What would allow us, if the truth about the origin of language, the viewpoint of the certainty of terms, were alone decisive, what would allow us to say, 'The stone is hard,' as if 'hard' were known to us otherwise than as a subjective stimulation!) (*Friedrich Nietzsche* 248)

The interference of rhetoric with semiology is complicated further if we admit a play between the German prefix *ge-* and the Greek word for 'earth' (*gē*). Thus, even as the sentence specifically denies the relationship of language to physical experience, the signs of a dead language evoke 'earth' within it, and even as it denies the validity of an essentialist account of naming which would attempt to establish the 'certainty of terms,' the passage is informed by images from the Genesis myth.

To read in this way is, of course, to resuscitate worn-out metaphors and restore the exchange value of the linguistic coin. Nietzsche's writing virtually demands that we do just that; while he attempts to demonstrate the arbitrariness involved in our assignation of gender to common nouns such as the 'masculine' tree (*der Baum*), and the bias inherent in our decision to refer to a winding motion in the name of the serpent (*die Schlange*) but not of the worm, the resonance of his examples tempts us to conclude that they are not arbitrary but deeply motivated. Tilottama Rajan has argued that, rather than dissociating language from truth, Nietzsche is actually acknowledging the effectiveness of metaphorical relations. His essay belongs in a tradition of language theory that 'valorize[s] metaphor as closer to the source(s) of things, because it disseminates and thus perpetually renews meaning' ('Displacing Post-Structuralism' 466). When Nietzsche writes explicitly on language in Genesis, he stresses its relational aspect. In 'On the Origin of Language,' he briefly but significantly comments on the fact that even the Old Testament, 'the only religious document with a myth about the origin of language, or something of the sort,' does not really address itself to linguistic origin (*Friedrich Nietzsche* 210). Rather, the existence of language is presupposed; both God and Adam use language to name things, thereby expressing the *relation* of those things to the human subject. 'Logisch geht es also jedenfalls nicht bei der Entstehung der Sprache zu,' Nietzsche concludes in 'On Truth and Lying' (*Werke* 3.2.373) – roughly translated, but with Nietzschean emphasis, '*logical* it ain't, in any case, the way language originates.' Depending on how much weight we give to the Greek and biblical roots of the word 'logical,' the sentence may disintegrate into either a paradox – the origin of language has nothing to do with *logoi* or words – or an ironic denial that the origin of words has anything to do with the divine Logos invoked by theories of the motivated sign. But if it denies logical connections, perhaps the sentence implicitly affirms metaphorical ones. The logic of Nietzsche's essay demonstrates how language falsifies our physical experience of the world, but its rhetoric reveals the irresistible influence of our mythological and literary experience, as expressed in a metaphorical tradition reaching back to the beginning of the Bible.

Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* also sets out to demystify the relationship between language and experience, yet it too is strongly influenced by the language of the opening chapters of Genesis. Arguing for the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, Saussure sets himself against those for whom 'language, reduced to its essentials, is a nomenclature: a list of terms corresponding to a list of things' (*Course* 65). The nomenclature model is the one that derives from the myth of Adamic naming, in which each name properly and adequately designates one created thing. Far from banishing the imagery of Genesis, however, Saussure seems to recall it when he chooses, as his primary examples of the linguistic sign, *equos* and *arbor* – an animal and a tree. As he substitutes for the nomenclature model his own model of the sign as a link between concept and sound-pattern, Saussure retains *arbor* as his main example. In other words, he co-opts the central images of the Garden of Eden myth, once the main evidence for a motivated language, to illustrate the arbitrariness of linguistic relations (e.g., 'Whether we are seeking the meaning of the Latin word *arbor* or the word by which Latin designates the concept "tree," it is clear that only the connexions institutionalised in the language appear to us as relevant' [*Course* 66–7]). In terms of its imagery at least, his theory puts itself forward as a reinterpretation of the linguistic implications of cosmogonic myth.

If the tree in Saussure's *Course* illustrates the distinction between signifier and signified in the linguistic sign, in Kenneth Burke's philosophy of language it functions as a marker of difference on other levels of the linguistic system. In *The Rhetoric of Religion*, the tree is Burke's habitual image when he distinguishes between word and thing ('the word "tree" is *not* a tree' [283]) and between literal and metaphorical levels of meaning (8–9, 254). It provides the focus for his contrast between the world of 'sensory images' and that of 'mythic images,' a distinction which approximately corresponds to Searle's opposition of brute and institutional facts. For transformational grammarians, even the use of 'tree diagrams' – in French simply *arbres* – might be regarded as a subtle instance of the symbol's pervasiveness. In a theological context, finally, Martin Buber makes the tree an image which speaks of the dissociation of subject and object, or the lapse from an 'I-Thou' to an 'I-It' relationship between the human subject and the environment:

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> But whenever the sentence 'I see the tree' is so uttered that it no longer tells of a relation between the man – *I* – and the tree – *Thou* –, but establishes the perception of the tree as object by the human consciousness, the barrier between subject and object has been set up. The primary word *I-It*, the word of separation, has been spoken. (Buber 23)

The reappearance of the tree as a primary image for the differential functioning of language and consciousness, in writers as diverse as Nietzsche, Saussure, Buber, and Burke, seems to point toward linguistic undercurrents in the second and third chapters of Genesis. The tree is the first example of a marked sign that Judeo-Christian mythology offers, the first object to be set apart from others of the same kind by purely institutional standards. This is a corollary of the fact that the second chapter of Genesis introduces, in the divine prohibition and the consequent curse, the Bible's first examples of the sociopolitical speech act. Thus the speech act which differentiates the tree also marks the site of a significant distinction between the Garden of Eden narrative in Genesis 2–3, which is known to biblical scholars as the Jahwist or 'J' text, and the Priestly or 'P' myth of creation in Genesis 1. While performative speech is a central component of both myths, they illustrate two different kinds of performativity, both of which have important implications for visionary poetry.

Phenomenological Performatives: The 'P' Myth

Without referring specifically to speech-act theory, Kenneth Burke has analysed the significance of Genesis 1 for linguistic philosophy. His work makes explicit what is often implicit in poetic texts which allude to the creation narrative: that the belief that words can be instruments of meaningful action is nowhere more forcefully imaged than in a myth in which a deity creates the world through acts of speech.[1] Philosophically, the 'P' myth also shares some of the central concerns of transcendental phenomenology, in ways that may be illuminated by Derrida's reading of Husserl. In

1 My reading of the first three chapters of Genesis is in sympathy with Burke's (in *The Rhetoric of Religion* and part 1, chapter 3 of *A Grammar of Motives*) insofar as we both treat the myth as a logical paradigm, though for Burke it is a paradigm of the Christian schema of sacrifice and redemption and for human action in general, while I address its implications for inspiration and poetic creation. I am also more concerned than Burke with the rhetorical dimension of the text and with distinctions between the diction of the 'P' and 'J' accounts, especially in the Authorized Version, which resonates in English visionary literature from the seventeenth century onward.

Speech and Phenomena, Derrida explores the basis for and the potency of phonocentrism as exemplified in the moment of *s'entendre parler*, the ability to simultaneously utter, hear, and understand one's own speech. 'Hearing-oneself-speak' appears to tether voice to its origin, to make spoken language inseparable from presence, intention, and consciousness. But precisely because this kind of auto-affection seems to transcend the difference between interiority and exteriority, allowing the subject to experience his or her own utterance without passing through the sphere of the other, it also conceptualizes that difference:

> ... the unity of sound and voice, which allows the voice to be produced in the world as pure auto-affection, is the sole case to escape the distinction between what is worldly and what is transcendental; by the same token, it makes that distinction possible. (Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* 79)

When we apply Derrida's account of the metaphysics of presence to the domain of cosmogonic myth, as he himself appears on the verge of doing in *Of Grammatology*, spoken language appears as the ideal medium for conceptualizing the idea of world-origin:

> The system of 'hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak' through the phonic substance – which *presents itself* as the nonexterior, nonmundane, therefore nonempirical or noncontingent signifier – has necessarily dominated the history of the world during an entire epoch, and has even produced the idea of the world, the idea of world-origin, that arises from the difference between the worldly and the non-worldly, the outside and the inside, ideality and nonideality, universal and nonuniversal, transcendental and empirical, etc. (*Of Grammatology* 7–8)

The privileged status of voice in both the 'P' myth of creation and Husserl's phenomenology suggests a parallel between Husserl's account of speech as the speaker's expression of a meaning-intention, and the concept of God which lies behind the performative utterances of Genesis 1. Derrida's account of the way expression necessarily introduces a distinction between exteriority and interiority corresponds, in turn, to the way divine utterance in 'P' brings about the distinction between an originary consciousness and a material creation.

The undecidability that Derrida describes reappears in the New Testament's counterpart to the opening chapters of Genesis, the beginning of the Gospel of John. Its paradoxical formulation seems to hover between establishing and transcending the opposition of interiority and exteriority,

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as it affirms that the Word both *is with* God and *is* God. The ambiguity has obvious significance for the theological doctrine of the Trinity, but it may also speak to the phenomenological concern with consciousness and expression:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. (John 1:1–2)

As a phenomenon inseparable from the being of God (by analogy with the *s'entendre parler* that characterizes human speech), God's spoken word assures the presence of God as origin. At the same time, the external dimension of speech as sound or material signifier is, in the case of the divine utterance, accorded an ultimate exteriority as world – that which stands over against God, hears him as other, and responds to his words. The cohesion of interiority and exteriority in the concept of creation by the word is constantly threatening to break apart, as illustrated by John 1:1–2 or, even more strikingly, by Faust's infamous translation of the Gospel of John in Goethe's drama:

It says: 'In the beginning was the *Word*.'
Already I am stopped. It seems absurd.
The *Word* does not deserve the highest prize,
I must translate it otherwise
If I am well inspired and not blind.
It says: In the beginning was the *Mind*.
Ponder that first line, wait and see,
Lest you should write too hastily.
Is mind the all-creating source?
It ought to say: In the beginning there was *Force*.
Yet something warns me as I grasp the pen,
That my translation must be changed again.
The spirit helps me. Now it is exact.
I write: In the beginning was the *Act*. (Goethe 40)

Unwilling to locate originary power in the 'word,' Faust rejects the intrinsic notion of 'mind' (*Sinn*) in favour of increasingly outward-directed faculties and concepts, 'force' (*Kraft*) and 'act' (*Tat*). Fittingly, Faust's soliloquy coincides with the emergence of the principle of negation in an externalized and material form, as Mephistopheles, who first appears to Faust in this scene. In a less diabolical but equally revealing vein, the very term 'utterance,' which we are tempted to use synonymously with 'speech,' privileges and enshrines the metaphor of exteriority or 'outerance' in hearing-oneself-speak.

If we now draw the internal-external opposition into a more strictly rhetorical frame of reference, we may identify two contrasting aspects in the language of the 'P' and 'J' creation myths, which I will call the intransitive and transitive aspects. The *intransitive* aspect manifests itself when language concentrates on and tries to maintain a certain interiority; ignoring external reference, it sets up a self-reliant or self-reflexive standard of truth. This intransitive quality may be a feature of divine utterance, when it derives power from the intrinsic consciousness or intentionality of the speaker and creates things from nothing, or it may appear on the level of the narrative itself, as a proclamatory or kerygmatic mode of expression. If, by analogy with Derrida's deconstruction of Husserl, the acknowledgment of exteriority and difference is inevitable, the intransitive narrative nevertheless maintains an emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the speaking consciousness and of performative language.

On the other hand, language may be oriented toward exteriority and objectivity, and cosmogony may be conceived of as a process of ordering elements which already exist apart from the creator. Cosmogonic narrative may be termed *transitive* when its primary reference is to existing objects which must be named, marked, organized, or differentiated from one another. Because the transitive text refers to an existing world, hearers or readers may test its validity against their own experience; the narrative thus assumes a constative dimension, in that it admits the criterion of truth and falsity. All of these ways in which language can effect or affect empirical phenomena are relevant to the biblical myths of creation, and their relative significance to the two different traditions that make up the creation account in Genesis helps to characterize the conflicted paradigm of performative language that this narrative provides.

In the 'P' account, which appears in Genesis 1:1–2:4a, the intransitive dimension dominates both on the level of God's language and on the level of the narrative itself. Employing speech acts that do not depend on any agent or object apart from the voice and its origin, God speaks entities into being: 'Let there be light' (1:3); 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters' (1:6); 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven' (1:14). The 'P' narrative is characterized by ritualistic language that makes abundant use of numerology, parallelism, and refrains, yet at the core of this cultural and religious formalism lies a vision of language which can create things from nothing so that the resulting world is coexistent and perfectly corre-

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spondent with the words. It is a kind of performativity that operates in the utter absence of society or convention, relying solely on the intentionality of the Elohim's utterance.

This intransitive quality is reflected on the level of narration, since 'P' never evades the self-consciousness of being a verbal account of a cosmogony that is effected through the use of words. The narrative presents itself as the absolute emergence of world and text, in a manner that is only approximately conveyed by the opening words of the Authorized Version, 'In the beginning.' The first word of the Hebrew text, *b^{e}reshith*, cannot be satisfactorily translated in its context, but the likeliest translations yield the sense that origination itself is being defined here.[2] What is being evoked is not 'a' beginning or 'the' beginning, but rather the very activity, 'beginning' (Josipovici 67). There is nothing before the word 'beginning,' but by the end of the account there exists a highly ordered *something* which has been brought into existence by the effect of language on the imagination of the reader or listener. As Gabriel Josipovici puts it, 'the world which those opening words bring into being is not just the world of the book, but (so it is asserted) the very world in which we who are reading the book exist' (61). Instead of concerning itself with empirically verifiable statements, the 'P' narrative declares *how* origins may be conceptualized and commemorated. It belongs to the mode that Jean-François Lyotard identifies as 'narrative knowledge,' a discourse which, unlike modern scientific knowledge, is not subject to argumentation or proof but contains its own legitimation independently of any assertion of authority on the part of either the narrator or the hero of the narrative (*Postmodern Condition* 18–27). Qualities that Lyotard identifies as distinguishing features of narrative knowledge – including a rhythmic, repetitive sense of time which lends itself to ritual

2 *B^{e}reshith* may either be an absolute form of the noun 'beginning' preceded by a preposition but without a definite article (i.e., 'in beginning'), or a construct form with adverbial function, in which case the definite article would normally be omitted (i.e., 'in-[the]-beginning-of'). The two possible translations, especially when combined with the indicative verb which follows (*bara*, 'created'), yield two equally unsatisfactory versions of the main clause in Genesis 1:1–3: respectively, 'In beginning God created ...' and 'In the beginning of God's creating the heaven and the earth ... God created ...' For detailed discussion of the opening words of the Bible and their significance for the concept of origin, see Eichrodt, Josipovici (53–64), and Andrew Martin (2–4).

The absolute character of this beginning to both world and book is intensified by the fact that *b^{e}reshith* is also the title 'Genesis,' the first word of the text having been adopted as the name of the book. It is also worth noting that the opening of the Gospel of John, *en archê*, 'in beginning,' corresponds exactly to the opening of Genesis with regard to the omission of the article (and the resulting difficulty of translation).

performance, and the presence of a variety of speech acts in addition to simple denotation – are especially conspicuous in Genesis 1.

If the bold 'Let there be light; and there was light' is the paradigmatic example of divinely creative language, this paradigm might seem to be watered down in all the subsequent acts of creation. Later in Genesis 1, the immediacy of divine utterance seems compromised by the supplemental statement that 'God made' the firmament, the heavenly bodies, and the rest, after issuing his declarative statements. Yet the text reflects a constant faith in the immediate effectiveness of divine utterance by adding the formula 'and it was so' after the divine *fiat* in all but one of the remaining creative acts:

> And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: *and it was so.*
>
> And God made the beast of the earth after his kind ... (Genesis 1:24–5; my italics)[3]

Conversely, not all of God's utterances in Genesis 1 are performatives on the model of 'Let there be light.' His other speech acts, the naming and blessing of created entities, are more transitive or object-directed. By the third day of creation, the divine utterances include imperatives that reorder or realign elements which already exist separately from the Elohim: 'Let the earth bring forth grass' (1:11); 'Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life' (1:20). This outward-directed utterance, which Searle would call a 'directive,' is most evident at the end of the chapter, where God blesses and instructs the newly-created human beings ('Be fruitful, and multiply' [1:28]). Yet it is significant that the narrative still makes do with the divine utterances themselves. No response on the part of an audience is necessary; indeed, the presence of auditors is never explicitly taken account of. It is assumed that the divine utterances alone are sufficient to consolidate and perpetuate the world-order that is brought into existence by the Elohim's creative acts.

Similarly, God's acts of naming in Genesis 1 are less referential than

3 It has been suggested that the 'And God made' clauses (1:7a, 12a, 16a, 17a, 18a, 21) are vestiges of an earlier myth which portrayed God as a physical creator, or else the later additions of an editor who felt the need for increased anthropomorphism in the account of creation (*Interpreter's Bible* 1:472). Although this atomistic approach to the text, which identifies different strands within the 'P' narrative, is now being questioned, the idea of slippage between creation by the word and physical making provides an interesting parallel to Faust's compulsion to render 'word' as 'act.' The same atomistic approach allows for the hypothesis that 'and it was so' originally followed the *fiat* in the remaining case as well (i.e., the second day, vv. 6–9), as it in fact does in the Septuagint.

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they may seem. The verb translated as 'name' in the 'P' text (*kara*) might be more accurately rendered 'call out' or 'proclaim': the narrative portrays God as announcing the names of things, rather than referring to them by their names (Josipovici 64). Moreover, God's naming of the created elements establishes a difference between them which is conceived of in spatial terms – perhaps as an extension of the primary distinction between interiority and exteriority which expression itself creates. When the God of Genesis 1 distinguishes between day and night or land and sea, he establishes a type of difference in which opposites are assigned their proper places *as contraries*, but one is not defined in terms of, or as the *negation* of, the other (i.e., darkness is 'darkness' rather than 'not-light,' and vice versa). It is true that only the light (i.e., only the entity explicitly created by God) is affirmed as good; nevertheless, the Authorized Version overstates the subordination of darkness to light when it speaks of God dividing 'the light from the darkness' and 'the day from the night' as if light and day were privileged terms. The Hebrew has God dividing, in a parallel construction which specifically indicates parity rather than subordination, 'between the light and between the darkness,' 'between the day and between the night' (Genesis 1:4, 14; Greenstein 66). Each member of a pair of terms complements the other, as established in the chapter's ritual refrain, according to which the evening and the morning together make up a unit of time.

Thus, even when the 'P' account admits a more transitive kind of language, it does so in a way that maintains the centrality of an intrinsically authoritative speaking consciousness. Difference is not value-laden in this myth, nor does the effectiveness of performative utterance ever depend on communal acknowledgment of the speaker's authority or the legitimacy of the speech act. The Elohim's utterances are non-Austinian performatives in that their success is a function of the inherent and absolute authority of the speaker, not of societal convention. The distinguishing feature of the 'P' myth of creation is the projection of an ideally effective voice, whose affinities with spirit, will, and consciousness are affirmed again in the cosmogonic Psalm 33: 'By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth ... For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast' (vv. 6, 9).

Sociopolitical Performatives: The 'J' Myth

A duality in the notion of verbal performance emerges when 'P' is contrasted with the 'J' narrative in Genesis 2:4b–3:24. The 'J' myth has a clear orientation toward communal order and concerns itself throughout with the establishment of the first man's relationships to animals, to woman, and to God. Accordingly, 'J' recognizes a second type of performative utterance, one which involves referential and contractual language and institutes a new order among already existing elements. This performative corresponds, moreover, to a second type of difference, the arbitrarily established binary opposition in which two terms, one marked and the other unmarked, inevitably fall into a hierarchical order. In contrast to 'Let there be light,' the prototype of the speech act in 'J' is Yahweh's command to the man in Genesis 2:16–17 not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

The utterance immediately marks one tree off as different, not in the sense in which the opposed but complementary elements of Genesis 1 are physically distinguished from one another, but as an institutional fact established by Yahweh's utterance. The woman, trying to erase the difference that the divine utterance has made, reveals the tree's empirical likeness to the rest of the garden when she describes it (in Genesis 3:6) as 'good for food' and 'pleasant to the eyes,' just like all the other good and pleasant trees that Yahweh causes to grow in Genesis 2:9. Nevertheless, Yahweh's speech act marks it as a 'Tree, of many, one' – like that tree in the 'Intimations' ode which abruptly recalls to Wordsworth the loss of glory from the earth (187). The effectiveness of the prohibition in distinguishing the tree, linguistically as well as legally, is brought home by the fact that it is virtually always referred to by Yahweh as 'the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat' – rather than as 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' or 'the tree which is in the midst of the garden,' either of which would serve to identify it as well. If the speech acts of Genesis 1 are analogous to the *s'entendre parler* of pheonomenology, the corresponding twentieth-century parallel for Yahweh's speech act is Saussure's definition of the linguistic sign as determined purely by difference and not by positive terms. The prohibition effectively makes the tree into a sign whose 'most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not' (*Course* 117).

A specific contrast between the characteristic speech acts of the 'J' and 'P' myths emerges when Yahweh's prohibition is compared with the institution of the Sabbath in Genesis 2:2–3. At first glance, both might seem to be utterances which arbitrarily mark one day or one tree as different, solely because an authoritative speaker has declared it to be so. Yet it is signifi-

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cant that the origin of the Sabbath coincides with its formal establishment. Having reached the seventh day in narrative time, the 'P' account relates that God ended his work and that he 'blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: *because* that in it he had rested from all his work' (Genesis 2:3, my italics). The proclamation and blessing of the Sabbath is an intrinsic aspect of the origin of the day itself, brought about simultaneously through God's action (or rather, his cessation from action). By contrast, the trees in the garden already exist at the point when Yahweh marks one of them as different in its relation to the hearer of his utterance.

Yahweh's speech act functions like a law or a constitution in the way it circumscribes behaviour by means of authoritative language, rendering future conduct (the eating of the tree) unlawful which would otherwise have been harmless.[4] In this regard, it is entirely appropriate that this chapter should refer to the deity by the divine name 'YHWH Elohim.' YHWH, the ritually and phonetically unpronounceable name of God, is replaced in reading or recitation with the euphemism 'Adonai' and translated in the Authorized Version as 'LORD God,' a title which, in both Hebrew and English, carries connotations of social status and political authority. The 'J' account is informed by a consciousness of power relationships on the part of the writer and the characters themselves. The woman is tempted by the idea that she and her husband might be 'as gods,' and it is when Yahweh realizes that 'the man is become as one of us' that he banishes him from the garden and the tree of life lest the threat to the heavenly host become a permanent one. In this context, it is not surprising that language in 'J' reflects a political dimension that is absent from 'P.'

Kenneth Burke derives from the 'J' creation myth another hierarchical opposition which is, for him, one of the defining characteristics of human action. This is the principle of negation, which for Burke takes its definitive form, not as the constative 'is not,' but rather as 'shall not.' In the terms outlined in the previous chapter, 'shall not' is performative because it constitutes an explicit directive and because, as a second-person verb form, it is context-dependent, challenging the hearer or reader to fill the place of the elided 'you.' Burke's principle of negativity becomes the foundation of social organization since it underlies the distinction between 'mine' and 'thine' (i.e., we

4 Cf. Westermann: 'There are three basic ways in which man's conduct in community can be limited: by the taboo, the command (or prohibition), and the law. Each of these three is institutionally conditioned: the taboo is pre-personal, the command is personal, the law is post-personal' (*Creation* 91). Westermann's interpretation differs from my own in that he distinguishes between prohibition and law whereas I am concerned to demonstrate how they function analogously as speech acts. Nevertheless, his theological commentary supports my argument about the sociopolitical role of the performative in the 'J' myth.

understand 'mine' to mean 'not thine'). He describes the distinction as one which is discovered by means of language, but also forms the basis for a host of verbal formulations – 'laws, deeds, contracts, precepts, prison sentences, educational policies, businesses, revolutions, religions, etc., etc.' (*Rhetoric of Religion* 285) – all of which Austin would identify as explicit performatives and the societal institutions that public speech acts sustain. The 'mine-thine' distinction, which Burke also translates into the performative 'No trespassing,' is precisely what Yahweh institutes when he distinguishes the one tree which is his from the rest of the trees, which he presents to the man. Interpreting the 'J' myth in terms of the distinction between the deictics 'mine' and 'thine' also reveals a parallel with Benveniste, for whom the instantiation of subjectivity as marked by deictics is fundamental to linguistic performativity, and indeed to every communicative act.

All of this points to the recognition that the 'J' account introduces a type of speech act and a type of difference which are intrinsic to the use of language in ordinary interpersonal relations. The myth focuses on differences which attract cultural bias, differences to which society adds the designations positive and negative, accepted and taboo: such is the difference between male and female, clothed and naked, perhaps even (in a Nietzschean vein) good and evil. 'Good' in 'P' is the unconditioned and unfocused approbation of the refrain, 'and God saw that it was good,' but in 'J,' 'good' has become one half of Milton's 'two twins cleaving together,' a thing that cannot be known without knowing evil (*CPW* 2:514). A host of other speech acts defined by societal convention and power relationships feature prominently in the myth, the most significant being the curse and the bestowing of names. The effect of Yahweh's sentence on those who disobey his command is to separate the serpent out from other beasts ('thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field' [Genesis 3:14]) in much the same manner as the tree was separated out from other trees, and to establish domination and subordination as the characteristic terms of relationships between the sexes and between the serpent and humankind. The curse itself is a type of speech act which must be understood in Austinian terms, insofar as a curse cannot exist unless there is a recognized formula for cursing or at least until cursing is acknowledged by a collectivity as a possible act.[5] The conventional quality of this speech act demonstrates in turn the extent to which the myth is directed toward a community of hearers or readers which is, so to speak, in a better

5 Compare Austin's discussion of insulting, which is recognized as a conventional procedure in virtually all societies although the expression 'I insult you,' except in certain very specialized contexts, will not do as a way of invoking the convention (*How to Do Things* 30–1).

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position to understand the significance of God's curse than are Adam and Eve. It is this community, rather than the first human beings, which recognizes precedents and established formulas for speech acts like prohibiting, cursing, and naming.

As an etiological myth which accounts for suffering in human existence and inequality in relationships, 'J' is transitive in yet another sense. Regardless of whether a particular audience accepts the myth's explanation, the *logic* of the etiological narrative appeals to the audience's own experience. The narrative asks us to recognize experiential truths (that childbirth is painful or that tilling the soil is hard work) and then to accept the explanation that it offers for them. Without implying that 'J' is in any sense proto-science, we might conclude that the myth approaches Lyotard's definition of 'scientific knowledge' insofar as it appeals to, or at least allows for, empirical verification. A heuristic classification of the different kinds of performative language in the opening chapters of Genesis might then be proposed:

	Intransitive	Transitive
Divine Utterance	'Let there be light'	'Thou shalt not eat of it'
Narrative Language	narrative knowledge, proclamation	scientific knowledge, constation

The ritualistic 'P' myth, lacking an obvious awareness of speaker, addressee, or scene of discourse, contains its legitimation within itself, just as the deity who declares, 'Let there be light,' does so on the basis of an inherent, non-conventional, non-consensual type of authority. By contrast, the 'J' myth is informed by the operation of sociopolitical performative language, which it projects back onto a story about the beginnings of social order. 'J' is transitive insofar as it appeals, ultimately, to the truth of the reader's or hearer's experience, and the divine speech acts in the story are similarly transitive inasmuch as they operate in and on a social context.

Scenes of Creation in Philosophy and Literature

As for Searle's taxonomy of speech acts, it may now be possible to identify the motivation behind his attempt to ally 'Let there be light' with the institutionally authorized declaration. The fusing of the 'P' and 'J' traditions in Genesis constitutes a similar conjunction of societally dependent speech acts with performative utterances that depend on divine will alone. Just as the writer of 'P' needs to posit an originary voice, so Searle's appeal to the

creative *fiat* in Genesis may be interpreted as the desire for an effectual language grounded in the will and personal consciousness of the speaker. The dependence of Searle's speech-act theory on the category of intention fits with this desire. His theory of speech acts is, among other things, an attempt to integrate the divergent movements in the philosophy of language which concentrate on the use and the meaning of expressions, and the speaker's intention (meaning) is a major component of Searle's definition of illocutionary force (use):

> In the performance of an illocutionary act in the literal utterance of a sentence, the speaker intends to produce a certain effect by means of getting the hearer to recognize his intention to produce that effect; and furthermore, if he is using words literally, he intends this recognition to be achieved in virtue of the fact that the rules for using the expressions he utters associate the expression with the production of that effect. (*Speech Acts* 45)

While he regards conventions or constitutive rules as the basis of illocutionary acts, Searle also restores individual intention to a central place in the definition of the performative – perhaps as a defensive response to the mounting evidence in speech-act linguistics that language is in large measure the reflection and the basis of a communal economy. His attempt to incorporate 'Let there be light,' and to admit the ability of speakers to perform the speech act of naming or designating without the sanction of an extra-linguistic institution, challenges both Austin's reliance on societal convention and Saussure's repeated insistence that no individual can alter the language system, certainly not by private volition. Yet Searle's move is also an attempt to reassert the possibility of meaning, perhaps even the integrity of the self, a move that might be translated into a version of the Cartesian *cogito*: 'I declare, therefore I am.'

The same desire for the expression and effectiveness of the individual will is what I believe motivates the subtext of allusions to biblical creation which often informs visionary poetry. The paradigm of creation by the word frequently surfaces in passages which, on another level, seem to be evoking the societally dependent performative. Thus, scenes of creation in visionary literature often intensify the conflicted nature of the performative which has emerged from the Genesis account.

Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan,' for instance, implies (if it does not develop) a parallel between Kubla Khan's creation of a physical paradise and the poet's spiritual or artistic recreation of that paradise. It is less often noted that Kubla's creative act is also a revision of biblical creation. Gardens,

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trees, rivers, and sea figure as prominently in the poem as they do in the opening chapters of Genesis, and Kubla's pleasure-dome mimics the dome-shaped firmament of Hebrew cosmology:

> In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
> A stately pleasure-dome decree:
> Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
> Through caverns measureless to man
>   Down to a sunless sea.
> So twice five miles of fertile ground
> With walls and towers were girdled round:
> And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
> Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
> And here were forests ancient as the hills,
> Enfolding sunny spots of greenery. (*Complete Poetical Works* 1:297)

The final strophe of Coleridge's poem imagines an origin for the world-dome which echoes biblical origins, as the unearthly poet, like the Elohim in Genesis 1, builds 'in air' by the power of his voice:

> Could I revive within me
> Her symphony and song,
> To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
> That with music loud and long,
> I would build that dome in air

But the dome initially owes its existence to Kubla, whose performative utterance is a 'decree' authorized by his position as Khan. If it is possible to hear an ironic echo of 'In the beginning God created' behind 'In Xanadu did Kubla Khan / A stately pleasure-dome decree,' it is also necessary to distinguish the immediate effectiveness of God's utterance from the effectiveness of Kubla's, which the poem represents as equally immediate but which we realize is dependent on the labour of unseen gardeners and stonemasons who are compelled by an imperial proclamation.

'Kubla Khan' celebrates the role of language in creation, but its subtext is an awareness that language creates by circumscribing and delimiting an object, just as Kubla's encompassing walls and towers enclose a measured plot of the measureless landscape. In his description of the pleasure-garden, Coleridge brings out latent connotations of ordering and limitation in the etymology of the word 'paradise,' which derives

from a Persian word meaning 'orchard.' Moreover, the space Kubla Khan defines for himself is one from which, amid the sounds of a sublime landscape, he hears a language of political strife: 'Ancestral voices prophesying war.' If the text implies an analogy – or a contest – between Kubla Khan's imperialistic creation and the Poet's expressive re-creation, perhaps it is significant that the politically charged appellation 'Kubla Khan' has imposed itself as the title of the poem. Only the subtitle ('A Vision in a Dream') indicates that the text also constitutes what Coleridge elsewhere described as a repetition of divine creation in the finite mind: an imaginative vision.

The uneasy relationship of poetic expression and political speech act – the dark side, as it were, of Shelley's contention that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world – is also a subject of Friedrich Hölderlin's allegorical lyric 'Nature and Art, or Saturn and Jupiter.' Jupiter, the representative of Art, is simultaneously acknowledged and condemned in this poem as the force which gives laws, apportions lots, and exerts verbal authority over the world while his deposed father, who was once greater than Jupiter although he never pronounced commands or required a title ('wenn schon / Er kein Gebot aussprach und ihn der / Sterblichen keiner mit Nahmen nannte' [*Sämtliche Werke* 2:37]), laments inarticulately and unnamed in the abyss:

> down the abyss you hurled
> The holy father once, your own parent, who
>   Long now has lain lamenting where the
>   Wild ones before you more justly languish,
>
> Quite guiltless he, the god of the golden age:
>   Once effortless and greater than you, although
>   He uttered no commandment, and no
>   Mortal on earth ever named his presence. (*Poems and Fragments* 165)

The poem ends by expressing an affinity between Jupiter and the human poet, two sons of time whose utterance is both politically charged ('welcher ... Geseze giebt') and supernaturally prophetic ('und, was die / Heilige Dämmerung birgt, verkündet' [*Sämtliche Werke* 2:38]):

> I'll know you then, Kronion, and hear you then,
>   The one wise master who, like ourselves, a son
>   Of Time, gives laws to us, uncovers

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That which lies hidden in holy twilight. (*Poems and Fragments* 167)

If the poem is primarily a late contribution to the eighteenth-century art-and-nature debate, its association of Art with a figure of political tyranny also betrays Hölderlin's anxiety over the sources and limits of verbal authority. Like Blake's myth of the degeneration of the creative language of ancient Poets into the pronouncements of Priesthood (to be discussed in a later chapter), 'Nature and Art' requires us to recall the common origin of politically effective language and of artistic expression in an inarticulate natural world.

If the disjunction between the creative word and the political pronouncement is a source of anxiety for the Romantics, it is a still more urgent issue for a twentieth-century writer like Hermann Broch, whose own experience as an exile from Nazi Germany renders him hypersensitive to the political power of utterance. Broch's novelistic epic *The Death of Virgil* is an extreme and magisterial response to the artist's anxiety over the role of performative language in enacting political, or at least societally determined, authority. The novel chronicles the final hours of Virgil's life, which are, for Broch, an allegory of the perils of the *epos* (both word and epic) in the Western history of empire. The dying Virgil must learn to let go of his position as the poet of imperial Rome; most of the novel charts his growing awareness of the way language collaborates with imperialism, both in the declarations of his friend Octavian when he speaks in his official persona as Caesar Augustus, and in Virgil's own literary production inasmuch as it justifies the ways of empire.

For an elucidation of the role of the performative in Genesis, the most significant aspect of *The Death of Virgil* is the novel's climax: a rewriting of the scene of creation in which Broch attempts to transcend the disjunction between the two types of performative language. In the final chapter of the novel, Virgil's death is described from his own perspective as a vision of being borne away across the water. Among the vestiges of his earthly life that he leaves behind are names, particularly names which wield political authority. Caesar Augustus lays aside his power along with his names ('seine Macht entglitt ihm, sie entglitt ihm mit dem Namen, mit all den Namen, die er bisher getragen und die er allesamt ... jetzt abtun mußte' [*Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 4:416]), and the boy Lysanias, before losing his identity altogether, loses the politically charged name of 'Führer' by which Virgil has known him ('kaum mehr ein Führer, nur noch ein Weisender' [*Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 4:425]). The dissolution of sociopolitical authority is accompanied by the dissolution of the logical foundations of language, including the division between subject and object on which both perception and signification had rested and, significantly, the division between external appearance and internal essence ('die Verwandlung des Außen ins Innen ... die Einswerdung von Außengesicht und Innengesicht' [*Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 4:417]).

The conclusion of *The Death of Virgil* represents Broch's attempt to transcend not only the politicization of language which has marred Virgil's literary efforts and his own, but even the division between interiority and exteriority that seems to mark all utterance. After witnessing the dissolution of the world in the reverse order of its creation, from animals to plants to stars to earth to light itself, Virgil participates in an eternal re-creation which centres on the vision of an ideally performative word:

> ... hervorbrechend als das reine Wort, das es war, erhaben über alle Verständigung und Bedeutung, endgültig und beginnend, gewaltig und befehlend, furchteinflößend und beschützend, hold und donnernd, das Wort der Unterscheidung, das Wort des Eides, das reine Wort ... (*Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 4:453–4)

> (... breaking forth as a communication beyond every understanding, breaking forth as a significance above every comprehension, breaking forth as the pure word which it was, exalted above all understanding and significance whatsoever, consummating and initiating, mighty and commanding, fear-inspiring and protecting, gracious and thundering, the word of discrimination, the word of the pledge, the pure word ...) (*Death of Virgil* 481)

The word which is absolutely pure and unified and yet remains, like the utterance of Yahweh, a 'word of discrimination,' is one that Virgil, and Broch, can only imagine 'jenseits der Sprache,' beyond language; and the unity of interiority and exteriority is purchased at the cost of denying the utterability of the word, at least for the poet: 'unaussprechbar war es fur ihn' (*Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 4:454). Even if Broch's mystical vision is successful, it would seem to confirm that the language of creation as we know it is inextricably bound up with difference, delimitation, and power.

The Death of Virgil bears witness to the concern that Broch feels for the potentially destructive force that language can represent in the social order and for the collaboration of art with this force. But the novel also reveals his ultimately Romantic allegiance (shared, perhaps unconsciously, by philosophers of language) to the creative power of cosmogonic myth: 'Aller Mythos gipfelt in Kosmogonie: er ist das Ur-Bild des Aussagbaren, primitiv, dennoch unerreichbar an Einfachheit' ('All myth culminates in cosmogony:

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it is the prototype of the expressible, primitive, yet unrivalled in its simplicity') (*Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9:203). The Romantic desire for expressive creativity motivates recurring allusions to and images of the supernatural performative as manifested in the 'P' myth of creation. Yet the Romantic poets, like Broch, cannot ignore the role that performative language plays in the shaping of a social and political order. The result is a conflicted model of poetic and cosmogonic creation, the roots of which may be traced to the double focus of the biblical account of creation, whose two narrative traditions distinguish between the theological-phenomenological and the sociopolitical performative while also incorporating these speech acts into a single narrative of beginnings.

Some of the most subtle and provocative juxtapositions of the two paradigms of performative language occur in the work of Milton and Blake, poets whose claim to authority often rests simultaneously on the concept and imagery of God's creative utterance and on socially constituted speech acts. Moreover, the relation between the two types of performative speech and the poet's awareness of this relation differ in the texts of these two writers in ways which open up a new perspective on the influence of Milton on Blake, and the influence on both of the discourse of their contemporaries. Milton insists on the presence of a creative Logos as both the subject of his writing and the motivating power behind it, even though he is involuntarily engaged in dividing and hierarchizing the world when he rewrites the story of creation in *Paradise Lost*, and in illustrating the workings of the social contract when he defines his own inspired stance. Blake, partly because of his reading of Milton and partly because of the different conventions which circumscribe discourse in his time, is much more conscious of, and therefore anxious about, the dichotomy between language which derives its creativity from individual will and language which wields authority by common consent. The evolution of the visionary poet's response to this problematic of Logos, society, and the role of language in constituting or reconstituting reality is the subject of the following chapters.

3

The Language of Inspiration in Milton's Prose

... you [Milton] are very solicitous about [words] as if they were charmes, or had more in them then what they signifie: For no Conjurer's Devill is more concerned in a spell, then you are in a meer word, but never regard the things which it serves to expresse.

The Censure of the Rota

Milton's Word: Theology and Logology

A writer who is going to create his or her own system discovers a matrix of problems inherent in cosmogony and beginnings. So Milton realizes, and Blake after him, when they take on the task of putting the world into words. Whatever the consciousness of being inspired means for these poets on the level of language (and that is one question I will be addressing), it is somehow bound up with the originality of the work and the uniqueness of the message. Being thus engaged, on a fundamental level, with the problem of origin, both poets return to and revise the biblical paradigm of creation through language. Yet the properties of language are often at odds with the idea of origin or free creation, in ways that Milton and Blake intuited and that language theory since Nietzsche has more explicitly addressed.

Milton's narrative of creation by the Word in *Paradise Lost* is founded on his multifaceted understanding of what language is and where it comes from. The Word, in various capitalized and uncapitalized senses, means for him the Son of God; the power by which God creates the universe; the inspired and infallible authority of Scripture; the revelation, comprising both poetic ability and the gift of interpretation, which comes to inspired writers from God; and the instrument which Protestant preachers employ

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