EXISTENCE, HISTORICAL FABULATION, DESTINY
TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE THEME ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS xi

PART I EXISTENCE, LOGOS, AND IMAGINATION

JADWIGA SMITH / Contextualizing Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka’s 
Concept of Fabulation 3

SECTION I

LAWRENCE KIMMEL / The Mythic Journey of a Changeling 11

ALIRA ASHVO-MUÑOZ / Aura; Ontological Materiality of 
Existence and Fabulation 27

WILLIAM D. MELANEY / Sartre’s Phenomenology of History: 
Community, Agency and Comprehension 37

IMAFEDIA OKHAMAFE / Historical Fabulation as History by Other 
Means: Shakespeare’s Caesar and Mofolo’s Chaka as Opposites 
in Rubiconesque Leadership 51

MICHEL DION / The Dialectics Between Self, Time and Historical 
Change According to Milan Kundera 77

SECTION II

FRANCK DALMAS / Lived Images/Imagined Existences: 
A Phenomenology of Image Creation in the Works of Michel 
Tournier and Photography 93

LUDMILA MOLODKINA / Aesthetic and Historical Framework 
of Russian Manor as a Genre 107
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VICTOR GERALD RIVAS</td>
<td>The Portrait of A Real Live Man: Individuality, Moral Determination and Historical Myth in the Light of Henry James’s The American</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REBECCA M. PAINTER</td>
<td>Healing Personal History: Memoirs of Trauma and Transcendence</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATTI ITKONEN</td>
<td>Once I Was: A Philosophical Excursion into the Metaphors of the Mind</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAYMOND J. WILSON III</td>
<td>Existence and Historical Fabulation: The Example of Tom Stoppard’s Travesties</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHRISTOPHER S. SCHREINER</td>
<td>Metaphysical Fabulation in the Berkshires: Melville’s ‘Arrowhead’ and the Anachrony of Thought</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRUCE ROSS</td>
<td>Being is Believing: The Underpinnings of Walter Benjamin’s Deconstruction of Historicism</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BERNADETTE PROCHASKA</td>
<td>Historic Fabulation and T.S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding”</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSUNG-I DOW</td>
<td>Harmonious Balance as the Ultimate Reality in Artistic and Philosophical Interpretation of the Taiji Diagram</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JERRE COLLINS</td>
<td>Time After Time: The Temporality of Human Existence in Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BERNADETTE PROCHASKA</td>
<td>Destiny in the Literature of Walker Percy, Leo Tolstoy and Eudora Welty</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REBECCA M. PAINTER</td>
<td>The Interior Quest: Memoir, Lens of Personal Destiny</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Author/Contributor</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION II</td>
<td>CEZARY JÓZEF OLBROMSKI</td>
<td>Collective Intentions and the Phenomenology of Time – The Theory of Non-Domination in Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION II</td>
<td>ALIRA ASHVO-MUÑOZ</td>
<td>Interpretation of Destiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION II</td>
<td>MICHEL DION</td>
<td>Human Destiny at the Edge of Existential Categories of Life: Musil and Kundera in Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION III</td>
<td>VICTOR KOCAY</td>
<td>Aspiring Beyond: French Romanticism, Nietzsche and Saint-John Perse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BRUCE ROSS</td>
<td>Words Turn into Stone Haruki Murakami’s <em>after the quake</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VICTOR GERALD RIVAS</td>
<td>On the Modern Opposition of Fate, Destiny, Life, Doom and Luck in the Light of Henry James’s <em>The Portrait of a Lady</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RAYMOND J. WILSON III</td>
<td>Gail Godwin: Negotiating with Destiny in <em>the Odd Woman</em> and “Dream Children”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ROBERTO VEROLINI</td>
<td>The Soul and its Destiny: Readings and Dialogues on Science, Philosophy and Religion – A Meeting with Vito Mancuso and Orlando Franceschelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NAME INDEX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE THEME

Surging from the ontopoietic vital timing of life, human self-consciousness prompts the innermost desire to rise above its brute facts. *Imaginatio creatrix* inspires us to *fabulate* these facts into events and plots with personal significance attempting to delineate a life-course in life-stories within the ever-flowing stream – existence.

Seeking their deep motivations, causes and concatenations, we fabulate relatively stabilized networks of interconnecting meaning – history. But to understand the meaning and sense of these networks’ reconfigurations call for the purpose and telos of our endless undertaking; they remain always incomplete, carried onwards with the current of life, while fluctuating with personal experience in the play of memory.

Facts and life stories, subjective desires and propensities, the circumambient world in its historical moves, creative logos and mythos, personal freedom and inward stirrings thrown in an enigmatic interplay, prompt our imperative thirst for the meaning of this course, its purpose and its fulfillment – the sense of it all. To disentangle all this animates the passions of the literary genius.

The focus of this collection is to isolate the main arteries running through the intermingled forces prompting our quest to endow life with meaning.

A-T. T.

ix
Essays presented in this collection are gathered from two successive and thematically interlinked conferences of the International Society of Phenomenology and Literature (an affiliate of the World Phenomenology Institute) annual conferences, number 31 (held May 16th and 17th, 2007 at the Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts) under the title: *Existence and Historical Fabulation* and Conference number 32 (held on May 5th and 6th, 2008 at the Radcliffe Gymnasium, Cambridge, Massachusetts) on the topic: *Human Destiny in Literature*. Our authors are sincerely thanked for their studious contributions and participation in the discussions which make an essential feature of our conventions.

Our faithful secretary Jeff Hurlburt and Springer publisher deserve as usual thanks for their expert editorial help.

A-T. T.
PART I
EXISTENCE, LOGOS, AND IMAGINATION
CONTEXTUALIZING ANNA-TERESA TYMIENIECKA’S CONCEPT OF FABULATION

ABSTRACT

Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka’s Book three of *Logos and Life* is devoted to the exploration of the life-significance of literature and the fabulating creativity of the human being. Her work is to be viewed in contrast to the postmodern treat-
ment of narrative as an ever-present factor in private or social discourse and ultimately without any essential or epistemological foundations and values.

The fabulating creativity of literature as a particular form of aesthetic involvement in the arts is specifically human: it enagages the individual human being in a given historical time and culture. However, Tymieniecka eschews the underlying possibility of relativism, so strongly implied in postmodern think-
ing, on the grounds that the richness of life’s variables is not “random.” Instead, these variables constitute the very primeval laws of life. It is the vocation of literature to embrace these variables and, thus, to engage in philosophical investigation as well.

From formalism to postmodernism, from the interest in a variety of narrative strategies and techniques to the concept of narrative as crucial to a politi-
cal discourse of power—we have witnessed a continuous reinterpretation of one of the fundamental human activities of telling stories, writing stories and critiquing stories. A contemporary field of narratology represents one of the disciplines specifically interested in the production of narratives and their existence through written, spoken and visual language in a variety of media, whether in film, graphic novels, television news, miming, etc. The traditional focus of literary studies on the rules, structures and conditions of telling a story in literary texts, folk stories or myths, as initiated by Shklovsky and Propp, is now augmented by a strong interest in telling stories and producing narratives in other fields. Whether in political science, sociology or cultural studies—we observe a shift toward analyzing the ways of grasping knowledge and convey-
ing it through various narratives as a means of interpreting social and political control or execution of power.

Modern psychology, though no longer under Freudian sway, certainly has its share of incorporating private stories and interviews into its general body
of knowledge, particularly in its clinical component. Such acceptance of private stories on a large scale is also evident in the field of history influenced, though at times reluctantly, by a new historical push in the direction of obliterating a distinction between a document and text, any text. A postmodern approach to history accepts individual stories of average citizens and grants them an important role in constructing some larger historical narratives with unclear boundaries, negotiable by textuality and varied historical context. Whether indicated as Lyotard’s “grand narratives” or Foucault’s “episteme,” these attempts at reinterpretation of validity of historical experience, primarily in social sciences, explain all normative behavior as contextualized by ever changing historical processes or, in other words, narratives not grounded in any essential norms and values.

Lyotard’s thought, so instrumental to the poststructuralist distrust in the human being’s epistemological faculties and the human being’s role as the central subject of knowledge, stresses such non-rational elements of human existence as sensations, emotions and subconscious reflexes. According to a grand narrative of the postmodern era, an individual human being is ultimately unaware of his or her role in the production of any grand narrative, past or present.

To introduce, at this point, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka’s Book Three of *Logos and Life*, devoted to the life-significance of literature, is a calculated effect: only in contrast to the prevailing context of the postmodern treatment of narrative as ever present factor in private or social discourse but ultimately without any essential or epistemological foundations and values, we can appreciate her work on the fabulating creativity of the human being.

“Fabulating” or “fabulation” as used by Tymieniecka should not be confused with the use of the term by Robert Scholes who incorporated it in his work *The Fabulators*, dealing with the twentieth-century novels not fitting into the traditional category of realism because of their experimentation with the fantastic, mythical or gothic, in other words, what we would call now magical realism.

In the Introduction to Book Three of *Logos and Life*, Tymieniecka talks of the fundamental role of individualizing each human life through unfolding in successive steps of that life’s inward/outward functioning. However, “The Human Condition is a set of functional virtualities which accounts for the emergence of the specific type of living beingness that is man within which the interiorization/exteriorization vectors of life assume a unique amplitude and significance” (10). The human being, then, is able to grapple with “the final metaphysical question” about the onto-poietic factors behind the individualizing progress of life and “the first elemental factors behind the establishment and subsistence of life” (10). Thus, the fabulating creativity of literature as
a particular form of the aesthetic involvement in arts is specifically human: it is engaging the individual human being in a given historical time and culture. However, Tymieniecka eschews the underlying possibility of relativism, so strongly implied in the postmodern thinking, on the grounds that the richness of life’s variables is not “random.” Instead, these variables constitute in their “inward/outward orientation” and “dominant/submissive dimensions,” the very primeval laws of life. It is the vocation of literature to engage in and embrace these constants of the onto-poiesis of life, and thus engaging in the philosophical investigation as well.

Though philosophy and literature are frequently encroaching upon each other’s territory, each claiming superiority in grasping reality, truth and essential human values, Tymieniecka avoids a trap of qualifying the role of philosophy or of literature as a better vehicle of “the cognition of knowledge of anything” (17). Instead, she observes, the task of superior grasp of knowledge does not pertain to literature because literature reaches the much deeper level of human existence. Literature portrays the human world and existence post-factum, after the events of life are experienced and lived; only then these events are recreated through the “creative vision” in literature in order “to establish contact to convey experience” (18). Thus, unlike philosophy, literature does not attempt to establish some positive knowledge of life; rather, literature remakes the so-called facts, establishes understanding of order or truth and reshapes them into the unique personal vision. Lucidity and clarity of a philosophical treatise are replaced by the “subliminal logic of the significance of life” (20). In other words, the conscious state emerges out of a pre-intentional and pre-noematic state. The subjective circuit, then: “Is already ‘pre-objectivized,’ that is, with respect to it the intimate inner-realm of the self, has already assumed its universally valid posture, ‘direction toward’ objectivized forms, and should in fact be considered to be already the ‘intersubjective’ circuit of interiorized life” (23). But this mediation between the subjective and intersubjective for each human being has to take place in the flux of life, relating each individual human beingness to the totality of life and all its brutal forces. This is accomplished because of Imaginatio Creatrix. Thanks to Imaginatio Creatrix, the aesthetic, the moral, and the intellectual emerge as taming and stabilizing roles amidst nature and its vital forces. This creative orchestration establishes the means of “the stabilization of the inner/outer flux of life’s force” (25), and ultimately the humanization of nature. Chaos and fragmentation, unreason and lack of comprehension are replaced by “structurizing intentionality . . . as if ‘exorcising’ the frightening tentacles which threaten life’s poise” (26).

The most crucial function of the creative orchestration, then, is making sense out of the vital stream of life, and this is, ultimately, the primordial function of fabulation. Thanks to it, the human being projects, integrates, and endows
with meaningfulness those individual interests with those of the vital stream of life: “there occurs in fabulation a basic end uniquely important, dramatization of the events and their effects, a modeling of views about human predicament” (30). Three basic principles of fabulation—the tragic, the comic, and the epic—play each a crucial role in life-significant creative arts of story-telling or writing.

Tymieniecka clearly warns against treating a literary work as a handy tool for transmitting to the reader a rational view, patterned and arranged in orderly schemata, reaching down to the first principles; “rathers, literature provides the reader with means to recognize his or her most” “secretive, inert, waiting bundles of emotions, concerns, forebodings, anxieties” (33). Illuminated in new, defamiliarized ways, they reach the current life.

Why does one need this intermediary, this creative act of literature? The answer is in the fact that though everyday life-experience of the human being is already in “the lucid zone,” above the brute forces of vital nature, not all is clear and controlled for an individual and an individual within a social network. This lack of clarity occurs because beneath this lucid zone there are still present elemental forces of nature, giving us “spontaneous urges to move, to advance, to rush forward” (34) beyond the everyday repetitious activities of life. No wonder, says Tymieniecka, that every great civilization is advanced by its art, literature, and laws. Though almost a cliché, and Tymieniecka is aware of it, this statement should reclaim its value in light of phenomenology of life: “Art and literature appear as crystallization of the answers to the deepest longings of the subliminal soul, thereby, responding to the needs of the human spirit as it takes off,” compensating for the fact that the human being “fails to become his own master within the intricate web of life, and longs for completion, compensations, reward, and redemption.” (35–36).

The fabulating function comes to life as the result of the first movement of intellect, triggered by natural curiosity to know as well as need to question. Whatever the form of fabulation—from dance to stories, to music and societal laws—it deals with the tormented, convoluted, unclear, chaotic, etc., and endows it, after “imaginative de-composing,” with patterns. Thus, “the brute and opaque fact of life are imaginatively transfigured into elements of existence, and to confront them, there emerge the elemental passions of the subliminal soul” (38). The new patterns endow the old and convoluted entanglements of the human being with a universal validity, as instigated by the fabulating imagination. The links between these patterns and all the individual and experiential traits possessed by the readers, viewers and listeners are conditioned by “the three primogenital sense-giving factors or virtualities”: the poetic sense, the moral sense, and the intelligible sense. The fabulation then:
intentionally transfigures life’s nude facts in accordance with the propensities, virtualities, and factors of the human condition. The result is prototypical models of human character, conduct, societal organization, vision of humanity; the stage is set for the ideals which will fashion a culture’s style. (39)

Tymieniecka continuously stresses the role of a literary work as a source of gaining insight into the significance of life. Initially, the text or the stage play or film makes the recipient focus on the particular fabula, but that is not enough because each individual will qualify the elements of the fabula from the point of view of some personal experiences, establishing the possibility of conflicting interpretations. However, Tymieniecka warns against the relativistic position which inevitably results from accepting all interpretative versions are correct. What is ignored in such a critical approach, so currently favored, is the fact of the existence of a fabula. Instead of relativity:

inasmuch as the possibility of relating personally to some or other special point in complex texture of the work of literature is established by the works’ intentional-ideally unchangeable-structure, these clues are intentional knots of significance in the pattern that makes the fabula ciphered in the script. They punctuate the significant “nervous system” of this pattern as it emerges from it structural formal—material moments. (44)

Because fabula originates from subliminal sources, it connects with “elementary drives, pulsations, stirrings, etc.,” and it helps to distinguish between “Nature without” and “Nature within,” that is to establish some significance in the eyes of the human being (45). Tymieniecka illustrates the concept of fabulation with her several page-long discussion of drama, particularly Greek. She sums up the most important observations about what ultimately distinguishes great literature; she makes a connection between an intentional structure of a given work and its lasting value. It is through a “pattern of intentional knots of significance” that the fabula is ciphered in order to be deciphered by the readers or viewers, and ultimately igniting some imaginative and passionate responses in the subliminal soul. Hence, the life significance of the literary work depends on its poetic enjoyment, a crucial factor in the human condition, necessary for fully embracing psychic acts. It should be stressed again, then, that it is not the intellectual faculty of the human being but the aesthetic enjoyment which allows for the exploration of the significance of life and self-understanding.

Tymieniecka returns to the issue of fabulation in 2006, in her essay titled “Logos’ Timing of Life—Fabulating History.” This time, she investigates the role of the interrogative logos as a primogenital function of fabulation and, as explained by her in Book Three of Logos and Life, with Imaginato Creatrix as an instrumental factor. The interrogative logos is behind a sense of history because it is involved in the introspective probing of the conscious life by the human mind, and it also questions the contribution of individual memory as well as the common human condition. This common human condition
reaches out also to all acts of communicating the story of life. The human mind, through various ways of experiencing the reality of life, individually and collectively throughout time, forms and reforms models of experiencing, reflecting the deepest human concerns. Thus, Tymieniecka gets involved in the contemporary discussion about the role of an individual human being as defined by the context of various societal functions and historical events:

To understand now means not only to situate an event within the network of life in its natural unfolding, but also to relate it to traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. This quest spirals up to find or establish a sphere of sense higher than that of vital significance. (xvii)

In other words, instead of postmodern stress on an infinite play of social and historical variables, Tymieniecka explores the possibilities of human communication. She points out that fabulation allows, thanks to imagination, to go beyond the historical, factual marking of reality. This going beyond the identifiable marking of social reality does not lead, however, toward relativism or even nihilism, so characteristic of our contemporary thinking because fabulation is essential to human communication, to the exploration of the deeply personal as well as communal, connecting the past and the present: “The human condition bends toward the rays of fabulation, a love of fabulation being a life force” (xviii). As a life force, it is not to be confused with the ontological grounding of truth or knowledge; it is an impetus to search for meaning of human condition. Stories, then are not to be understood in a Lyotardian sense—as a final destination in the constitution of relativistic knowledge. Instead, stories have a crucial epistemological value because they are fundamental to the very inception of human communication and the explanation of the possibilities of knowledge, including the eventual judgment about the ontological acceptance or exclusion of relativism.

WORKS CITED

SECTION 1
Once upon a time, there was a creature that crawled out of the sea and... Once upon a time, there was a creature made perfect who met a serpent in a garden and... Once upon a time, there were heroic creatures on earth that strove against the gods and...

There are many such tales in the archaic moorings of our collective memory, but one in particular that seems inclusive if indeterminate: Once upon a time there was a creature that came out of the darkness with a only a faint memory of water, and sand, and cold, and fear to discover that its very life depended on telling a story about its origins—of which it had no clear memory, and its destiny—of which it had no certain knowledge. What more fabulous to conceive than this creature which, having lost its tail, dreams of growing wings? It is a being whose nature transforms itself and the world it inhabits but, for all this, keeps running up against its own limits: neither Ape nor Angel, it remains a creature caught between, looking through a fractured mirror at possibilities always just beyond reach. It is a changeling creature, a child seeming stolen from the gods.

I

Historical fantasies in language and life: The nature and reach of language has been variously construed by philosophers with only a common acknowledgement that it is the single instrument we have toward a comprehensive critical discernment of life and world. It remains a critical issue, however, whether the entire range of meaning can and should be used in comprehending truth and reality. It may be well to clarify at the outset the difference in these two questions. Truth has many forms, indeed truth is a matter of form. Reality, on the other hand, however and wherever manifest, is a matter of flow rather than form. Its modality is one of continual transformation. If the limits of our world are the limits of our language, then it makes a world of difference if we confine our language to facts. Even the most fundamental forms of knowledge in science are discontinuous and subject to paradigm shifts, but reality is itself formless and suffers no such fixations. Inquiries concerning truth invariably require a calculus of language with an abridgment of meaning, but if we move...
from the question of what is true to what is real there can be no final abridgment of language and no abstractions into a calculus. The world of reality unlike the world of truth refers to the whole of what is possible—that is, to whatever is meaningful within the range and sense of language.

In ancient classical philosophy the long standing ‘quarrel’ that Plato alludes to between literature and philosophy is framed in many different ways, most particularly as that between mythos and logos. It has an historical sequel in the divide between Plato’s rejection of the value of rhetorical discourse and its reinstatement by Aristotle. Two philosophers in the modern period have similarly commented on a kind of conceptual schism in the relation of language and world: With regard to Nietzsche’s rhetorical claim that there are no facts, only interpretations, Wittgenstein offered the logical corrective that not everything can be an interpretation.

While these seem to be contradictory claims (as Wittgenstein so intended in his reminder to Nietzsche) they can also be regarded as compatible remarks about and within the world of sense and meaning. Interpretations can only be interpretations of something, of course, but that something can be other than a fact—e.g. it may be an assumption or postulate, or else be grounded in a social or existential commitment unrelated to a factual claim. The point here is that to call something a fact whether in common sense or science, is to give it a value, or accept it as constituted by a value. The world is not reducible to facts in the absence of some determining structure of agreement as to what will count as a fact. In scientific discourse and practice this is commonly expressed as ‘all observations are theory laden’ with the general implication that all seeing is ‘seeing as...’ To put it differently, no intelligible world—including that of physics—consists in a totality of facts. The world in which we live is not made up simply of things, nor is it comprehended by facts: facts are not the building blocks of meaning, only one of its potential attributes which in turn requires interpretation. To put the matter in terms other than interpretation and as it will be addressed in this essay: the world in which we live is meaningful in terms of the stories that we tell, stories that we share, stories we remember and stories that we live. Stories and the lives they embrace are neither constituted nor limited by an independent description of facts. They are formed and edited in terms of the perspectives and interpretations we bring to the experiences we share.

Aristotle’s indelible inscription in the bedrock of western thought—that Man is a creature with Logos—is a point of departure and a point directly in question concerning the issue historical fabulation. In the specific context and currency of his time Aristotle’s definition focused on the rational discourse of self governance so that his original claim split into the memorialized definition
that as a possessor of Logos or speech, Man is a rational and a political animal. These two features of Logos are of course the result of an interpretation of a founding claim that intellectual history has since adopted as the defining capacity of human-being. So understood it has the effect of restricting the cognitive limits of language to discursive reason.

But another interpretation can and has been given to ‘Man is a creature with Logos’ (words/ speech/ language) that does not center in logic nor serve the narrow limits of control in reason and rule. As a creature with Logos, Man is understood as having the capacity to tell stories—that is, as an alternative to Aristotle’s governing definition, Man is a story-telling animal. Man is a creature graced not only in a faculty needed to reason and govern, but able to put her life and experience into stories. The stories we live by are legion—collectively they comprise the different human concerns investigated by religion, history, philosophy, biology, economics. . . Within each of these collective accounts the dominant interpretation in western intellectual and political history has been that of rule and reason, logic and legislation—that is, it has biased Aristotle’s interpretation of Logos. This bias has tended to establish and direct the central use of language to that of control—of the environment, of the world, of others, of ourselves. Such a bias in philosophical terms represents an ambition to reduce meaningful discourse to the category of facts and so use language (Logos) to constrain the myriad possibilities of imagination toward a matrix of control. This project was made explicit in logical positivism but it is residual as well in the general culture.

It is instructive to consider what a shared life-world would become if it were reduced to a discourse of facts, in which no stories are told, or rather, just one story, the recounting of facts according to the master narrative in which all facts are given or from which they are derived. As a case in point, and reflective of a dominant male culture still in keeping with the Classical Greek bias, the traditional form of autobiography has been that of factual summary. In Lionel Trilling’s wonderful story about college teaching, Of This Time, Of that Place. . . , a class of first year students is assigned to write an initial essay about who they are and why they have come to the college. The responses all take the form: ‘My name is James Bierbower III. I was born on. . . in. . . and went to school at. . . my father, James Bierbower II and his father. . . were born and raised. . . ’—a series of related facts and events that frame the endowed life of an entitled class at a small liberal arts college. The one exception to this litany of sameness is a student who begins his essay by seeming to reject the essay question: ‘Of this time, of that place, of some heritage. . . what does that matter to those of us now engaged in the creative adventure of learning. . . ?’ It turns out, of course, that it does matter, and throughout the term, the teacher is hard pressed and finally unable to locate this student on any spectrum of acceptable
discourse and decides that he cannot pass his work. However brilliant in other ways, the boy simply does not fit in, nor fit the mold of common sensibility grounded in the factual discourse of learning and life. His work is eventually consigned to a discard pile of student failures. There is a tragic context in the telling of this story which would take us aside from the limited point of our interest here which is to note the standard of autobiography in the listing of facts and events in standard categories of social accountability.

In contrast to this factual encasement the emerging literature of the feminine movement has produced new voices that have found a different way to shape the possibilities of autobiography more in keeping with the complexities of our changing life stories. In this literature a life-story can well begin at any point that constitutes a significant sense of its coherence and importance, nor is one limited to a single starting point or narrative. One might begin a story of her life: ‘I was abandoned by my parents...’ and so a life narrative unfolds in terms of that critical perception and experience. But at another juncture, or just as well, this autobiography may be transformed along with the life of its telling: ‘I first met my birth mother on my graduation from middle school...’ Where one starts is critical for the narrative, obviously, and also critical for the life of its telling, but that place is not assigned by any objective order in terms of its importance or the coherence of the narrative. Language is a tool for many purposes, and the meaning of a life cannot be determined independently of the story in which it is framed; to the extent that there are optional narratives, there exist also different life possibilities. No one is stuck with one set of determining facts, no matter how hard the circumstances of her life.

In a world fast losing its tether to religious conviction, moral objectivity, universal reason, political solvency, ecological sensibility...it may be that all we have left are stories to replace the once endowed gods, the enshrined templates of True, Good, Beautiful, Sacred...except of course that the gods and these various testaments were all and in themselves stories and the products of stories. Hopefully we can avoid succumbing to any insistence that there is only one way to see the world (e.g. physics), one way to consider life (biology), as once people were persuaded or forced to think there was but one God—their own (theology.) I trust it is not necessary to note here that this is in no way to dismiss the importance of any particular story—e.g. physics or biology—or to debunk any efforts to assess truth, goodness, or the sacred. This is only to suggest that the meaning and value of any discourse is related to the context of the stories being told.

Our lives individually and collectively are comprised of stories in which events are recorded, interpreted, evaluated, edited, but also in which possibilities, disappointments, alternatives, dreams, regrets, hopes are woven into the narrative; occasionally, our experiences may be sufficiently shaken by joy or
sorrow such that a whole paradigm shifts in the narrative. It is in this sense that historical fabulations surround our most ordinary lives, extend and inform the range of our possibilities as human beings.

We are in fact not bound by facts. If we have a nature, it is one that we have given to ourselves in some accepted story or other and which remains ever a work in progress. Does this mean there are no facts that form the boundaries of life and world? No, only that the facts in our lives are first of all dependent on the meaning of our experience—individually and collectively, existentially and historically—in its myriad forms and flaws; it is only in this flexible and variable way that the meaning of our lives is ever ‘determined by the facts.’

What I am arguing for, then, is more a plea for the centrality of metaphor in language (Logos) and of imagination in life—for the possibilities embedded in a living language that is addressed to the comprehensive if indeterminate richness and complexity of human existence. To put it in another way the division of Logos from Mythos and the related genders of language that estrange and hermetically seal facts from the reach of fiction and fantasy must be reconciled in order to create the life stories in which we find meaning.

II

True stories: some say that in the beginning there was a great void and out of Chaos came Desire and Destiny and the ensuing generation of first things. Others say that in the beginning darkness covered the earth but the creator brought forth light and knelt down in its early mist to breathe life into the clay. Still others say that in the first three seconds of the universe there was a cosmic mix of mass and energy that generated life. Like most autobiographies, the self-life-writing of human-being can begin at any particular moment that is memorable or that the retrospective mind finds especially compelling. Some picture human life to be that of a naked ape whose existence in the world of his own making is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. Others imagine that of one race are gods and men. The story seems to depend on where and when the teller, and what the point of telling or taleing. But no story holds title to truth for, of course, the story itself is in process, the subject in transit, the end in question.

We attribute to the writers in the age of Classical Greece, particularly the critical historians and philosophers, the intuition that it was important to get things right, to give reasons and argue for perspectives about the name and nature of Man. It is not uncommon to suppose that in the gradual transformation of mythos into logos—of emergent sense into manifest truth—that we have left well behind as vestigial myth the primal energy and spiritual core of
generative stories. But to think so is a mistake. History is still a story, allegory survives at the heart of philosophical discourse and metaphor generates invention at the base and boundaries of scientific inquiry. *Mythos* remains subliminally operative and functionally transformative in the living culture of the storytelling animal whose very life blood is possibility.

Still, we *would* like to get it right; indeed the literal bias of the modern temper rather insists on it, but we must trace back this particular obsession to its archaic source in wonder if we are to understand its nature and risk. Arguably, the first point of critical separation of the mythic and historical, the factive from the fictive, is found in the development of ‘the Socratic Method.’ The Platonic Dialogues mark the distinctive turn to an insistence on rational discourse as the touchstone of value and this also allegedly marks the fatal fracturing of reason and passion in philosophical inquiry. However, we will try to discern in this most enigmatic of the triumvirate of Classical Greek philosophers the more fundamental and sustaining resource of mythic energy that keeps open the possibilities of human imagination. Further developing the counsel of Socrates and framing the *paidaeic* project of Aristotle, Plato’s poetic dialogues contain countervailing and contrapuntal elements of both *mythos* and *logos*. It is the philosophical convergence of discursive logistics and dramatic erotics which make his work such a compelling study of Man as a changeling creature caught-between.

Throughout the Platonic *corpus* there are countless instances and uses of myth, allegory, and extended metaphor imbedded within the discursive logic of his *Dialogues*. A long history of scholarship has argued the point and import of Plato’s wide and effective use of what otherwise and in the context of his valuations he seems to dismiss as nonsense or insidious. Should we believe what he says against what he does? The rhetorical, dramatic, and figurative uses of myth are so obviously deliberate and intentionally integrated such that they cannot be dismissed as incidental accessories. So what then are we to make of the fabulations of Plato in the midst of the serious business of a search for truth? It is one thing to credit the great tragic dramatists with imaginative license and emotive excesses in the search for the darker reaches of the pathological in human perversions, marking the territory of *That Way Be Dragons*. But *et tu Plato*? How and why myth and to what end in the larger body of his work?

I want to look briefly at one of Plato’s *Dialogues*, more precisely at two sections of the *Symposium*, which I take to be a crucial index of what the thinker was about in his task of truth-telling concerning the nature and destiny of human kind. I suspect it is more usual to think of the *Symposium* as a derivative, supplemental, or even incidental relief text in the Platonic corpus,
rather than generative for the whole of his systematic inquiry into Truth, Wisdom, and the Form of the Good. But the erotic genesis of inquiry is the whole point of the text of this dialogue and as such marks the conceptual beginning of Plato’s central project of achieving a synoptic vision of reality.

Of the two myths to be discussed in Plato’s *Symposium* one is familiar and oft-cited (the speech of Aristophanes), the other is more complex and variously interpreted (the dialectical teaching of Diotima). Both occur in the context of a gathering of friends to celebrate the victory of a tragic dramatist during the festival of Dionysos. The evening is given to drinking and conversation, and an invitation is given to each person to address an encomium to Love. In Aristophanes’ speech, Plato has the great comic dramatist relate a fabulous myth which depicts the human condition as one driven by desire resulting from a radically divided soul in which the separate parts are condemned to search the world for completion and fulfillment by reuniting with its other half. Characteristically, the effect of Aristophanes’ myth is a deep mix of comic *pathos*. The original rotund creatures possessed of two heads, four arms, four legs, etc., were so aggressive, obnoxious, and threatening that the god split them in half—creating a vast community of half-life beings whose plaintive existence is driven by an obsession to recover their whole identity through the other. Given the great plurality of people and expanse of the world, and given the complexities of ordinary human association along with the risk and pain of experimental intimacy, the prospect of reconciliation is not optimal. At root this fabulation has the telling truth and compelling reality of common human experience. If Socratic wisdom consists in striving the whole of our lives so that the end of all our striving will be to return to where we began and know the place for the first time—that is, if the journey of the intellect is for the mind to come to understand what in some important and archaic sense it already knows, then this myth represents an important parallel with respect to the journey of the heart. There is in each person a life-long striving to arrive whence we began, and there is the hope that if we are fully alive, sensitive and open to the risks of desire, then we may finally come to ourselves in simple fulfillment of the nature of our existence. However poignant the human situation seems under Aristophanes’ comic tale, there is promise as well—a further analogue to the myth of human discord that placed hope in the bottom of Pandora’s Box.

The series of *encomia* to love in the *Symposium* predictably reflect the character of each speaker and further index the relation each has to this most intimate and binding phenomenon of social existence. Recall that the series begins with a speech in praise of that first impulse of desire in the journey toward beauty and truth: the physical attraction to the body of the ‘other.’ But in terms of Aristophanes’ interpretive myth this means that we are drawn out of ourselves toward ourselves. Each speech expands the domain and level of this
impulse, in which Love, Desire, *Eros*, is depicted variously as a young playful and vigorous god, as a great benevolent god of age and wisdom, as the most beautiful of gods...until it is the turn of the old satyr Socrates. Subsequent to Aristophanes’ account, and leading up to Socrates’ interrogatories, the host and honoree of the symposium, the new and victorious playwright Agathon, flushed with victory, pictures the god in his own image, as if he were looking into a mirror for a likeness. One is reminded of Nietzsche’s remark about one loving that in which they find their own strength. It remains for Socrates to lift the discourse to embrace the whole of humanity.

III

The love and pursuit of wisdom in its most general as opposed to profession-ally philosophical sense is a journey without a destination. As such the journey itself a fabulation of human sensibility—desire in search of its ground, the soul in search of its sense and limits. Its object is the subject itself. The Greeks analyzed desire as a lack, as an immediate and compelling sense of incompleteness, and as such at the heart and impulse of all movement. It is significant that Plato places the mythic account of desire at the root of human endeavor in the character and voice of the comic poet, who begins in a playful and vulgar style in keeping with his reputation. The burlesque gives way however to a more somber rendition of desire in human longing for a soul mate that will reconcile the divided self. Recalling why Zeus split in two the strident creatures of the originating species, there is reason to question the wisdom of any reunion. However poignant the plight of the human being so divided, this reminder of what a permanent reconciliation would restore in the form of the two headed many armed monster suggests the human being is a finer and nobler creature when caught up in the infinite and insistent space of desire. This sense of the incompleteness of human endeavor is familiar characteristic of the eristic activity and *aporetic* discourse of the early ‘Socratic’ dialogues, but it is true also in the more ambitious epistemic extensions of the later dialogues. There is, for example, a characteristic lack of closure even in the *Republic* when the question is put at the end of the long discussion, looking back on the constructed ideal system of rational order of human community ‘But how and when will all this come to pass...?’ To which Plato has Socrates respond “Not until philosophers become kings and kings philosophers.” In both conceptual and historical terms, this must mean something like ‘When hell freezes over.’ A reconciliation of ideas and the framing of ideals is one thing, but human life fraught with desire is something quite other, and Plato again counters the idyllic rationality of the *Republic* as well as the exacting epistemic but still incomplete efforts at
birthing knowledge in the *Theaetetus* with the great dialogue and dialectic of desire in the *Symposium*.

The lesson of the *Symposium* in the larger body of Plato’s work suggests that the rational framing of the instrumentality and power of *Logos* requires an associated discourse of *Mythos*, and a generative base of *Eros*. Reason and passion, inference and inclination, deduction and desire are always in play if not in concert. Aristotle confirms this same point in his founding insight that wisdom begins in wonder. He includes what amounts to a cosmic addendum that acknowledges desire at the root of all things—that the principle of all motion is attraction. In the different context and concern of the *Symposium*, the teaching of Diotima is that only the gods remain unchanged: in mortals attributes pass away and age, but they leave behind a new generation of possibilities that enable mortal life a share in immortality.

Plato’s efforts to circumscribe the limits of desire on the positive side, that is, at the highest reach of intelligence and imagination, invariably meet with a discursive *aporia* at which point he resorts to the dramatic figuration of myth, metaphor and allegory. Although Plato was patently hostile to the use of fabulation and provided extended critiques of differing orders against the various arts and their disfiguring conceits, he nonetheless found it necessary to supplement and contextualize his vision of human aspiration and achievement in figurative terms. Many of these dramatic vignettes have made their way into the canon of world literature quite apart from the abstract corpus of Plato’s philosophical work. The most famous is likely the ‘Allegory of the Cave’, from the *Republic*, which is sufficiently well known not to require detailed description here. The fabulation of this allegory is first of all a portrait of the human condition as an imprisonment of the senses. The world into which we awaken is a life buried in the deep cave of a shadowland in which phenomena play across a dimly lit cavern and knowledge is limited to guessing the sequence of their occurrence. Shackled to this world of shadows in a flickering and false light of enfeebled perception, the ambitions of relational desire is limited to cleverness, where prizes are awarded to those who provide the most persuasive story of sequencing. This allegory is usually read in epistemic terms as a figurative framing of Plato’s theory of knowledge, one that requires the transcendence of phenomenal appearance toward an ideal world of enlightenment independent of the senses. So considered, it serves as a dramatic analogue to Plato’s discursive explication of ascendance to the realm of intelligibility in the equally famous theory of the divided line. Our interest in this essay, however, will remain with the developmental issue of desire and with the apparently necessary discourse of fabulations through which the nature of desire finds adequate expression.

At the basic erotic level the crudity of desire demands immediate gratification in a physical object, a raw craving for the other. In the *Symposium* this
level consists in an enflamed desire for the body of a beautiful youth. In the corresponding allegorical context of the Cave, however, it is clear that such an appeal leaves desire in possession of an empty husk, the faint satisfaction of an embracing shadow. Plato’s cave and its shadow-world recalls the Underworld of Homer, in which the wandering Odysseus meets the shade of great Achilles who soon disabuses him of any notion that power, authority or prestige exist among the faded creatures of Hades. Desire is empty in such regions, whether in Hades or among the idle and vacant distractions of a world devoid of transcendence. At the same time, however, Plato makes clear that it is in the visceral commonplace of craving that one discovers in oneself the base stirrings of a desire. It is through effort and direction that this primitive desire becomes the aspiration of wisdom—a desire which, taken root, transforms the self and the world it inhabits.

Plato’s measured constraint in this initial position is to insist that from any level of apprehension deserving the name “humanity” it makes little difference whether the movement is that of an organism above or a shade below: fulfillment is hollow without a transcendent aspiration of desire. The life journey from out of the cave is not only toward cognitive enlightenment, but one in search of moral and emotional maturity. Once free of the shackles of immediacy, desire effects a transformation of intellect and imagination toward the soul’s fulfillment. It is convenient to mark the stages of this ascendency of desire in the lexicon of Love within classical Greek literature in terms of *libidos* (the first and sustaining movement of life energy) through *Eros* (the cathecting immediacy of desire on available objects) to *philein* (recognition of the mediating reciprocity of the desire of others) to *agape* (the fulfillment of desire in realization of human possibility.) This characterization of the growth and maturation of desire which is developed in the *Symposium* is a moral and emotional analogue to the wisdom of human aspiration that begins in the movement out of the cave into the light in Plato’s *Republic*.

So who and what is this creature that struggles out of the cocoon of the senses, who emerges from a primitive encapsulation and begins its journey to overcome the remnants of its birthing? Plato’s answer is to describe a philosophical animal, one whose realization of desire gradually transforms a world of contingency and necessity into a realm of freedom and beauty—a creature that in transforming its environment transforms itself.

Plato’s metaphor for this changeling creature is that of pregnancy: a human being is a creature of desire whose manifest destiny in wisdom is to give birth in beauty. The characteristic figure in this process is Socrates as midwife as described in the *Theaetetus*. This self-description and model of the teacher is confirmed throughout the Platonic corpus, in which we discover Socrates assisting others both in finding a source of the beautiful and of assisting in
the birthing and examination of the created offspring. In the *Theaetetus*, it is argued that while all men are pregnant, not all are ready for the labor that will bring forth promising offspring. Even the most earnest among those who labor bring forth wind-eggs and become discouraged in their passion.

The *Symposium* gives an account of the origin and development of this idea of birthing, and this once again requires the figuration of the fabulous: males are pregnant and laboring to give birth, seeking a transcendence not only of the prison of the senses but of the time of their tenure in the world. The point of all pregnancy, as explained in the concluding wisdom of Diotima, is immortality—either through the natural physical begetting of children, or through the intellectual and imaginative creation of immortal thoughts, deeds, or works.

**IV**

That Plato was ever in search of truth and reality is not in question, of course, but it is also the case that in order to do this he must construct a world in which his former teacher appears throughout as a protagonist of mythic proportions. No less an authority than Shelley, who translated the *Symposium*, refers to the poetic structure of the Platonic corpus in his essay on the *Defense of Poetry* arguing that Plato was essentially a poet such that the truth and splendor of his imagery are matched by the melody of his language. Shelley claims to be following Plato in holding that the exercise of every imaginative art is poetry. His further thesis in a famous and often contested passage is that poets who imagine the indestructible order of beauty are more than authors of language, music and painting but are also founders of civil society and inventors of the arts of life. Shelley’s claim that poets become teachers by drawing near to the beautiful and true reflects his general understanding of Plato’s work grounded in the force of the poetics of the *Symposium*.

There is reason to believe that the historical Socrates, as he remarks in his own words in the *Phaedo*, is not a mythologist, not a ‘teller of stories’. His basic attitude was critically opposed to the fancy of poetic conceit, and the purpose of his inquiry essentially *aporetic*—to bring discourse only to the point of its limits. Not so Plato; although he burned his tragedies when he took up philosophy at the death of Socrates he retained a poetic sense for the importance of the mythic in his development of the genre of philosophical drama. The major emphasis of his work is committed to transcendence toward a synoptic vision of reality, which could not be fully developed within the logistical constraints of argumentative discourse. Plato is more than a creator of particular contextual myths. His incorporation of the mythic begins and is sustained through his depiction of Socrates—a character of mythic proportions who is a fusion
of logos and mythos, ethos and pathos. Among the countless fabulations of Socrates throughout Plato’s Dialogues perhaps the most important for our purposes is found in the closing sequence of the Symposium. In a mock encomium to the god of love, the drunken interloper Alkibiades likens Socrates to the Sileni, the seduction of his words having the same effect as the flute playing of the demon Marsyas. That Socrates is here and throughout depicted as an erotic force comparable to the fabled satyr of Dionysian passion is evidence of Plato’s commitment to revitalize the tradition of myth that was being displaced from the literature of his time. Euripides’s dismissal of myth from the Dionysian ritual of drama in favor of common characters and ordinary life signaled an end to the tradition and depth of the tragic vision once achieved in Aeschylus and Sophocles. In its place Plato offers a new mythic genre that provides a conceptual and creative base to revitalize the possibilities inherent in the metaphysical depth of tragic drama. Although Plato no longer probes the darkness of the human soul characteristic of tragedy, his dialectical drama draws on the residual depths of the earlier drama. The Platonic Dialogue neither rivals nor replaces the great tradition of the tragic dramatists, but as evidenced in the Symposium, it does transform into a new key a human drama grounded in passion.

In the Symposium Plato constructs a variegated account of the strange creature Eros in such a way to mirror the various mythic images of the satyr figure of Socrates. Neither god nor man, the daemon Eros is the child of Poros and Penia—an offspring of the coupling of affluence and poverty; he is, in the solemn description of the priestess Diotima, rough and disheveled, without house or shoes one who sleeps in the open streets and alleys of the world. However, he was conceived during the birthday celebration of Aphrodite so he is a lover of beauty and a pursuer of good, and thus a driving force in the relations and aspirations of human beings toward virtue and wisdom. Neither Eros, love nor Socrates, teacher possess the good, the true, or the beautiful, but they are so disposed in nature that they aspire to these things, and in so doing inspire others to do the same. We are thus given the condition of human-being as divided and infused with need and longing, but having manifest possibility, pregnant with the prospect of great thoughts and deeds needing only to be brought forth in beauty. The journey of man is always toward the fulfillment of this possibility—the birthing of human excellence through the love of another.

The self is divided in its very nature throughout Plato’s range of mythic images. The description in the Republic is the familiar political myth of human soul as tripartite, composed of intellect, spirit, and appetite. Later in that same work Plato constructs a fabulation fashioned after the mythic beasts of the Chimera, Scylla, and Cerberus. This image of the soul is the mythic figure of a three headed beast or rather three beasts joined together ‘naturally’: the first
a multicolored beast with a ring of man-heads that grow and change at will, the second beast that of a lion, and the last in the figure of an ordinary human being, the composite given the outward features of the latter. In the Republic, Plato’s subject is the just soul, and his analysis here is that the manifest soul will be determined by which of the beasts are fed and nurtured—if the first two are favored and the last neglected or starved then the different parts of the beast will devour and kill one another. To achieve a harmony of soul, clearly the human intellect must make the courage and strength of the lion an ally in order to control and domesticate the many appetites of the multiform beast of the passions.

The nature of the soul for Plato is movement; the virtue of the immortal soul is life. Prior to its incarnation the soul, as it is pictured in the Phaedrus, is winged and feeds on the pure forms of the true and the good, but incarnated in human form it is weighed down in visceral accessories and torn by good and bad desires. In yet another tripartite image this soul is depicted in terms of a charioteer with a team of horses, one good, one bad. The soul is attracted, as in the Symposium first to the sight of a beautiful youth, which brings to mind the idea and ideal of beauty itself. The soul takes wing at the aspect of beauty but there ensues a struggle between the two horses, between the base and higher impulses of passion. The task of the charioteer is to bring the team into harmony of action and aspiration. It is clear that neither love nor beauty alone will satisfy the need of the soul for fulfillment, but also that both the carnal and the spiritual impulses of the soul remain active in its journey.

The detail and stages of this journey is the subject text of the Symposium and the capstone of that dialectical discussion is the teaching of Diotima in which she instructs the young Socrates on love. She teaches that the object of love is not beauty, as many think, it is birth. Procreation is the closest things mortals can get to immortality. At this most basic level of generative desire, Diotima explains that its source is not reason, for animals too are seized by desire and will sacrifice everything to protect their offspring. Mortal nature itself is locked into an imperative to overcome mortality. If wisdom is to achieve birth in beauty then clearly its object is immortality

Even where the question of a Dialogue is more narrowly directed to epistemology—the nature of knowledge rather than love or wisdom—the imperative of desire is still present. Socrates is depicted in the Theaetetus as a midwife assisting in the labor of bringing to birth the truth that is in each person, a truth through which one participates in immortality if only for the moment its realization. The sole resource for this birthing is the reproductive capacity to constantly replace the past generation with a new one. An individual is constantly renewed and constantly losing other qualities. Plato observes that no characteristics, traits, beliefs, desires, delights, troubles or fears ever