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Literature, Mystery, and Truth

--Lawrence Kimmel

Prefatory Note

In this essay I will make use of a procedure, and concept of truth that emerged from the work of Brentano and Husserl, that runs against the currents and idols of our age. Its most recent articulation is found in the work of Heidegger. The idea of truth as *aletheia* is an attempt to see the truth of Being as it discloses itself to understanding. In this way, truth is an activity of disclosure that has two moments; coming to light and bringing to light. Its notion is that of allowing things, as it were, to come to presence, to speak for themselves. Rather than construct an artifice of propositional reference for external verification, phenomenological analysis allows for disclosure of meaning through a natural form of life in which a question at issue is at home. A hermeneutical circle of interpretation surrounds the concept in question—in this case ‘mystery’—with a network of sense natural to its occurrence, and so brings understanding into a space in which the whole meaning of the moment is revealed.

This way of proceeding requires, or at least invites, an indirection of discourse. Kierkegaard famously remarked that the secret of communication is to set the other free. This is also a useful rule of inquiry into the truth of Being: to position oneself in such a way that one can hear as well as see, feel as well as think what it is that we are trying to understand. Literature is, in the view I will develop, an open domain and field of expression in which truth can happen, can come to a fuller presence in human understanding. There is an important cultural lesson in this procedure, whether or not I am able to make good on it here, that such understanding requires patience. This point has its parallel in Aristotle’s reminder about moral knowledge: that some subjects can be learned only by being made a part of the learner’s very nature, and this takes time.

I

Mystery is elemental in human consciousness, generative in language, and fundamental to the project of culture; as such, it is a creative source and paradoxical aspiration of literature. The archaic and originating activities that became literature are not only shrouded in mystery, they address the shroud of mystery that surrounds consciousness. The emergence of myth was less an attempt to explain the unknown than to provide the unknown with a form of expression within which human existence could make itself known. “To make known” at this level is not to provide explanation, nor ensure understanding, but only to connect human consciousness with what it is not, with that out of which it came to be. This first movement of literary imagination is a means

that enables understanding, of making a space for Being to come into presence. So conceived, myth is a primitive form of literature that joins truth and reality.

Mystery and the wonder of the unknown arose with imagination, and remain a vital part of its cultural appeal. The modern world seems often to have outgrown fascination with the deeper mysteries of existence, but there is still marginal wonder with the unknown of endings, most of all with death. But in the beginning, the wonder was with the unknown of the beginning, the before. The earliest mystery concerned the unknowable that led to life and world, not just to the mystery of what leads away. The Greeks, who first brought critical reflection into focus and so into literature, still had a sense of astonishment concerning Being. For Aristotle, philosophy only begins in wonder; in creative literature—unlike philosophy and history—that wonder is preserved, and with it, the mystery that constitutes the bookends of existence and world.

In the ubiquitous metaphysics of modern technology, whatever discourse is not instrumentally useful becomes thereby meaningless or vacuous; lacking specificity, it becomes specious. Nietzsche's provocative challenge to the contemporary spirit, that whatever does not destroy you makes you stronger, is only an extension of enervating logic of "*Carpe Diem*" in which the cultural imperative of intelligence is self-empowerment, a self-absorption of existence in conflict with itself. If not a dismissal of mystery, this engagement of will is pitched to contest its hold on human imagination.

Mystery, on this now common view, is an occasion and obstacle such that the task of the critical arts is to dispel mystery, and that of the creative arts to explicate it. Science is to displace mystery with fact, and one presumes the correlative task of literature is to translate it into entertainment. Perhaps this oversimplifies even common understanding, but I set it out as a touchstone for what I want to investigate, that mystery must remain a vital part of every cultural endeavor; preserving mystery is an essential task of *both* scientific and literary imagination. In what follows I will compare the response to mystery by philosophy, science, religion and literature. Each cultural domain offers something of value to an understanding of the mystery of existence, but it is the world of literature that is most open to the self-disclosing truth of mystery. To this end we will consider not only how truth is a mystery, but also in what way there is truth *in* mystery.

The goal of this inquiry is to understand the sense in which mystery *is* truth, open to the reach of poetic imagination in literature.

It is only at the margins of our language, our culture, and our sensibilities that we are still open to the elemental experience of mystery. This experience has many names, indeed comes in any number of possible categories, both common and rare. Familiar names given to normalize the experience of mystery are “beauty”, “awe”, “faith”, “God”, “ecstasy”, “the uncanny”, “eternity, and “the unfathomable”. But the same sense of self and other, of “everything and nothing” may be occasioned by anything that quickens consciousness to its own existence: a sudden awakening to the sound of rain, a pause beside a brook on a fine summer day, the calling of one’s name in a distant land, the smile on a strangely familiar face. But mystery objectified, projected only onto or away from the order and disorder of things in the world, defeats the phenomenological project of understanding human existence. We live now in a world leveled by the dominance of objective discourse obsessed with material things, and with the calculative utility of their possession. In human terms, this victory of man over nature, world over man, comes at the expense of a deeper perception of reality. Against such leveling of discourse, the task of literature is to remain open to inclusive dimensions of Being disclosed through creative imagination

Nietzsche remains a provocative and productive source for an analysis of the connection between art and culture. Although the concept of the will to power seems to dispel the hold of mystery on imagination, his demonstration that *mythos* is essential to a healthy culture reinstates mystery in the equation of cultural evolution. On Nietzsche’s analysis, in the modern reduction of *logos* to logic, and logic to the social logistics of common agreement, culture loses the mystery of the mythic, the *mythos* of story, and so the imaginative core of its creative energy. While Nietzsche has a point in his criticism of the common sense reduction of normal science to the delineation of fact, there is clearly a sense and level at which creative science is a cultural *poiesis*, a making of intelligible stories. While it is useful to distinguish the point and profit of different languages and genres of human inquiry and expression in the arts and sciences, we do violence to truth by disjoining them into categories of either creative or critical discourse. Although the question of the connection between the factive and fictive in science is of

interest here, my focus will concern the nature of mystery in the truth of *literature*, where *mythos* is both source and measure.

A common idea that misleads away from recognition of elemental mystery in all forms of cultural expression is framed by C.P.Snow's demarcation of the "two cultures" of science and art that divide critical and creative intelligence. This is a very old idea. Plato remarks on the ancient quarrel between philosophy and literature, relegating one to divine inspiration, presumably a madness of mystical indulgence, granting the other critical logos in which the mystical is put aside. Despite posting sentries at the gates of the *Republic* to turn away poets, however, Plato had a wonderful way of waffling on the issue. His own dialogues, in praise of reason, have both a discursive and dramatic element to ensure that what cannot be demonstrated can still be disclosed through dramatic portrayal of context and character. Moreover, he makes use of myth at strategic points in argument to tether the sense of what otherwise remains an abstract consideration: for example in the Allegory of the Cave, or the Vision of Er. Finally, of course, there is the significant reminder in the *Phaedo*, where Socrates on the day of his execution is discovered setting into verse the fables of Aesop, with the worry that maybe he had the God wrong all along and that the way to wisdom was an art other than the practice of philosophy.

The critical literature of classical Greek philosophy marks a significant beginning for the importance of mystery as a sustaining resource of human self-understanding. An early philosophical fragment of Heraclitus, "I went in search of myself", signaled a foundational task for ensuing intellectual reflection and inquiry, paradoxically tying it to a fundamental conviction that Man in his very existence is most of all a mystery to himself—consciousness itself is a mystery. This paradox is echoed in the familiar imperative of wisdom, "Know Thyself," carved on the cornerstone of the Temple of Apollo in Delphi. An important contemporary consequence of the dark sayings of Heraclitus and the postulate of Aristotle that connects philosophy and wonder is that they provide an occasion to once again raise the core issue of mystery in human self-understanding. A sharpened sensibility to the fullness of life restores mystery to a world grown otherwise too weary and wise in its skeptical and protective indifference to

residuals of wonder. If we want the whole truth of human reality, we must first confront the mystery of life itself.

While it may be clear that mystery is a source of both inspiration and inquiry, it is a harder case to make that there is truth in mystery. Concerning both mystery and truth our focus will remain that of literature. It is possible to wash one's hands of a concern for truth; this was the reasonable decision of Pilate, and remains a popular posture of skeptics everywhere. A dismissal of the question of truth in the effective acceptance of pragmatism is now a standard presumption of social science and political practice. Only literature seems always to remain immune from the debunking press of impatience in dismissing truth, partly because as fiction, it is excused from an expectation of fact, and partly because as an aesthetic endeavor, it is understood to appeal finally to beauty, not truth, goodness, or utility. Even so, the world's great literature has always raised anew the question of a deeper truth, of an enduring, universal, or eternal truth, even against the post-colonial, post-modern particularities of opposition to the facticities of circumstance.

There has always been an important connection between truth and freedom, when framed independently of the motive of power. This is no less so at the frontiers of scientific inquiry, commonly conceded in even a surface understanding of the work of Einstein, Heisenberg, or Feynman. The free play of imagination at the creative borders of poetry and physics thus re-introduces the germ of mystery at the heart of every cultural exchange. The physicist, facing the indeterminacy of the nature in fixing reality, the poet challenged by the indeterminate density of the spirit. When the search for truth concerns wisdom or faith, its goal is manifestly freedom. For Socrates, the pursuit of wisdom required the freedom of discourse; Kierkegaard, echoing of the Scriptural promise that Truth sets one free, insisted that the secret of all communication is to set the other free. In each case, freedom *into* what? Into the mystery of mind's exercise of inquiry and expression.

The question of truth as such, rough-hewn or whole cloth, remains open, subject only to the limits of human imagination. In literary terms, the plainest expression of this is to concede that life in all its wonder is a depth of mystery. In philosophical terms, whether the context is critical, intuitive or revelatory, truth is still couched in the familiar paradox framed by Socratic ignorance: how is a contingent, historical, existing temporal

person to attain what is timeless? If truth worthy of the name is not subject to the fleeting vagaries of time and place, how are we, creatures bound in time and space, to gain access to it? The Socratic understanding of moral life, of how to live fully as a human being, defined truth not as a power of possession but as a search for transcendence. Wisdom, Socrates remarked, belongs only to the god; for the rest of us, there is only the commitment to its pursuit. Plato's amendment, making Truth an ideal object of transcendence, did not remove the paradox of our grounding in its remove: whatever wisdom we ultimately acquire of truth, in immanence or transcendence, it is a moving point fixed briefly in the interstices of mystery.

Whatever analytical answers are given to connect opinion and knowledge, mind and world, subject and object, word and thing, existence and essence, there remains always the initial quandary concerning truth that seems to undermine the whole project: how do we get there from here? Literature has no such question; for both here and there are wherever imagination takes root and its expression finds resonance with the possibilities of lived experience. We can, as is often recommended in the temper of our time, reject or override the question of truth, either in skeptical dismissal or in dogmatic embrace. But if one takes the question of truth seriously, then alternative modalities of at least two kinds become apparent: truth as fixed or truth as transcendence. There are endless claims of legitimacy in configuring truth. The question is: can truth appear other than in some agenda of conscription? Can truth somehow simply be disclosed without deliberate configuration? Poetic license does not take leave of truth, only transcends the ordinary of expectation or fact. In this sense the poetic is a transcendent search for truth in the sense of its disclosure to the broad reach of the imagination. Literature is an indispensable mode of exploring the depths of transcendence—transcending time, place, and circumstance, it transports the individual, transfigures the actual, transforms the common. In this mode it constitutes a hermeneutics of truth.

The simple view that truth is most clearly manifest in the shared experiences of ordinary lives must still find its source in a broader ascription of embodied truth. In the absence of an enframing story, perceptual experience, whatever its claim for meaning, is so far, without appeal to truth. Lived experience as such, as Sartre pointed out, is not yet even an adventure. Until a story connects the flux of awareness into coherent meaning,

and literary imagination further transforms the commonplace into the transcending possibilities of self-understanding, the question of truth arguably is not even brooked.

II

There are different cultural responses to mystery that reflect different human interests and historical achievements. In terms of the immediacy of experience, in what we now think of as purely aesthetic expression, the artistic impulse of imagination first framed images of things absent—brought the past to presence of mind and perception. The ancient paintings on the deep cave walls of Lascaux suggest both the mystery of imagination and magic of its expression. Such expression allowed human beings to take hold of the world, to recreate the images seen and felt, and so command power over the forces of their being and movement. Such images refined into art provide historical continuity to culture and a continuous window into human possibility. Through them, in art and literature we still have access to voices in the time of the gods. Mythic expression is an elemental response to the mysteries of the turning seasons and heavens, of life and death, gods and men; its codification into a coherent story simply frames the mystery of existence in a way that makes sense. Nature, destiny, and the will of the gods, however concerned or unconcerned they are with human life, are beyond the pale of human command or conscription. Myth and mystery sustain each other; at the very least they are compatible.

Once stories become invested in the lives of those who tell and hear them, the practice of ritual arises, and mythic literature becomes encoded in a cult of practice, in a commitment to the truth or necessity of belief. Religious impulse, generated in a sense of awe, transforms fear into a celebration of wonder. It is a cultural insistence that mystery is in itself meaningful, and its appropriation is a matter of belief and inspiration rather than comprehension. While religion is a celebration of mystery, theology is its intended explication. One may argue that the hermeneutics of revelation is the first misstep of cultural retreat from what Nietzsche called the vitality of *mythos*.

Modern science, locating the historical grounding of the logic of its method and discipline with Aristotle, might agree that scientific inquiry begins in wonder, but insist this only sets the task for its removal. The modern era of critical inquiry turned to the

elimination of mystery in the systematic framing of all questions within a logic of verification and falsification. Descartes' impatience with any inquiry for which certain boundaries of truth cannot be set out advanced the principle of methodological doubt that remains the spiritual core of the sciences: doubt everything in order to ground certainty. It is only in this grounding that a progressive mastery of the world can be accomplished. As a method of achieving mastery, the method is faultless; as a mode of understanding truth, it is flawed. Contemporary logical positivism further extended the principle of verification to a monopoly of sense. Social science statistical techniques constitute a leveling of mystery. It may be that the attempt to dismiss or eliminate mystery properly refers only to normal science, not to revolutionary science. Arguably, the latter does not eliminate mystery, but only extends its boundaries, or re-describes the shifting grounds of its configuration. Moreover, at the present and penultimate point of revolutionary science, it may be useful to suggest a category compatible with that mystery still at the heart of creative inquiry that we might call *revelatory* science. This would include the search for new modes of artificial languages that prove more powerful than the so-called 'natural' languages, which have formed traditional social frameworks of agreement. Such revelatory inquiry must not only tolerate but also court the mystery of paradox. An obvious example is non-Euclidean geometry, in which the shortest point between two points is no longer a straight line; or, expressed paradoxically, a straight line is now defined as the arc of a circle whose radius is infinite. The power of the paradox generating systems in which parallel lines do meet further opens the exploration of mysteries that await in space.

There are two ways to assess the power and success of variable perspectives in science: either dismiss the idea of a singular and ultimate truth of reality entirely, or concede the limitations of human perspectives in its comprehension. Emergent scientific interest in pattern analysis and chaos theory reintroduces mystery without mysticism, and opens up critical inquiry again in creative and imaginative ways. The recent film concerning the recognition accorded the mathematician John Nash dramatizes a point. Recall his first efforts at configuring significant patterns in the movements of birds searching for food, or plotting the random gathering or couplings of students in a cabaret. The important point to notice is a legitimate mathematical, and consequently scientific

interest in (apparently) random patterns of life that form the mysterious relations among disparate perceptions of human experience. It may well be that the point of scientific inquiry is to project useful configurations of possibilities, but it needs acknowledging that possibility exceeds those useful configurations. Philosophy has always modeled a similar limited ideal; in its most obvious traditional forms, it is an effort to replace the natural mystery of life with systematic designs of its own reflections.

It remains primarily, then, to literature and the arts to engage in a discovery of the spirit of truth in beauty—a creative project that has no need to eliminate, reject, replace, explain or explain away the wonder of life.

III

It is important to note that mystery, which seems to be an awareness of something absent from comprehension, is nonetheless experienced as a presence. Mystery commonly brings with it a sense and meaning of indeterminate, perhaps indeterminable, content or reference. We speak, for example, and importantly, of death as a mystery, but it is a mystery experienced as a Presence. Obviously, it is not death itself that I experience, but the mystery of its meaning. Whether the context is a sense of loss concerning my own death or that of another, the mystery of death takes hold of my soul. The presencing of this mystery may bring an accompanying terror, or regret, or possibly anticipated release. In the case of my sister who has just died, or, alternately, my anticipated loss when she is failing, I dread the emptying out of her existence, the disintegration of the life force that she has been. Imagination is never more real than in the presence of such mystery, the soul more centered and concerned. It is not merely my own loss, but my sense of *her* loss that fills the growing sense of absence, of disconnection, that comes to presence as the mystery of death. The Stoic counsel is that death is nothing, no living experience, for death is the absence of experience. But however well intended the counsel of taking delight only in the ease of pleasure, it cancels the depth and reach of imagination. A full life yields all the variances between rapture and despair in the play of imagination that inspires and directs literature.

Themes of death and love in literature connect consciousness to life and world. Mystery itself is a mode of being in the world upon which literature draws. The

experience and impulse of love, more than the desire for an object, pleads a reciprocal desire of another. But in its fundamental ontological aspect, as Sartre put it referencing Stendhal and Proust, love aims at laying hold of the world in its entirety.

Death and the mystery of its presence in consciousness is a different kind of connection from love, of course. Love is an intimate relation of transcendence to world in the alchemy between two existing persons. Death is a creative space of presencing between being and non-being, between the existent being I am and the nothingness against which I exist. Death is an acute awareness of existence, as love is a celebration of that existence. The world's great literature is a domain of understanding manifest in the tension between the two defining categories love and death. Typically philosophical discourse is directed to fix these categories. Death, for example in Plato, is analyzed in terms of possible meanings: it is a release of the soul from the body into cycles of continuance, or a dispersion of atoms of energy, as oblivion into the advent of nothingness, or into sanctions of judgment. Literary discourse, on the other hand, is concerned rather to keep the avenues of mystery open to the imagination, even as it may elaborate the possibilities of Plato's options. Primal images of death, a fearful lurking creature waiting in the devouring dark, fuels poetic imagination to expressions that leave the soul exposed to the remembered fears of childhood, drawn once again into the unknown and unknowable. Two ancient Hellenic and Hebraic poets offer similar and sweeping metaphors of inevitability that preserve the mystery of life and death: that Man's days numbered as the grass, so the wind passes over the field and shall know it no more, and that men's lives are as leaves scattered by the seasons of wind that are no more.

The poetic response to these great themes creates a space of imagination in which the individual comes to recognize the mystery of herself in the mirror of existence, whether in love or in death. The poetic surface of the looking glass of literature is fractured so that every experience is given infinite configurations of shapes, images, moods, and effects. Images of love range from the passionate excitement of first love to the no less passionate calm and gentle assurance of aging closure: the brilliant radiance of Juliet, within which Romeo finds his spirit awakened in love, to the simple grace of each day's most quiet need in the loving devotions of Browning's *Sonnets from the*

Portuguese. The poetic expression of the experience of death has equal breadth of mystery: John Donne's line from the *Holy Sonnets* that in the face of death, "all my pleasures are like yesterdays..." pries open the mystery of each person's life in the detail of unique, but still commonly lost, yesterdays. A subsequent line voices a resolution and defiance against the dominion of death that lends some sense of empowerment, however tenuous, within the frail mystery of human existence. A different isolating and ominous sense comes to presence in Emily Dickinson's line of a failing life that hears "a fly buzz when I died". Perhaps the most familiar of any poetic context in which human existence is placed against the mystery of death is that of Hamlet's quirk of puzzled speculation, and pause, courting death, as a journey "beyond the borne, from which no traveler returns." These poetic images in response to life in death are profoundly diverse and viscerally dense, and yet the mystery remains intact and in force.

In the creative *poiesis* of words and works, love and death become natural objects, not in reference to something other. Death and passion coalesce into a concrete moment of presence in *Macbeth's* great soliloquy of exhaustion in the sound and fury that signifies nothing. Shakespeare's voice echoes the lamentation of death in *Hamlet's* "good night, sweet prince..." In a different mood, we are drawn into the aged longing of Tennyson's *Ulysses*, or the youthful sorrow of loss in *In Memoriam*, drawn into the tenuous hope of Wordsworth's *Intimations*, and so on into the acute and intimate images that surround these themes in literature. Poetry in this way brings to presence concrete and palpable experience otherwise out of reach of shared meaning.

The essence of the poetic, whether of love or death, is mystery. Browning's line that "a man's reach should exceed his grasp--or what is a heaven for?" marks the reach of literature as well, to move beyond, beneath, or apart from what is given, predictable, and possessible, to what is only possible through the *poiesis* of creative imagination. The poetic re-discovery of mystery in the obvious and common, is always a lesson of looking into the depth of a mirror of culture that otherwise reflects too often only an indifferent world otherwise engaged. Mystery, endemic to the opening presence of imagination, leads to a quickened sense of literary expression, discovering its own power, and at the same time its own vulnerability. The poetics of mystery in literature range from surface surprise to wondrous awe; they record the variegated capacities of human response from

nervous amusement in comedic puzzles, to lyric joy in poetry and drama, to profound and resonating depths of despair and triumph in tragic drama.

The greatest mystery in literature may be the existence of language itself, the sheer fact of meaning. It is easily enough said that Man is a symbolic animal, a creature with the capacity of speech, as Aristotle put it. But only a moment's reflection on this incredible empowerment of self-consciousness gives access to the core of what makes literature an evolutionary extension of the human modalities and ways of being. It is a familiar thing to mark the magic of words as a process of transformation. Science transforms the possible into the actual, exercising a leverage of language over the phenomena of nature. In literature, there is a reverse sense in which the actual is transformed into the possible, the plausible into the impossible. Imagination is so much an ordinary part of the mind's exercise that we too seldom take time to reflect not on its accomplishments, but the simple fact of its existence. Whether its achievement is scientific or literary, language is the root of transformation, and there is surely no more transparent symbol for the mystery at the heart of human endeavor than language itself. The draw and movement of literature is funded in this gift of mystery in the genius of language. Mystery comes into reflective existence in the activity of imagination as it becomes aware of its estrangement from the source of its content. In this case the mystery of one's own existence may bring with it in an acute sense of loss in the realization that the individual is not one with the world. So described as a theme of literature, mystery marks a process both of alienation and realization. In this experience the individual comes to a heightened awareness of both herself and the other.

The mystery of the past has its epistemic parallel in the present: whether a puzzle of perception or cognition, memory or imagination, it takes only the disconnection of a moment to throw the whole into mystery of mind and world. Mystery and magic are allied where the ordinary of memory and imagination are revisited. Memory brings the dead past to present life; in transforming past to present it brings a past event in the world, to a present remembrance in the mind. A simple model for this alliance can be shown in the deconstruction of perception and cognition. The now familiar distinction between an object of perception and an idea of conception, only becomes curious to us when the distinction breaks down, in some "pathological" setting—e.g. hallucinations-- in

which a person cannot make a distinction between what is being perceived and what imagined (recall again the recent depiction of the case of the mathematician John Nash in the film “A Beautiful Mind”). In quite ordinary circumstances we often have a similar problem in confusing memory and imagination. I remember so well the magnificent elms I climbed as a child in front of our house in Chicago, but now I discover through conversation with my parents that we lived in a new development where there were no trees at all. So I concede that I must be imagining this; but I may wonder at the persistent conviction that it was so, that this is not an ethereal invention, but a coming to presence in mind of a past situation and lived event. The point pertaining to mystery is not that there may be a mistaken conflation of imagination and memory. The phenomenological network of mind and calling may be recalled in Faulkner’s reminder that “Memory believes before knowing remembers, believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders.” Mystery remains a presence in the web of beliefs that constitute our existence.

IV

Mystery, Magic, Miracle: The advent of mystery at the point of reflective consciousness is astonishment that the world exists, that there is anything at all, that there is something rather than nothing. Magic enters the circle of mystery in the search for the *logos* and *techne* of power in the *poiesis*, *praxis*, and *theoria* of thought and action. Miracle completes the mystery cycle in human culture with the acknowledgement or projection of a transcendent creative power concerned for the world. Three different kinds of response to mystery may be referenced broadly as philosophy, science, and religion.

If we make a basic division of mystery into the unknown and the unknowable, science, under the rule of demand and *logos* of control, responds to the former and dismisses the unknowable. The unknown is met in the case of theoretical science with explanation, and in the case of the practical sciences with organization. The goal of each is to remove the mystery of the unknown through the rational empowerment of knowledge. In contrast to this, the domain of the unknowable remains a source of appeal to both philosophy and religion, and to literature, which draws from and deepens the sense of each. The *telos* of philosophy is wisdom in an understanding of the unknowable.

The *telos* of religion is worship of the unknowable through faith. Whether the mode is sacred or secular, however, a rule of service and supplication orders this response to mystery. The attributive aim of science is power, of philosophy wisdom, of religion faith. Finally though not independently the parallel aim of literature is beauty. But in each case there is a legitimate claim to truth, albeit of different kinds, and those truths are connected to the many aspects of mystery—truths of explanation, organization, understanding, worship, and in the case of literature and the arts generally, the truth of celebration.

In the poetic response to mystery, imagination is not limited to a logic of explanation (science), a logic of resolution (politics), or a logic of belief (religion), but only a logic of expression, and as such imagination is opened to a disclosure of human consciousness not grounded in a prior concern for limits. In literature, imagination is fueled by passion as well as reason, by arbitrary as well as ordered forms of articulation, by mood no less than method; its appeal is as much seduction and sedition as reason and rationality. Unconcerned with truth as either verifying or legitimating, literature is as close as human understanding comes to the realization and expression of freedom in truth.

Three principle sources of mystery embedded in human consciousness seem to divide in literature: the mystery of emergence that produces a literature of wonder, the mystery of endurance that produces a literature of courage, and the mystery of transcendence that produces a literature of hope. Consider the historical genres of literature responding to the great open depths of mystery. Hebraic and Hellenic texts respond to the mysteries of beginnings and overcomings. Of beginnings there is a literary search for sense; in overcomings, a search for identity. In myth, stories of gods merge into stories of heroes. Epic literature searches the reaches of imagination for a sustaining sense of tradition, tragic drama for a sense of destiny in the logic of inevitability. It hardly requires argument or example that poetic expression is the haunt of mystery. Consider easily accessible examples in the mythic themes of Yeats' *Leda and the Swan*, in which the violent parting of these thighs envisions the destruction of Troy and death of Agamemnon, of the spiritual terror of *The Second Coming*, in which some rough beast slouches toward its birthing in Bethlehem (an image particularly

haunting in our time). Think of the nature themes in Wordsworth's hearing often the still sad music of humanity in the green hills looking down upon the delicate stone ruins of Tintern Abbey; think of the mystery of the burning brightness in Blake's dark forests of night, of Tennyson's soft lament as the trees weep their burthen to the ground in the parting beauty of the last summer song of the swan, of Frost's woods, deep and dark in snow and of the road's parting, leading to one knows not what; of Dickenson's courtly prince of darkness kindly stopping, Thomas raging against that darkness, Keats quietly ceasing upon the midnight with no pain, of Rilke's soul exposed to the raw dark space of the universe, rejoicing in the mystery of the dark earth's renewing life.

Continuing with the theme of darkness and mystery in the novel, think of Conrad's definitive work in which Marlowe, backing away with humiliation from the pit of recognition in the heart of darkness, confesses his rational cowardice, musing about the droll mystery of Life, that "mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose..." concluding that if such is the meaning of life, it is a bigger puzzle than anyone could have imagined. These are familiar lines, images that come easily to mind, however deeply disturbing their contemplation. At the heart of the language of metaphor is the mystery of its density and disclosure. The life of mystery in a line of poetry is endless in its awakening.

The name and nature of mystery in the culture of poetry, as well as its occasions are endless as well. Fate and Destiny, Future and Past, Being and Nothingness, Immanence and Transcendence, Existence and Oblivion, Life and Death, Time and Eternity, God and Immortality, Love and Loss, the unfathomable abyss of mind, body and soul, the consciousness of existence. Wittgenstein's suggestion that the most obvious image of mystery is language itself, in its very existence, places mystery prior to the poetic reach of metaphor and paradox through which literature stretches the limits of language.

We are creatures caught in the moment between past and future. The past is lost to us but in memory; the future is unknown to us but in imagination. Literature finds resource in both, gives expression to both, and brings both to presence in the poetic work. Claude Monet provides an apt metaphor for the poetic task in his remark that he "paints

the moment”, but in the work of genius, that moment opens into eternity, and therein lies mystery and its truth.

V Concluding remarks

We have noticed three primary creative languages in response to mystery: the language of science that dismisses mystery in favor of the secular magic of technology and the ordering of nature; the language of religion that captures mystery within the confining net of faith; the language of philosophy that first remarked on the mystery opened to critical consciousness but only proceeded to anatomize the wonder it provoked. In contrast to the limiting logic of these languages designed to empower specific perspectives, we have commended the language of literature. Here the variegated expression of the poetic freely draws on the creative intuitions and insights of all forms of discourse. The ground that sustains the freedom of poetic discourse seems to be twofold: the beauty of expression, and the truth of reality. The aesthetics of beauty are open to every form of human expression. The elegance of mathematics and devotions of the mystic both have a claim to beauty, no less than to a piece of the truth. The collusion of the poetic is more apparent, perhaps, in religious literature, music, and art than in scientific theory or practice, but a concern for, and response to, the ineffable of Beauty is apparent in the appreciation and judgment of each. The singular advantage of literature is that it is open to draw on themes as well as insights of philosophy, science, religion and every other form of cultural articulation of human existence.

The second grounding of literature, in the truth of reality, again is not exclusive. Any sense of reality that includes human passion can hardly deny access to religion. The case of science one must argue from the other side, showing there are good reasons not to grant to the language of science an exclusive claim to the truth of reality. Even granting each cultural project access to truth, it is the poetic language of literature that searches out the full dimensions of human concern in questions that lead either to religious devotion or a scientific ordering of nature. Not limited in motive to the empowerment of truth nor transcendence of world, literature is creatively free to fantasize fact and secularize the sacred, and so stretch the boundaries of human sensibility to the possibilities of its own existence.

Whether Keats' aphorism that 'Truth is Beauty and Beauty Truth' can survive the debunking ironies of an embarrassed age in which "...all we have to know" concerns neither, there is reason to preserve the mystery of this relationship, whatever it may be. Nietzsche's remark that tragic drama must worship at the shrine of both gods, Apollo and Dionysos, reason and passion, has its broader analogue in the whole of literature, which exists in a continuous poetic tension and occasional confluence of these two pillars of mystery: beauty and truth.

The centrality of *aletheia*, as the truth of self-disclosure and the unfolding of Being, whatever weight one gives to Heidegger's warning that its recognition is imperative for the future survival of human life, the importance of this conception of truth for the life of literature is clear enough. Truth, so understood, as the creative space that literature opens to human understanding, constitutes a vital endowment that preserves the mystery of existence necessary to inspire imagination and sustain the human spirit.