The Transcendental Element in the Absent Presence.

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THE TRANSCENDENTAL ELEMENT
IN THE
ABSENT PRESENCE

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and the
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of English

By
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B.A., Sam Houston State University, 1969
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1971
May 1995
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Abbreviations

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"The Transcendental Element in the Absent Presence" analyzes the absent presence, the rhetorical and literary states of being there in the mind of the perceiving individual, though not there physically. It seeks to answer: What does the term "absent presence" mean? Is there a difference between rhetorical and literary absent presences? If so, how is each manifest through the reading process? And, what sustains these absent presences?

Evidenced through selected works of Plato, Aristotle, New Testament writers, Sidney, Shakespeare, and Dickinson, the study argues for the intellectually, spiritually, or aesthetically transcendent quality of the absent presence. Any encounter between reader, text, and writer affirms a dialogic "other," a rhetorically recognizable presence, albeit absent, that operates from both sides of the text, from both the writer's composition and the reader's reading.

Literary absent presences, emanating from the rhetorical text, additionally influence both writer and reader. This is especially evident in the poetry of writers whose personae are poet-lovers lamenting their departed beloveds. Through a kind of aesthetic transcendence, these poets transform the absence of the
beloved into a viable absent presence, a textual presence which is subsequently controlled by the artist to "speak" to the reader.

Success is determined by the degree of love which dominates the exchange. Whether reacting to eros or agape, cupiditas or caritas, the poet-lover and reader reflect that which dominates their response to the significant rhetorical or literary "other." The consequence is either negative or positive; the perceptor (poet-lover or reader) languishes in personal or interpretive frustration, or she soars in aesthetic or hermeneutic fulfillment as she comes to greater understanding of self, world, and other.

An implicit premise is that these rhetorical and literary operations are an integral part of any textual experience--both the writer's composing and the reader's reading. They are subtle textual energies that significantly contribute to understanding--that instant of intellectual, spiritual, or aesthetic fusion between writer and reader.
Chapter 1

Introduction

The topic for this study is the plurality of absent presences that operate rhetorically and literarily through a reading experience. The absent presence, as a rhetorical term, assumes duality, functioning from either side of the text—writer to reader and reader to writer. The absent presence, as a literary term, likewise assumes duality, working between writer/persona and reader/persona. For the purposes of this study, the term, though metaphorical by implication, is more than metaphor; it describes the rhetorical relationships between writer/reader and reader/writer and the aesthetic relationships between poet-lover/beloved and reader/persona. Though not there physically to the other, each absence is there in the mind of the individual. It becomes an absent presence.

My thesis is that absent presences, both rhetoric and aesthetic, dominate any textual experience involving Western literature; they are implicit in both the writing of a text and the reading of a text. But since I could not take, since I do not assume, that all Western literature is my province of study, I had to find a way to limit the focus--for my research and for my future reader. Capitalizing on the conventional view that Western
civilization has two major roots, classical and Hebraic, I begin at the most rudimentary level; specifically, I seek an explanation of the origin of the term in the culture that is ours. As a result, the second and third chapters return to the source of Western thought: to germane texts of Plato and Aristotle and to the Bible, primarily the New Testament, which becomes my link between the rhetorical and the literary operations of the absent presence.

In its literary context, the term absent presence is especially relevant to poetically rendered relationships between a poet-lover and a beloved. As a common denominator in the sonnet-sequence of Sir Philip Sidney, the sonnets of William Shakespeare, and the fascicle poetry of Emily Dickinson, these dominant literary absent presences can best be understood in relation to their rhetorical correlate. I will thus argue that the literary absent presence is a direct consequence of the rhetorical absent presence that operates within the triangular framework of writer/text/reader.

The purpose of this dissertation study, then, is to explore the concept of the absent presence. I will attempt to answer several critical questions: What does the term "absent presence" mean? Is there a difference between a rhetorical and a literary absent presence? If so, how is each manifest through the reading process? And, what is the force that sustains these absent presences?
This study will not be a history of the idea of the absent presence. Rather, it will be severely limited in scope, beginning with a chapter that explains why the rhetorical term came into being, moving to a chapter that suggests how the literary version came into being, and developing through three chapters that provide examples of how the rhetorical and literary aspects of the term conflate in the texts of the poet-lovers of Sidney, Shakespeare, and Dickinson.

Critical thought that influenced this study is varied. Although I am not a proponent of deconstruction, I realize that Derrida's poetics have permanently altered the theoretical landscape. His analysis that language abounds with absences, what he refers to as a gap, a slippage, or a lack, stimulates my own discussion of what the absent presence seeks to accomplish within and through a text.

Since I will focus on those rhetorical and literary absences that result from the printed word, my approach is hermeneutic. Essentially I conclude that the term "hermeneutic circle," which originates with Martin Heidegger in Being and Time and is amplified by Paul Ricoeur in The Conflict of Interpretations, inaccurately describes understanding that comes through recurring reading experiences. Circle implicitly denotes closure, implying definitive readings of a text. Since I argue that interpretations are as numerous as the individuals who
bring their various experiences to the reading table, I offer "hermeneutic spiral" as a term that better explains an open system of interpretation which allows for a multiplicity of, and successive, readings by a given reader.

Several theorists and their works will undergird my development. Even when I do not refer specifically to Ong, Ricoeur, Steiner, and Hall, their discussions, especially those concerning textual transcendence, guide my work. Referring frequently to the writings of Walter J. Ong, primarily to his two texts *The Presence of the Word* and *Interfaces of the Word*, I will credit the onset of the absent presence to the emergence of the written word.

The written word is that which allows transcendence, a term that I use interchangeably with understanding. My source for this synonymizing of terms is Ricoeur's *The Conflict of Interpretations*: "to understand, for a finite being, is to be transported to another life" (CI 5). Developing my thesis along intellectual lines with regard to Greek writers, spiritual lines with respect to New Testament writers, and aesthetic lines with attention to poet-lovers, I, too, argue that each rational being who processes thoughts is temporarily, for the duration of the text, "transported" into the life of the other.

Steiner takes up the idea of transcendence in *Real Presences*: *Is there anything in what we say?* His text
attempts to explain the literary transcendence that occurs when a reader willfully and willingly engages the text of another. He contends "that in the art-act and its reception, that there is in the experience of meaningful form, a presumption of presence" (RP 214). Whether fully cognizant, as perhaps is the writer who envisions the kind of audience who might read his text, or unaware of the operations, as generally are most readers who pick up that same text, an absent, yet discernible, presence emanates from either side of all written communication. Though neither individual is corporeally present to the other, both writer and reader can recognize the effects of the other. These effects are indisputably real as they are manifest through the intellect, the experiences, and the emotions of the other.

If any literary text is to make meaning, it requires a meeting point of identity between writer and reader. It must overcome difference. But a text by itself, that which Ross Chambers calls "deferred communication" (MM 137), cannot accomplish correspondence between writer and reader; it demands participation from each individual on opposite sides of the text. The writer must make the first overture to overcome difference by putting his words to paper; the reader can be no less active. So as to glean even an instant of hermeneutic fusion with the writer, she must participate fully in the textual activity.
I will develop my argument from the assumption that a kind of intellectual, spiritual, or aesthetic transcendence occurs each time that a reader gleans understanding from a text. Such an encounter between reader, text, and writer admits to a dialogic "other," to a recognizable presence that aids the reader in the hermeneutic possibilities of the text. This presence operates from both sides of the text, from both the writer's composition and the reader's reading.

The "deferred communication," which is the written aesthetic text, relies on the reader to interpret the discourse offered by the absent writer, termed by Chambers, as the "enunciator." Chambers describes this rhetorical process as that which gives "texts their social function, enabling them to pursue their existence as 'literature' by effecting their on-going meaningfulness" (MM 137).

The texts of Burke and Hall will support my exposition of this "ongoing meaningfulness" of printed texts. Frequently I will refer to Burke. His extensive corpus, which explores the complex roles of language, both oral and written in modern society, helps to shape my understanding of absent presences as pervasive elements in written communication.

But it is Hall's *Word and Spirit* that can bring written language, and the attending transcendence, clearly into focus. As Hall begins his book, relying heavily on
"our modern prophet" Kierkegaard in order to understand spirit, he clearly states his thesis:

What I want to explore, with Kierkegaard's help, is the particular character of this modern spiritlessness, the peculiar twists of the modern resistance to, and ultimate denial of, spirit, I will make the case that Kierkegaard also wants to make, namely, that the denial of spirit in the modern age is ironically dependent on the impact of Christianity.

(WS 4)

Proceeding in the first chapter of his text, Hall gives a convincing explanation of how "the advent of Christianity radically changed human consciousness" (WS 5), how it moved rational man from a "psychic" (intellectual and static) to a "pneumatic" (spiritual and dynamic) way of thinking. It is this pneumatic "world-picture" (WS 6) that allows a reader to transcend self; it is that which enables her to visualize past, present, and future. And it is accomplished through speech, most notably written speech, which is the literary text.

An implied trait in any literary work, be it a lengthy treatise on rhetoric, an inspired guide on spirituality, or an organized collection of brief poems, is that it continues to provide meaning each time a reader takes a text into herself. In any rhetorical interchange, she becomes an essential player. In effect, she completes the rhetorical experience when she interprets the words of the writer. And when she interprets the words of the other through her experiences, when she slants them through her
own perceptions, they begin to make meaning for her as she relates to self, world, and Other.

The role of the reader, then, is crucial both to the rhetorical and the literary processes. She must be a willing, a kind of loving, participant who submits her intellectual and emotional self to the text offered by the writer. As she does, she can hope to achieve at least momentary hermeneutic fusion with the absent author. This fusion, I will argue, is the direct result of love. As that which seeks to overcome difference, love is necessary for a successful rhetorical union between text, writer, and reader. Love is that which allows intellectual, spiritual, emotional, or aesthetic fusion between writer and reader; it is that which enables transcendence.

To support the premise that love is implicit in a rhetorical exchange, I will note the manner of love that selected writers incorporate in their methods of rhetoric so as to overcome the difference that separates writer and reader. Plato/Socrates depends upon eros to bring a like-minded interlocutor into shared understanding; God relies upon agape to close the separation between Creator and creation; and the poets Sidney, Shakespeare, and Dickinson vacillate between cupiditas and caritas in their searches to reconcile poet-lover and beloved. As my argument examines how the dominant literary absent presence of a text operates in conjunction with the rhetorical absent
presences, love will be a pervasive assumption. It will be the singularly significant element that links each selected writer to his or her audience.

Adhering to the Socratic practice of defining terms early in a dialogic exercise, I will fully define the term "absent presence" in the second chapter. Then, because of their impact on all of Western literature, I will focus on selected writings of Plato and Aristotle, specifically on those that explore principles and practices of rhetoric. I will posit that the very act of writing those principles and practices on paper for future readers to digest bespoke the existence of a rhetorical absent presence.

Before Plato, and with the exclusion of drama, the most respected communication was oral—the physical presence of both speaker and listener joined in dialectic relationship through the spoken word. In his Phaedrus and The Republic, Plato defends the spoken word, as practiced by his mentor Socrates, against those who would tarnish dialectic exchange through the practice of putting words to paper. Rooted in Plato's defense of the spoken word, however, was a problem that would not go away: How could he preserve the words of his beloved mentor Socrates without putting those cherished words to paper? This inescapable irony is that which set the rhetorical stage for the emergence of the absent presence.
Aristotle, along with his rhetorical triangle, only exacerbated the irony, but his methodology began to provide the means whereby readers might begin to accept, if not fully understand, the invasion of an absent presence into a rhetorical exchange. Aristotle’s On Rhetoric heralded an "acceptable" written treatise of ideas, precisely the ideas of rhetoric, of the correct means of communicating and sharing knowledge. In his book, Aristotle describes the rhetorical triangle between logos (text), ethos (writer), and pathos (reader). Inherent in this triangle is the idea of absence—absence of the reader during the time of the author’s writing of the text and absence of the writer during the time of the reader’s reading of the text. Because his On Rhetoric is the earliest discussion of that which occurs when two individuals, the writer and the reader, communicate through a text, his work sets the stage for literary endeavors; and key players on that literary stage are rhetorical absent presences operating from either side of the text.

The third chapter, which looks to Christian theology, continues the discussion of rhetorical absent presences, but it argues that an additional absent presence, a literary one that operates between persona and beloved of the text, emerges in the writings of the New Testament. Jesus, who is the Word, is both character in and text of God’s communication with humanity. A kind of
transcendental act occurs between the believing reader who communicates with God through his Holy Spirit, understood as the paraclete of Jesus Christ.

In the final three chapters, as I provide literary examples of absent presences, I will focus on selected poetry of Sidney, Shakespeare, and Dickinson that especially reveals an absent "other." Observing as each poet explores the creative tension arising from the relationship between poet-lover and beloved, I will note that love is the force which impels the aesthetic endeavor. Although the love may have been spurned or thwarted, it nevertheless is the essential element in the verbal rendering of that relationship between poet-lover and absent beloved. As each writer creates a persona who is in emotional conflict with a beloved, each professes the tangible quality of love—even when the source of that love, the beloved, is physically absent.

Julia Kristeva's book Black Sun helps to explain the means whereby the poet-lover refines personal depression and melancholia into verbal art:

By means of a leap into the orphic world of artifice (of sublimation), the saturnine poet, out of the traumatic experience and object of mourning, remembers only a gloomy or passional tone. He thus comes close, through the very components of language, to the lost Thing. His discourse identifies with it, absorbs it, modifies it, transforms it: he takes Eurydice out of the melancholy hell and gives her back a new existence in his text/song.

(Black Sun 160)
The poet-lovers of Sidney, Shakespeare, and Dickinson follow the pattern described by Kristeva: skillful in their professions, they successfully transform personal disappointment in love into works of art. Gifted with a bit of "magic" (akin to that of the mysterious Orpheus), the poet-lovers offer their texts to readers. Through rhetorical identification, readers can share the poet-lover's gloomy experience with an absent beloved. Then, like Eurydice who learned to cope in a life without her husband Orpheus, Kristeva suggests that readers, too, might find solace, perhaps even a song, in the poet-lover's language which depicts the beloved poetically transformed into an absent presence. Although poetry may be a "fragile filter," according to Kristeva, it is the "basic, fundamental sieve that will sift . . . sorrow and joy into language" (BS 161).

Why is it necessary to "sift . . . sorrow and joy into language"? The answer, in highly reductive terms, is to provide meaning for that which seems meaningless. To paraphrase Kristeva, individuals can become dysfunctional if they fail to ascribe meaning to those experiences that are shrouded in sorrow and disappointment. In a worst-case scenario, they can succumb to a melancholic depression that robs them of their ability to translate and metamorphose their own gloomy experiences (BS 39-43). Poetic art is not simply a thought in isolation; it becomes literary
identification between poet and reader. As long as the poet-lover translates and metamorphoses personal experience and as long as the reader can share through her equally personal interpretation of that experience, meaning is effected for each on opposite sides of the text. Kristeva's psychological insights, which will underpin the development of chapters 4, 5, and 6, provide the rationale for understanding the transformation of an absence into an absent presence: creation of an absent presence makes the absence sufficiently meaningful.

Sidney, the first literary writer in my study who sustains a persona who is poet-lover, addresses a complex view of love. After describing Astrophil's unmistakably erotic love for Stella, a passionate love that is not to be consummated, Sidney refines Astrophil's physical love to its more acceptable aesthetic level. At the end of the sonnet sequence, Astrophil's masks are removed, and he is left with self-knowledge, with an incisively painful self-knowledge that may somehow redeem him from his failure in love. Sidney offers the aesthetic word as the means whereby his persona Astrophil might begin to probe the chasm of his own being. As he does, readers share in his search for epistemological clues that might help him (and those who share his experiences through the written word) understand a personal existence that began in hope but ended in disappointment.
Shakespeare views love in a different context, but he, too, creates a poet-lover who transforms the absence of his beloved Fair Friend into a productive absent presence. Boldly, Shakespeare’s poet-lover likens his artistic ability to the creative powers of God. Claiming his ability to eternize his beloved Fair Friend, Will, who is poet-lover, likewise eternizes himself through the poetry that he leaves to his readers. Through this written word, the poet-lover firmly establishes his own dominant presence in the poetic text. For his persona Will, love is a rational and necessary requisite for all that is good. It is that which forgives indiscretions, transforms relationships, and perpetuates both beloved and poet-lover; it is also that which motivates intellectual and meaningful correspondence between writer/reader and reader/writer.

Shakespeare exposes lust, the counter side of love, as he writes of Will’s relationship with the Dark Lady. This relationship is void of meaning; it has no redeeming value to the poet-lover. It inhibits his artistic ability and confounds his emotional self. In contrast to the meaningful absent presence of the Fair Friend, the Dark Lady (though erotically fulfilling) is a meaningless presence in his professional life. Positing the negative against the positive, the poet-lover describes his lust for the Dark Lady as that which is counter-productive to love. As Will rather graphically depicts that which is
not love, Shakespeare further defines the force that yields a literary text.

Dickinson, refusing to adhere to boundaries of either religion or literary tradition, explores painful ramifications of love. Especially in the fascicles, she focuses on love in absence of the beloved. But her poetry depicts more than the absent presence of the beloved; hers is a poetry of absence. In syntax, subject, and signature slash (which implies omissions and absences), she demands participation from her reader. To comprehend such a complex canon, Dickinson's reader cannot be passive. Rather, she must be proactive, bringing her own experiences, her own intellect, and her own creativity to the rhetorical experience.

Selected poems in Dickinson's fascicles continue the tradition of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. All depict a poet-lover who learns to create and then, like Eurydice, learns to cope with the absent presence of a beloved who has departed. These absent presences are not static on the printed page; rather, they continue to alter and shape the literary experiences of modern readers. The legacy is vital, but it is one about which most readers are generally unaware. As a rule, readers simply take the rhetorical and literary operations for granted, not realizing (perhaps not even caring about) the mental and aesthetic processes that
compel a reader to pick up a text, that enable her to read, and that subsequently allow her to comprehend the ideas set forth by authors whom she never personally encountered in a dialectic exchange. My study may cause such readers to consider, as the sophist Gorgias propounded in the fifth century B.C., that there is indeed a bit of "magic" in the reading process. Neither hocus-pocus nor sleight-of-hand, this "magic" describes that intellectual, spiritual, emotional, or aesthetic something that accompanies a successful reading experience. It is what Dickinson refers to as that "spectral power" which leads to understanding of a text.

Something viable happens when one reads. A reader may be unable to describe or specify exactly what as she recognizes that her intellectual, spiritual, or emotional self has been altered through the reading experience. Whether elucidating ideas of rhetoric, sharing messages of spirituality, or telling tales of a poet-lover and an absent beloved, the absent presence of the writer offers new insights, additional information, opposing views, or comforting affirmation of personal experiences. For a brief interlude, the reader is "magically," through the words of another, transported into a meaningful, perhaps even a different, realm of understanding.
Chapter 2

Is It or Is It Not? The Transcendental Element in the Absent Presence

Viewed from the perspective of theoretical analysis, the concept of the absent presence is a relatively modern critical term, emerging significantly in the twentieth century as a valid subject for rhetorical inquiry. In this chapter, I will attempt to define the term, to separate it into its two categories (the rhetorical and the literary), and to highlight critical stages of its development. I will also argue that the roots of the term absent presence are found in the rhetorical writings of Plato and Aristotle. Since my purpose is to highlight a singular element in the complex philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, this chapter will, in no way, provide an exhaustive study of any of the texts of these progenitors of Western thought; rather, it will explore selected texts as a point of departure for a discussion of the absent presence.

Is the term absent presence an oxymoron or a paradox? I propose that it is analogous to both but synonymous with neither. Like an oxymoron, the term is incongruous; like a paradox, it posits a truth from contradictory elements. But unlike either the oxymoron or the paradox, both which unite two disparate elements, the seemingly contradictory
terms, absent and present, share the same etymological root in both the Latin and the Greek languages. Since my study begins with writings of Greek philosophers, the Greek rendering seems appropriate.

Translating the Greek verb ἐκδημεω, which means to be at home, the Greek language adds prefixes to distinguish the quality of being: ἐκ-δημεω, or "absent," literally means "out of being at home"; en-δημεω, or "present," literally means "in being at home." Rather than suggesting contradictory locations, the separate forms of the verb suggest different states of "being at home." The importance is that each word denotes a specific relation to being "at home."

When applying this explanation to rhetoric and the reading experience, the question arises: "What does home have to do with the reading process?" I would suggest that home is that spiritual/intellectual/emotional self, which comprises human thought. If so, then the absent presence refers to that which is not at home in the physical sense, but is very much at home in the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional sense. It is that which, for whatever reasons, refuses to dislodge itself from the thoughts of an individual. Certainly it involves memory; but more than memory, which tends to be notoriously tricky, it becomes a dynamic action in the mind of the individual.
Such a statement sends my discussion of the absent presence into an immediate, but brief, detour. Any reference to that which occurs in the mind suggests philosophy, a potentially dangerous and imprecise realm. Because it is comprised of ideas, which can be as varied as the individuals who have them, philosophy has been, as a whole, an inexact and nebulous discipline. However, a study of rhetoric cannot be separated from philosophy. The symbols used by humanity, what we refer to as language, are the mental capacity that enables an individual to begin to understand who he is in relation to his world and his creator.

Anthony J. Cascardi addresses the relation between language and philosophy and the roles they play in any study of rhetoric. In his article, "The Place of Language in Philosophy; or, The Uses of Rhetoric," he argues:

Since its beginnings, philosophy in the Western tradition has taken for itself a number of first questions: the fact that there is anything at all, and that there is nothing, for instance; that man is a thinking thing, capable of reflection and self-guidance; that he does not live alone but has the existence of others with which to contend. Just how it is that philosophizing begins—whether in amazement or in reflective thought or in response to social or political needs—is probably undeterminable; the prospect of establishing the first question of philosophy may be impossible. What is nonetheless certain is that the practice of philosophy as we know it is inseparable from the use of language.

(217)
If philosophy is "inseparable from the use of language," and if a language of symbols is the medium through which an individual processes his thoughts, then rhetoric, which encompasses all of language--words, sentences, complete discourses, and the diverse styles through which they are uttered or written--is that which, as Cascardi suggests, renders the individual "capable of reflection and self-guidance." It is that which makes him realize that he has a point of beginning, perhaps even a creator, and "that he does not live alone but has the existence of others with which to contend." It is that which validates his being.

This theoretical knowledge is embodied in, and can be expressed through, various forms of rhetoric. In this and subsequent chapters, I will argue that these various forms of rhetoric--the dialectic discourses of Plato and Aristotle, the spiritual treatise of the writers of the New Testament, and the aesthetic poetry of Sir Philip Sidney, William Shakespeare, and Emily Dickinson--are critically linked: they each approach the philosophical musings of self in relation to world (primarily to the others in it) and the self in relation to creator (or Other). Since that which is "other" cannot be fully present to the mind that muses, it becomes an absent presence. Though not there physically, it definitely is there in the mind of the individual. It is not physically at home in the mind. That is, it is not present, but it nevertheless is home,
exercising its power and leaving its tracks, in the mind. It heralds an absent presence.

Writers selected for this study use the journey trope as the allegorical method to depict the means through which the individual comes to terms with an absent presence. Subtly different in its depiction, the trope is either intellectual, spiritual, or psychic. Plato and Aristotle embark upon a dialectic journey toward the Ideal or the Good; writers of the New Testament launch the spiritual journey that will return them and their readers to God; and Sidney, Shakespeare, and Dickinson offer personae who initially flounder, but ultimately survive to varying degrees, the psychological musings of self, world, and other.

Samuel C. Chew's text *The Pilgrimage of Life* quite thoroughly explores the journey trope in verbal and visual imagery. Discussing symbols used by "the painter, the sculptor, the engraver, the tapestry weaver, the designer of pageantry, the poet, and the writer of imaginative prose," Chew limits his focus to English and Continental models that represent a journey of the mind or spirit (xxiii, xxii). Although he does not extend his analysis to the writings of Plato and Aristotle, they can be included in the same analysis if we accept that their philosophical musings did indeed seek to understand self in relation to world and Other. In the words of Lucy Chew, who penned the
Preface to her husband's posthumously published text, they, too, ponder "man's journey through life from cradle to grave" (PL vi). Their dialectic discourses, not unlike those texts of the writers of the New Testament and the poets of sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, imply a seemingly intrinsic need of the individual to find where he is, and where he ultimately will go, in the life that is his. For Plato, it is to True Being. In The Republic, Plato likens the journey to that of a cave-dweller who slowly works his way up to light, to supreme knowledge (Rep 514a).

Aristotle does not ostensibly offer the journey motif as explanation for the individual's movement toward knowledge. However, he does emphasize action, suggesting a logical progression toward something that is better than the present state. For Aristotle, that successive motion is to take him to his potential, to move him to that which is the best of himself. Aristotle describes the process in Natural Science (or Physics). As each individual actively participates in the drama of his own life, he is continually "Coming to be" or "Coming into existence" (NS 12, 13):

For in every case there is something already present, out of which the resultant thing is born; as animals and plants come from seed. 'Coming into existence' takes place in several ways: (1) by change of shape, as a bronze statue; (2) by accretion, as things that grow; (3) by subduction, as a Hermes chiselled from a
block of marble; (4) by combination, as a house; and (5) by 'qualitative alteration' (alliôsis), where the material itself assumes different properties. In all of these cases it is evident that the process of coming into existence presupposes a substratum already existing. (NS 13)

Seeking to explain the meaning of his term "coming to be," Aristotle provides five dramatistic examples of differing ways that individuals may achieve completeness of self. The terms "change of shape," "accretion," "subduction," "combination," and "qualitative alteration" suggest modifications that will alter the original for the better, modifications that will make the original more meaningful, more useful, or more aesthetically beautiful. Implicitly incorporating the idea of flux in his theory of being, Aristotle suggests that change, which attends the human condition, at least theoretically, progressively improves the self. It is only through change that the individual hopes to realize the potential which was present in the "seed" of his rational being.

Philip Wheelwright's introduction to Natural Science, Psychology, and The Nicomachean Ethics offers a clear and succinct explanation of the fluctuating individual as envisioned by Aristotle. Positing that Aristotle offers a theory which avoids both "the pure relativism of Heracleitus [sic]" and "the metaphysical extravagance of the Platonic theory of archetypes" (NS xxx), Wheelwright elucidates the specifics which notably separate Aristotle's
theory of being from those previously espoused by Heraclitus and Plato:

In short, man as a moral agent is not entirely determined by external conditions. He has within himself—or perhaps better, he is within himself—a power (dynamis) to become reasonable, i.e. to follow reason. His actualization of this power is precisely the effort of 'moral choice' (proairesis), which gives rise to 'moral action' (praxis). It is as an unmoved mover, then, that the soul performs, and is responsible for, moral action. Man has the power to steer his own course.

The goal at which he aims is his happiness (eudaimonia), real or imagined.

(NS xxxix)

To further paraphrase Aristotle: man is a rational being who determines his life’s choices and is responsible for his personal actions within a society. A presumption of morality which engenders happiness underscores Aristotle’s view of the individual within the state or community. Aristotle’s theory of being is thus overtly ambitious, and implicitly energetic. Wheelwright reminds us that Aristotle’s word energeia is that which describes the dynamic "process of achieving such fulfillment" (NS xxxiv). As this study develops, energeia will be a significantly recurring term, referring to the poetically empowered word which seeks to achieve its hermeneutic potential.

Considering the term in relation to his process of becoming, I suggest that Aristotle’s theory of being assumes journey-like characteristics. The terms "coming to be" and "coming into existence" suggest a linear movement
from one state to a different, more advanced, state. In *Counterpoint: Kenneth Burke and Aristotle's Theories of Rhetoric*, L. Virginia Holland comments on this intellectual journey as a movement toward one's highest good:

> All life processes and the art of living itself thus become an actualizing of the potential, or of the latent possibilities of development which a thing has. Man has a specific function which distinguishes him from other species and makes him what he is.  

(Cpt 77-78)

She correctly recognizes that this function which distinguishes man from other animals is the soul.

I would add that the soul (and I use a previously discussed term) is the intellectual "home" for rational faculties. These complex faculties are comprised of the organic and the spiritual. Organic operations of the mind can be explained at least in part by scientists, but spiritual qualities of the soul continue to baffle philosophers and theologians. A singular point of agreement might be that the intellectual soul is that which enables the individual to translate experience and musings into metaphorical language. As the individual moves through life, he metaphorically filters one experience through another so as to achieve understanding. As he progresses in that journey, his reservoir of experience builds and propels him toward that which presumably will provide personal fulfillment.
The journey trope becomes more prominent in the biblical text. The Old Testament plots humanity's spiritual journey away from God, while the New Testament provides a prescription for individuals to return to him in Paradise. Poets Sidney, Shakespeare, and Dickinson all continue the journey trope, offering the poet-lover as the one seeking to conciliate the self who has been abandoned by the beloved. Whether philosopher, Christian, or poet-lover, language is that which allows internal dialogue with Other. It is that which bridges the chasm between the individual and the absent presence.

Critical to the development of my analysis are the thoughts of Walter Ong who argues in several of his texts that written, not oral, language is that which initiates the relationship between the individual (the reader) and an absent presence. In his book Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture, Ong argues that although oratory was tens of thousands of years old [before Plato and Aristotle], the kind of thinking about oratory you have in Aristotle's Art of Rhetoric had never been done before writing. The human mind had never gone through this series of maneuvers, never traced this kind of trajectory of thought. But once you had produced, with the help of writing, treatises such as Art of Rhetoric and of Plato's Republic, this kind of thinking and expression would ring in your ears.

(IW 87)
How does writing, which is unspoken, "ring" in the ears of its receptor? Speaking metaphorically, Ong describes the habitation of an absent presence in the mind of a reader. It becomes a discernible, an unmistakable, yet physically absent, presence which guides and shapes the rhetorical process between writer and reader. It becomes a rhetorical absent presence.

Now that I have defined the term absent presence and have provided at least a cursory explanation of why it came into being, my discussion will explore the earliest beginnings of the rhetorical element. Plato and Aristotle, though perhaps through no willful design of their own, can be called the creators of the absent presence.

Although Plato and Aristotle may not have particularly addressed the issue of the absent presence, which ultimately emanates from the logos, the evolution of this concept necessarily begins with their philosophies, which are, in many ways, reactive developments to the rhetorical practices that preceded them. It is important to remember that Greek philosophy often opposed itself to rhetoric, especially to the sophists who were disparaged as "bearers of eloquence." In an attempt to defend and to establish the usefulness of rhetoric, Plato and Aristotle, respectively, sought to turn it into something respectable. As progenitors of contemporary rhetoric, they provide the
rationale from which the image of the absent presence will develop. And that rationale is rhetoric.

As a metamorphic offspring of classical rhetoric, the process does not occur quickly. Quite the contrary. It requires centuries of verbal and linguistic adaptations to shape its modern meaning. Its nucleus can be traced to Greek rhetorical philosophy, to the writings of Plato. As he attempts to define rhetoric and determine its worth in society, Plato offers his *Phaedrus* as a response to Gorgias’s earlier work, *Encomium on Helen*. A compendium to sophistic views, the *Encomium* focuses on logos, the spoken word. But more than simple utterance, Gorgias submits that logos has almost unlimited power over the individual.

Plato likewise views logos in its Greek context. More than speech or language or the individual words that comprise the two, logos encompasses reasoning, understanding, and reckoning or calculating. Viewing logos as a subtle master of the individual, Gorgias and Plato attempt to explain its power through the materiality of the word as it penetrates the materiality of the soul. In the *Encomium*, Gorgias describes the word organically, as a physical entity that makes its way into the body (the soul of the listener) through the ear. After entering the soul, logos then elicits visible responses, which are evident through discernible bodily reactions: the heart races, the face flushes, the blood rises, or the palms
sweat. To explain how these emotional reactions are the direct result of verbal constructs, Gorgias relates the mythological account of Paris's rape of Helen of Troy. Paris (logos) penetrates Helen (the feminized listener), who is unable to resist his compelling erogenous force. Because the material word generates desire in the listener, the listener in turn responds erotically, awakening in kind to passion and love.

In his defense of the Greek beauty, Gorgias argues that Helen is overpowered by forces stronger than she. Not the least of these is logos:

The power of speech has the same effect on the condition of the soul as the application of drugs [pharmaka] to the state of bodies; for just as different drugs dispel different fluids from the body, and some bring an end to disease but others to life, so also some speeches cause pain, some pleasure, some fear; some instill courage, some drug and bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion.

(Enc 14.1-7)

Logos is a "powerful lord," one that can effect a tangible emotional response in his listener. According to Gorgias, logos has the power of seduction. Comparing it to the effects of drugs or magic, he says that logos can sedate or cure the spirit or it can cast a spell over the soul of the listener.

Plato addresses this same issue in his *Phaedrus*. According to Ronna Burger, in *Plato's Phaedrus*, Plato's version of the passion effected by eros is even more
intense than that described by Gorgias. Analyzing the spiritual journey of the soul toward True Being, Form, and Beauty (Ph 251a-252b), Burger says that, when in presence of the beloved who commands his powerful words,

the lover is overcome with shuddering, sweat, and burning heat. The stream of the beautiful, which flows from the beloved, enters the lover through his eyes and warms him, watering the passages of his wings, allowing the hard and choked ducts to become soft so that the wings can grow from roots all over the soul (251b). Erotic passion is marked by the intense mingling of pain, from the pricking and throbbing in the roots of the wings, with temporary pleasure, from the sight of the beautiful one, warming and moistening the passages (251c).

(PPh 61)

Why such graphic emphasis on eroticism? What is its relation to logos and rhetoric? The answer lies in 5th-century Greek pederastic practices, which will be discussed later in greater detail. Basically, though, eroticism is validation to the listener that the words he hears are from the god that he should follow; it affirms to the individual that the words espoused by his beloved are worthy of his life's allegiance. Burger explains: "Through his attraction to a particular beloved, the lover discovers the god he must follow in accordance with his own nature" (PPh 63). The god, the supreme beloved, is found in the logos, which is uttered by his earthly representative, the learned philosopher.

Descriptions of the erotic power of logos, similar in their effects but different in their partnering, are found
in the accounts of Gorgias and Plato. Presumably offered as more than metaphor, each writer describes the implications of eros in metaphorical terms, something that Kenneth Burke suggests is an integral part of all language—the everyday as well as the artistic. According to Burke, metaphor, quite simply, is "a device for seeing something in terms of something else. It brings out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this" ("Four Master Tropes" 503). Since Gorgias depicts the power of logos (the "thisness") in terms of "that" sexual mastery (rape) and vice versa, and Plato relates the effects of eros (the "thisness") to those of drugs or magic ("that), Burke explains what Gorgias and Plato were doing through their explanations of the logos:

Language develops by metaphorical extension, in borrowing words from the realm of the corporeal, visible, tangible and applying them by analogy to the realm of the incorporeal, invisible, intangible; then in the course of time, the original corporeal reference is forgotten, and only the incorporeal, metaphorical extension survives. ("FMT" 506)

Both Gorgias and Plato were attempting to explain what happens when one takes the words of another into himself. Gorgias describes that activity like a rape, a violently tactile experience. Applying Burke’s analysis to Paris’s rape of Helen, the physical act becomes subsumed by its metaphorical representation, which verbally becomes more
"real" than its reality. Burke thus makes a tremendous leap of linguistic application.

The comments of Ronald L. Hall may further elucidate how logos effects its own reality in the mind of a reader. In his book Word and Spirit, which contemplates what it means to be human, fully human, Hall begins the development of his thesis with the Greek activity in which the intellectual and the spiritual coalesce through the logos:

> we might say that because logos represents the very heart of the real, namely, eternal form and order, that it comes to stand, for the Greeks, as the very essence of the cosmos. . . .

> More and more logos was uprooted from the lively dynamic act of speaking--and hence from the embodied speaker--and came to stand for the eternal and fixed order of the cosmos.

(WS 21)

If, for the Greeks, logos is that which is real, that which is the "essence of the cosmos," then words and speaking are the primary means whereby one might approach that which is real. Language for the Greeks (and for all humanity) is that faculty enabling them to "see." Hall warns us that this sight is

> an abstracted structure of vision and not the concrete activity of seeing something. The latter is hardly static; rather, because it is an essentially embodied activity, it pulsates with a dynamic orienting motility, with the dynamic kinesthetic intentionalities of my posture, focus, attention, and so forth.

(WS 22).

The "concrete," the "dynamic," the "kinesthetic" all suggest the organic, that which is the essence of life.
And what describes the essence of life better than a graphic reenactment of the passionate coupling of lover and beloved? This seems to be what Gorgias through the rape of Helen (Encomium) and Plato through the myth of the soul (Phaedrus 251a-252b) attempt to do: existentialize the power of logos upon the intellect.

To better understand the import of these premises offered by Hall and Burke, we need to look at a question Burke poses in The Rhetoric of Religion: "But isn't there still a notable difference between thinking of something when it is present and thinking of it when it is absent?" (148-49) Burke seems to have already answered this question in his earlier text, A Grammar of Motives. In it, he plays grammatically with the word "transcend" and its derivations: transcendence, transcendent, transcendental. As he comments on moral transcendence in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, Burke leads us to, and through, his own ideas that help to explain his view of what happens in the absent presence:

For according to our account, the world as we experience it is but a world of appearances. The objects of experience, we have said, derive their appearance from the nature of our minds (as all colors will seem like shades of but one color if we observe them through colored glasses). But if they are appearances, what are they appearances of? Our desynonymizing here will lead us to the answer. The empirical realm is the realm of appearances. The transcendental is the realm that gives things the nature they seem to have in the empirical realm. The transcendent realm will be the realm of things as they are 'in
themselves,' not as empirically conditioned by the conditions of the transcendental. (GM 192-93)

Burke's movement up the rhetorical ladder of a morphological analysis of the word "transcend" echoes the ascending philosophy of True Being, which obliquely refers to Plato's doctrine of Forms (Republic, Books VI and VII).

In Plato's doctrine, the philosopher can reflect the "eye of the soul" (Republic 508.d.4) of True Being only when he forsakes all other pursuits. For Plato, this eye is spiritual and supernatural, the source of ultimate truth. The individual approaches this truth, which ultimately becomes present in the philosopher though absent in the world of reality, through a kind of transcendental movement, which Plato describes in the parable of the prisoners in the cave. In his notes, Hackforth equates the movement of the prisoners from shadows to sunlight with the journey of the dialectician in his search for philosophic knowledge: "the goal of the dialectician's upward path is the cognition of the Form of the Good conceived as the source of all being and knowledge" (Ph 135). And, according to Plato, part of that cognition enables the philosopher to discern the only appropriate and worthy rhetorical endeavors, those that preserve knowledge and perpetuate justice in the republic.

True to his "Platonic" reputation, Plato often prescribes a noble and purist form of rhetoric. In his
search for truth that can be found in True Being, Plato suggests that he at least recognizes a variable, one which he does not adequately address, in the discursive process. While talking to Gorgias and trying to determine the right and wrong uses of discourse, Socrates wonders what "this power of rhetoric can be. When I examine its vast proportions, it seems to me little short of supernatural" (Gorgias 456.5-7). Is Plato admitting to a bit of magic in the rhetorical experience? Is this reference to the supernatural simply to be discounted as Socratic irony, or does it hint at a broadening of the scope of rhetoric—a broadening that might include Burke's argument for transcendence? Plato's "supernatural" at least implies a transcendent movement that views rhetoric as operating beyond the confines of the spoken word. And undulating within that movement will be another presence, what will become known as the absent presence. Although not specifically addressed by Plato, the concept emerges slowly, but perceptibly, in his rhetorical treatises.

Presumably perfecting a flawed model, Plato frames his rhetoric according to the accepted pederastic conventions within his Greek society, but he does significantly alter those conventions. In "Love, Rhetoric, and the Aristocratic Way of Life," Albert William Levi cautions us to view this practice from Plato's point of view:
The Platonically approved love is . . . frankly homosexual, but it is not 'wicked,' for it seeks commerce with a soul and not a body, and its abiding concern is service to the other in pursuit of intellectual excellence and wisdom. The Platonic ideal, whatever its degradation in actuality, is essentially a 'pedagogical' love between an older man and a younger. ("LRAW" 197)

In Greek society, patronage and pederasty provided accepted methods of instruction for young aristocrats. The young male, learning from the older male teacher, comes to understanding through the spoken word (speech) which, according to Plato, is the primary vehicle for rhetoric, for that communication which leads to knowledge.

In "Eros," a chapter from Plato's Thought, G.M.A. Grube attempts to explain the Socratic slant of pederasty, a slant which differentiates it from the homoerotic pederasty practiced by other Greeks. Especially in the Socratic dialogues, male-to-male relationships are not necessarily physical, hence homoerotic, unions between a young and an older man; but they are highly erotic in that each individual intellectually stimulates the other to greater, eminently fulfilling, knowledge. Grube writes:

Socrates loved young men and, instead of the satisfaction of physical intercourse, he sought to make his many friends into better men, he loved their souls even better than their bodies. (PT 90)

Though ostensibly sexual, pederasty, as envisioned by Socrates, becomes that ideal relationship through which
"mutual love" allows a "joint search for supreme truth" (PT 96).

According to Grube, although it may be rooted in eroticism, such a relationship most clearly succeeds when it is asexual. Only then can the two parties focus upon a sharing of knowledge:

Teaching always remained to him a communion between master and pupil, research always a common quest between friends. He knew that man cannot stand alone, that he needs sympathy from, and interchange of ideas with, congenial minds. And here the homosexual habits of his contemporaries may have helped him to dissociate Eros from all physical contacts.

(PT 115-16)

In this passage, Grube surmises that Plato, ascribing to the views of his mentor Socrates, took that which he most admired about the homosexual relationship, "sympathy from, and interchange of ideas with, congenial minds," and conflated it with an asexual eros. The result is his personal view of pederasty. In the words of Grube, it "is the Platonic love, the love of truth and beauty quickened by mutual affection" (PT 117). Ideally, knowledge, rather than sexual gratification, results from the process of dialectic, from the give-and-take, the question-and-answer format of dialogue.

In the Phaedrus, as he regales the spoken word as the stimulus, even the requisite, for knowledge, Socrates inversely discounts the written word as a distant step-child of discourse:
You know, Phaedrus, that's the strange thing about writing, which makes it truly analogous to painting. The painter's products stand before us as though they were alive: but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence. It is the same with written words: they seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing for ever.

(Ph 275d.4-10)

As he equates dialectic with a quest for truth and written prose or poetry with an exercise in imitation, Plato severely limits the boundaries of rhetoric, arguing that the physical presence of the audience is required in order to achieve the correct communication of the speaker's knowledge, intention, and meaning. Christopher Norris, in analyzing Plato's myth of the invention of writing and its dubious acceptance by Egyptian King Thamus, adds that Socrates strongly condemns the written word. Because Socrates is Plato's ideal mentor, "the master in a scene of instruction" (Der 34), he cannot commit his own thoughts to writing. That becomes the task of his interlocutor, Plato, who must necessarily sully his hands with the written word.

Much of the focus in Ronna Burger's *Plato's Phaedrus* is this vexing problem that plagues Plato in his text that extols the love of discourse: if Plato follows his own advice and does not write the words of his beloved Socrates, that knowledge will be lost; if he dares to go against his advice so as to preserve that knowledge, he begins an irreversible movement away from the presence of
his mentor. The consequence of such a movement is the emergence of an absent presence. Although Burger does not refer specifically to this absent presence, she alludes to that interplay between a reader and an absent writer. In the introduction to her text, Burger comments:

> The transmission of knowledge through the art of writing, which makes it unnecessary for every thinker to begin with a tabula rasa, promises at the same time to free human memory from the task of preserving communal opinion over time, while creating, through its independent product, the possibility of that distance from the authority of tradition necessary for the activity of thinking.

(PPh 2)

For Plato, the dilemma in reading is manifest primarily through the processing of thoughts: communally versus independently. As an outspoken proponent of the dialogic process, he understandably hesitates to sacrifice the intimate mentor/interlocutor relationship. Centuries of unquestioned practice provided him with intellectual security, albeit a false security for one on the threshold of a rapidly changing world. His concern was valid: the speaker who put his words to paper would be threatened by a potential, if not certain, loss of power. Unlike a hierarchically driven dialogue, in which an interlocutor willingly frees his own thoughts so as to become like-minded with his learned mentor, any reading activity allows the reader to activate his own memory, to consider his own opinions, and to ponder his own thoughts. Though guided by
the absent presence of the writer, any conclusions made from the text are those of the reader.

Using the term "imitation" rather than absent presence, Burger discusses the relationship between a reader and an absent writer. Describing the intellectual tension that leads to knowledge, she writes:

The dialogue between Theuth and Thamuz is a model in miniature of every Platonic dialogue, whose fundamental perplexity is always determined by the tension between the living word and its written imitation: the products of the Platonic art of writing represent Socratic conversation as the paradigm of the philosophic enterprise without ever acknowledging the deed of their creator. While Platonic love of wisdom presents itself as nothing but the imitation of Socratic love of wisdom, the very act of imitation indicates the essential separation between them. (PPh 2)

As a writer puts words to paper, those of another or those of his own, separation from that living, spoken word begins. An absence erupts. Plato cannot be faulted for failing to resolve this issue in the Phaedrus. As knowledgeable as he was, he was still a novice concerning the manifestations of the written word. Theorists who would expound the complexities of that intellectual process had yet to emerge. Not the least of those theorists is Jacques Derrida.

Derrida does not ignore Plato's role as amanuensis for Socrates's dialogues. Also pointing to the myth of Theuth, Derrida exposes the rhetorical conundrum that helps to define his theory of deconstruction: meaning is
transferred imperfectly through the written word. Slippage necessarily results when the reader relies upon the absent presence, in this case Plato himself, for understanding a text. Including the cicada story that appears earlier in the dialogue, Derrida comments in *Dissemination*:

Both myths follow upon the same question [the status of writing], and they are only separated by a short space, just enough time for a detour. The first [the myth of the cicada], of course, does not answer the question; on the contrary, it leaves it hanging, marks time for a rest, and makes us wait for the reprise that will lead us to the second.

(Dis 68)

Like the first myth, the second also detours the listener/reader. The myth of Theuth, in conjunction with Socrates's speech against the written word (275d), leads the reader to believe that the philosopher condemns writing. Then, in one of his final admonitions to Phaedrus, Socrates mentions writing alongside speaking:

The conditions to be fulfilled are these: first you must know the truth about the subject that you speak or write about: that is to say, you must be able to isolate it in definition, and having so defined it you must next understand how to divide it into kinds; until you reach the limit of division.

(Ph 277b.4-8)

Plato here includes the written medium as a seemingly acceptable mode of rhetoric. And by the end of the dialogue, Plato moves even closer to acceptance of the written word. In the final stages of the discourse, he asks for the criteria that shape a good logos, whether oral
or written. The implication is that criteria do exist for constructing written texts that might satisfy even Plato.

For Plato, as he apparently wants us to understand him through his persona Socrates, "Writing is a dangerous gift because it substitutes mere inscriptions—alien, arbitrary, lifeless signs—for the authentic living presence of spoken language" (Norris, Der 30). Positing himself as the philosopher/dialectician who seeks ultimate truth through verbal interplay with a willing, like-minded interlocutor, Socrates necessarily defends speech as the only legitimate word. To give unequivocal credence to the written word in the closing chapters of the Phaedrus would result in radically undermining its rhetorical premise, which is to redefine and reformulate oratory that has fallen into ill repute through the mouths of the sophists. Nevertheless, because his dialogue exists as a written text, because it is, Derrida argues that

Only a blind or grossly insensitive reading could indeed have spread the rumor that Plato was simply condemning the writer’s activity. Nothing here is of a single piece and the Phaedrus also, in its own writing, plays at saving writing—which also means causing it to be lost—as the best, the noblest game.

(Dis 67)

Like all other aspects of Western thought, the written word is inherently comprised of polarities, of binary opposites: saved/lost, life/death, presence/absence. As such, it is
Western civilization's "noblest game," enticing its reader, sometimes with the allure of Paris, to play along.

Norris's argument that Plato sees writing as a "dangerous gift" further supports Derrida's view of opposing elements within a given text. Writing is a gift, presumably something desired, but it poses a danger to the reader, a danger of misinterpretation. In Plato's *Republic*, the text that outlines the creation of his perfect republic, Plato details some of the dangers of poetry, the written text that is spoken through the generations. The philosopher goes so far as to call for censorship of the writers of "tales," of those poets who would give

> names of things in the underworld which make every hearer shudder. And perhaps it is right to delete them for another reason: we are fearful on behalf of our guardians, lest such shudders make them more malleable and soft than they should be.

(Rep 387c.2-5)

Plato recognizes that any non-dialogical speech faces the potential threat of misinterpretation. (Derrida would counter that no speech, oral or written, is free of this threat.) Since poetry and story-telling (the written word) do not share the advantage of dialectic, Plato argues that perhaps they will mislead through their one-sided, stagnant format, creating unnecessary fear, weakness, and trembling within the spirits of the guardians of the republic. This stance seems to be in direct opposition to that of Gorgias
who "recognized the persuasive force of emotion. He regarded an orator as a psychagôgos, like a poet, a leader of souls through a kind of incantation" (Kennedy, APG 63). Although they may differ in the form of logos they prefer and in the objectives they have for rhetoric, both Gorgias and Plato advocate the actual presence of the listener.

Further consideration of Derrida's viewpoint shows that he takes Plato's argument a major, and thoroughly deconstructive, step farther. He argues that "correct" communication of any kind, either in writing or speaking, is a misnomer—even an impossibility. In her translator's introduction to Dissemination, Barbara Johnson provides a succinct overview to Derridean philosophy as it applies to the absent presence in language. According to her, Derrida critically views both language and thought within the milieu from which they spring: Western philosophical and cultural tradition. Placed in this rhetorical setting, language and thought are structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities: good vs. evil, being vs. nothingness, presence vs. absence, truth vs. error, identity vs. difference, mind vs. matter, man vs. woman, soul vs. body, life vs. death, nature vs. culture, speech vs. writing.

(Johnson vii)

Although not necessarily opposite in connotative meaning, the opposing terms create a hierarchical relationship, with the first term having "priority" over the second. And not strictly an either/or, neither/nor pairing of terms, they
are arbitrated by the very culture from which (according to Derrida) they spring.

Unlike Plato, Derrida does not argue that speech is better than writing. Nor does he simply reverse this value system and say that writing is better than speech. Rather, he attempts to show that the very possibility of opposing the two terms on the basis of presence vs. absence or immediacy vs. representation is an illusion, since speech is already structured by difference and distance as much as writing is. (Johnson ix)

In an abrupt twist of rhetorical terms, Derrida suggests that absence always exists, in both language and writing. Neither can approximate the original thought because, like speech, any text remains moreover, forever imperceptible. Its law and its rules are not, however, harbored in the inaccessibility of a secret; it is simply that they can never be booked, in the present, into anything that could rigorously be called a perception. (Dis 63)

This idea of the inability of the spoken word or the written text to produce a "perception" is known by numerous deconstruction terms: a lack, a slippage, "a difference, a gap, an interval, a trace" (Johnson x). But they all suggest the Derridean argument that presence "is an ambiguous, even dangerous, ideal" (Johnson xii).

Absence may be the lack of presence, and presence may be the lack of absence; but I suggest that presence, for Derrida, is not something that can be acquired through the
philosophical ascendancy of Plato's upward way or through the metaphysical movement into Burke's transcendent realm. Derrida seems to say that an exact transference of the original thoughts of the writer/speaker to his intended audience is impossible—either through spoken language or the written word. Because of the very quality of language itself, the task is impossible—in both the present presence of the speaker and in the absent presence of the writer.

Ferdinand de Saussure, in his work in linguistics, examines the difficulty inherent in any attempt to communicate. Language is only "a system of signs" ("OL" 156). In this imperfect system, understanding is, at its best, arbitrary; at its worst, understanding is illusionary. Nevertheless, individuals continue to strive to find meaning, in spite of certain slippage. The writer of a text, much like a responsive reader, must assume responsibility for his text; he must carefully incorporate "signs" that will guide a reader through his maze of words. He accomplishes this through the linguistic arrangement of syntax, the inclusion of metaphor, and the addition of punctuation. If the writer succeeds at every level of composition, the result is that the written logos works its "magic" in the mind of the reader. Although the action may be deferred, the written logos, which is tangentially linked to its now-absent creator, functions similarly to
the learned philosopher: it creates desire for verbal intercourse in those who are willing to participate in the reading process.

Plato would have us believe that this desire is totally separate from emotion. More than a speaker entering into a passionate exercise of persuasion "which produces mere belief" (Gor 454) in his audience, Plato's partners embark upon a journey of knowledge that at death will return the soul, as Grube notes in Plato's Thought, "to truth and eternal Forms" (125). Unlike Gorgias who defends emotion as a legitimate tool that can be used against the listener for the purpose of convincing him of an opinion, Plato argues that a reality (truth) exists apart from emotion, that logos, in its quest for pure knowledge, the knowledge of Forms, supersedes emotion. Although Plato may want to discount emotion, the words of his mentor suggest otherwise.

One reference that tends to refute Plato's disavowal of emotion is his myth of the soul, which depicts a charioteer seeking to control his team of two horses. As John Dillon explains in his introduction to Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism, the traditional interpretation of this mythic account is that Plato uses it to elucidate his tripartite division of the soul:

The divine soul has three aspects, the critical or cognitive (gnostikon), corresponding to our rational part, the appetite or 'dispositional'
(parastatikon), corresponding to our spirited, and the 'appropriative' (oikeiotikon), corresponding to our libidinous.

(Δ:HP xx1)

Emotions, both the "spirited" (which is the good horse) and the "libidinous" (which is the bad horse), arise from either part of the soul that is not rational. That which is dangerously emotional (the insolent and proud horse) confuses the individual in his journey toward the ideal; it is that which forces him to lose his wings and fall back to earth. When the charioteer focuses on the eyes of a particular horse, he becomes that which he sees: the bad horse stirs his negative emotions and makes him rebel from the Ideal; the good horse keeps him focused on, or "obedient" to, the Ideal (Ph 253c). But it is important to note that emotions control both horses.

This myth does not represent Plato's only acknowledgement of emotion in an individual's movement toward the Ideal. Near the end of his discourse in The Phaedrus, Socrates, who previously denigrates those who elicit emotion as a means to persuade, says: "Since the function of oratory is in fact to influence men's souls, the intending orator must know what types of soul there are" (Ph 271c-d). The implication is that a philosophical rhetoric will incorporate a knowledge and a use of psychology. This description does not seem far removed from that which Plato denigrates, the psychagogos whose aim
is the same as that verbalized by Socrates: "to influence men's souls." Although he might disclaim the comparison, Plato's account of the myth of the soul describes the power of eros (logos) that is quite similar to that which is recounted by Gorgias in the *Encomium*.

In the *Phaedrus* (251a-252b), as he explains the physical changes wrought through the immortality of the soul, the embodiment of spiritual love, Plato writes of another rape, a rape reminiscent of the inception of Helen of Troy, as depicted by W. B. Yeats in "Leda and the Swan":

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

(11. 1-4)

This sexually charged union between Zeus, in the form of a swan, and Leda, a helpless human female, exposes the primal nature of heterosexual relationships, a nature that Plato reformulates for his own philosophical purposes.

Plato might shape his rape by pederastic conventions so as to characterize an "ideal homosexual relation" (Hackforth 98), but his reformulated description is surprisingly similar to Zeus's rape of Leda, as poetically rendered by Yeats, and Paris's rape of Helen, as instructionally inscribed by Gorgias in the *Encomium*. The difference is that Plato seeks to transcend the sexual limitations of the physical world:
and but for fear of being deemed a very madman he would offer sacrifice to his beloved, as to a holy image of deity. Next, with the passing of the shudder, a strange sweating and fever seizes him: for by reason of the stream of beauty entering in through his eyes there comes a warmth, whereby his soul's plumage is fostered; and with that warmth the roots of the wings are melted.

(Ph 251a-252b)

Interfacing the sexual act (which sheds its carnal wings) with the spiritual experience (which achieves communion with Beauty of Forms), wisdom supplants eros as the motivating force of the logos. Thus controlled by wisdom, logos continues to penetrate, but its aim moves from self-gratification to self-abnegation as it reflects the "eye of the soul" (Rep 508d.4) of True Being.

Plato may seek to transcend the sexual limitations of the physical world, but his incorporation of eros belies his efforts. A paraphrasing of Burke's explanation of the relationship between persuasion and eros suggests that Plato cannot do that which he would attempt. Persuasion is always implicit in eros, since the goal of eros is to overcome difference; conversely, eros is equally implicit in persuasion, since the conceptualization of a sexual desire is revealed in the struggle for unity in a culture of estrangement (RM 176-77). If we apply this apparent paradox to the reading experience, we might note that both persuasion and eros are equally implicit in the reading process: as a writer verbalizes ideas, he generally
solicits agreement; as a reader takes up that text, he willingly (except perhaps in those instances of required reading) offers himself as a pawn of persuasion. Even if the reader chooses not to be persuaded, if he chooses to disagree with the ideas presented by the writer, his willful act of participation affirms the seduction of eros.

Plato could not accept this implicit relationship between eros and persuasion. Seemingly undaunted in his defense of persuasion which is void of sexually charged eros, Plato offers his myth of the soul to counter sophistic doctrine. His myth frees the idealized soul from the encumbrances of heterosexual mortality, presumably to supersede the tacit connection between persuasion and eros. The result is that his method of transcendence simultaneously creates the fatal rhetorical wound that will eventually lead to the demise of his restrictive concept of logos as a purely oral activity.

If the spoken word and the presence of the listener are the criteria for understanding and achieving pure knowledge, why does Plato’s myth refer to the eyes (“beauty entering in through the eyes”) rather than to the ears as points of entry (penetration) for beauty (eros), which is the metaphorical equivalent of logos? Although he may profess otherwise, he lends at least some credence to the emerging power of a persuasive written word, of a logos that will find its energy in, and through, the non-
The significance in Plato's shift from hearing to seeing is crucial. Not only is sight the sense that individuals use in reading, but it also is that physical ability which computes the distance between the seer and the seen. The instant of transcendent union between the two admits to distance and deferral, but it also allows for understanding. Ong takes up this issue in Interfaces of the Word and The Presence of the Word. Commenting on the gleaning and accepting of knowledge in our Western society, he assesses:

To a culture so visualist as ours (despite the recent build-up of the auditory), the world of early oral-aural man and the sense of presence it enjoys can appear curiously unreal. It seems too little objective, too much given to illusion, too threatened by subjective forces. For us, not hearing but seeing is believing. We feel truly at home only in a world of sight.

(PW 169)

Ong seems to say that, somewhat curiously, the modern individual has been lulled into a complacency of "seeing is believing," as evidenced by the one who accepts for truth something simply because he sees it in print. For him, such a world of sight provides a potentially deceptive confidence that he "knows," when indeed he may not, a topic Ong addresses in his later book, Interfaces of the Word.

In the chapter, "'I See what you Say': Sense Analogues for Intellect," Ong concludes that "in a field of
sight there is always a beyond or a beneath which is not seen" (IW 125). For the individual to begin to grasp that which he cannot see with the physical eye, he must be willing to shorten the distance between seer and seen, between knower and known, between reader and writer. This is accomplished through the intellect. Willfully engaging in synchronous activity with writer and text, the reader comes to certain, though not necessarily the same, knowledge as that set forth by the writer.

Plato’s Republic, which espouses an idealized rhetorical and an admittedly political environment, both which rely on the auditory senses, ignores a seemingly obvious fact: for posterity to follow his philosophical precepts, his words ultimately must be written. Norris explains Plato’s attending paradox:

For the fact is--to put the case at its simplest--that Plato is inescapably condemned to writing, even as he seeks to denounce its effects and uphold the authority of self-present (spoken) truth. And this predicament repeats itself wherever philosophy refuses to acknowledge its own textual status and aspires to a pure contemplation of truth independent of mere written signs.

(Der 33)

Norris suggests that Plato’s panegyric avowal of "non-write" paradoxically is his reluctant admission of writing. Once he puts his words to paper, Plato, quite unwillingly (but perhaps not quite so unwittingly), opens the rhetorical door to a new partner, the absent presence.
When the word is written, the once-controlled discourse is no longer restricted to a teacher and his like-minded interlocutor; another presence emerges—the absent presence of the future reader.

In Dissemination, we find Derrida’s lengthy, but quite complete, explanation of the ambivalence of written texts. His reference to "this pharmakon, this ‘medicine,’ this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison" (Dis 70) suggests the third element in the rhetorical process: the reader. Derrida determines that the reader is the "philter," the one who determines whether a text is "remedy" or "poison." Referring to Plato’s disparagement of the written word, he describes how the determination (cure or curse, boon or bane, understanding or confusion) is made:

There is thus for Plato no such thing as a written thing. There is only a logos more or less alive, more or less distant from itself. Writing is not an independent order of signification; it is weakened speech, something not completely dead: a living-dead, a reprieved corpse, a deferred life, a semblance of breath. The phantom, the phantasm, the simulacrum (eidolon, 276a) of living discourse is not inanimate; it is not insignificant; it simply signifies little, and always the same thing. This signifier of little, this discourse that doesn’t amount to much, is like all ghosts: errant. It rolls (kulindeitai) this way and that like someone who has lost his way, who doesn’t know where he is going, having strayed from the correct path, the right direction, the rule of rectitude, the norm; but also like someone who has lost his rights, an outlaw, a pervert, a bad seed, a vagrant, an adventurer, a bum. Wandering in the streets, he doesn’t even
know who he is, what his identity—if he has one—might be, what his name is, what his father's name is. He repeats the same thing every time he is questioned on the street corner, but he can no longer repeat his origin. Not to know where one comes from or where one is going, for a discourse with no guarantor, is not to know how to speak at all, to be in a state of infancy. Uprooted, anonymous, unattached to any house or country, this almost insignificant signifier is at everyone's disposal, can be picked up by both the competent and the incompetent, by those who understand and know what to do with it (ceux qui entendent et s'y entendent) (tois espíousin), and by those who are completely unconcerned with it, and who, knowing nothing about it, can inflict all manner of impertinence upon it.

(Dig 143-44)

The reader, then, willingly and wittingly, in his competence or incompetence, makes meaning for himself through the written words in the absence of the author. The absent presence thus becomes a dual activity, operating from both sides of the text. The author presumes the presence of the absent reader when he places his words on paper; conversely, through the very act of reading, of mentally interacting with those same words that the author put on paper, the reader acknowledges the presence of an absent author.

That which unites writer and reader is, in the words of Burger, a "product of writing." Hesitating to go as far as Derrida who refers in the passage above to that product as "a logos more or less alive" (PPh 143), she suggests that writing has no life until a responding, and responsible, reader takes it into himself:
The product of writing, like the creature of painting, is not an independent being with a life of its own, able to speak for itself; it requires its begetter to protect it against unjust abuse.  

(PPh 97)

For meaning to be effected, the reader cannot be a passive observer of the words before him. He must, as Burger further argues, purposefully engage in "the activity of interpretation" (PPh 97). Believing should not necessarily equate with seeing. Acting as both life-giver for and guardian of the quiescent words, he must protect them "against unjust abuse" and careless misinterpretation (PPh 97). According to Burger, it is then, and only then, that resuscitated with the breath of thought, the written corpse of the dialogue becomes a living being, knowing when to speak and when to remain silent, able to defend itself against all unjust abuse.

(PPh 3)

If the resuscitated words (a text) are positioned in a triangular framework with a responsible reader and a dominant authorial presence, the result is the rhetorical triangle.

Burger does not specifically refer to the rhetorical triangle in her discussion of the irresolute conflict between the spoken and written word that she finds in Plato's Phaedrus. However, her discussion of the responsibility of the reader, who works in tandem with the writer, attests to an absent presence already at work. Certainly Plato's own writings do not clearly address this
issue of the absent presence as it operates within the rhetorical triangle, but his dialogues lay the framework from which this critical term will emerge. We need to look only as far as Aristotle to see clearer evidence of its formulation.

Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric* offers an irreversible dialogic construct, the rhetorical triangle with an implicit absent presence. Aristotle’s recognition of this dynamic contributor to a written text affirmatively answers Plato’s question: Do criteria exist for creating not only an acceptable, but a masterfully cogent, written discourse? (Ph 276a-277b) Conforming to his philosophic tradition, Aristotle maintains the dialogic form. Werner Jaeger addresses this issue in *Aristotle: Fundamentals in the History of His Development*. He states that, presumably like other members of the Academy, Aristotle regarded the dialogue as the established vehicle for giving living form to esoteric philosophy, and . . . desired to see the master’s effect on himself reproduced in such a medium. (A:FHD 27)

His dialogue, however, is dramatically different from those of Plato and his peers: he does not offer the text of a learned teacher intellectually guiding his willing interlocutor. Perhaps most significantly, he does not have an external audience; rather, he relates a discourse that occurs in his mind, presenting a verbal interplay between the rational spirit and the questioning self which comprise
his being. Proof of his mastery of the centuries-old discursive method, Aristotle reformulates that which was used by his mentor into an inner dialogue, making it more suitable for the written word than was that which was generally practiced.

Although one might argue that the two aspects of Aristotle, the individual, are present in his creation of an inner dialogue, he does essentially what Walter J. Ong describes as "fictionalizing" an audience; he creates a physically, but nevertheless powerfully, absent presence (a mentally projected audience), which guides and directs his treatise on rhetoric. Aristotle's dialogue thus becomes a treatise of metarhetoric through which the third element of the rhetorical triangle is a recognizable force.

Aristotle may reflect Plato in some of his earlier works, but he dramatically departs from his mentor's transcendental quality of forms. Reflecting his training in biology and the empirical sciences, Aristotle considers all forms through their organic development. In so doing, he creates his complex philosophical system of rhetoric as a means for grounding words, or discourse, in a quantitative study of being, knowledge, and language. This triadic system of study establishes a pattern of triangular completeness that recurs throughout Aristotle's On Rhetoric. Arguments or speeches are either deliberative, epideictic, or judicial [1358b]; they involve ethos,
pathos, and logos [1356a]; and they require a listener, a speaker, and a subject [1358a].

And the concept of the absent presence evolves directly from these latter two triangular systems, as one system overlaps the other. The modern rhetorical triangle (reader, writer, text) directly parallels Aristotle's ethos, pathos, and logos while it simultaneously corresponds to his listener, speaker, and subject. Evidence of the evolutionary movement from the oral tradition of classical rhetoric to the written tradition of modern rhetoric is seen as reader and writer replace listener and speaker in the rhetorical triangle. Ong describes the differences that distinguish Aristotle's triangle from its modern counterpart:

> the spoken word is part of present actuality and has its meaning established by the total situation in which it comes into being. Context for the spoken word is simply present, centered in the person speaking and the one or ones to whom he addresses himself and to whom he is related existentially in terms of the circumambient actuality. But the meaning caught in writing comes provided with no such present circumambient actuality, at least normally. ("WA" 85)

Lacking a "present actuality" or a present presence of the speaker, the written word necessarily relies, albeit imperfectly, on the absent presence of its author to shape meaning for the reader. As the reader, who is an absent presence when the text is composed, partners himself with an equally absent author, he connects with that author.
Although the connection may be incomplete and the understanding may be arbitrary, the logos nevertheless creates an indisputable bridge between author and reader.

The purpose of that bridge is to effect meaning through the text; unfortunately, the process is often precarious, as meaning slips through the mental recesses of the reader's mind. Burke argues that a "word's 'meaning' is not identical with its sheer materiality" because there is "a realm that transcends the empirical" (RR 16, 36). Because of linguistic transcendence, the idea that the writer placed upon the page may not materially be the same idea as interpreted by the reader, but it has a semblance of that materiality if the reader is, as Burger suggests, responsive and responsible. Burke's theory concerning this linguistic transcendence is that language is the individual's "dramatic" attempt to get to "the form of a thing [that is] called its 'whatness,' or quidditas" (GM 228), a concept that can be traced to Aristotle.

As the individual seeks to understand the "whatness" of self, world, and Other, he necessarily begins a journey of exploration; or, as Aristotle might say, he begins his journey toward his greatest potential. It is a journey of activism, involvement, perhaps even intellectual risk. Holland summarizes Aristotle's dramatistic view of man as speaker in his society:
for Aristotle, man's life is an activity. It is a 'becoming' through acting and doing of what he 'potentially is.' The ultimate end or good for which he strives is 'happiness.' Individual happiness will result when he learns to follow the rules of reason and realizes in actuality all the capacities of which his soul (nature) is potentially capable. Man is not only a rational animal, but he is by nature a political or social animal. He will achieve social happiness when he applies his knowledge of individual good to the good of society.

(Aristotle) 83

Aristotle's writings reflect an aggressive approach to life and a utilitarian approach to rhetoric. To help ensure the good of the community, he offers rhetoric as a dynamic art that might benefit individuals in the drama of their lives. Establishing it as a techne, a "reasoned habit of mind in making" (NE 6.4.3), he then offers it as habit that can pervade and positively impact every arena of living—ethical, political, legal. His is a rhetoric steeped in a logic that is inherently beneficial to his society, serving as a means both for understanding and improving the self within his world.

Burke comments that "Aristotle's concern with logic as the instrument (organon) of human reason is 'incipiently' pragmatist" (GM 276). As he espouses that logic in his written treatise, the written word becomes an acceptable tool (organon) for the process of communication, for the purpose of disseminating ideas. Applying his logical approach to written language, Aristotle sees it as a
natural phenomenon and as rational instrument. Aristotle analyzes the arts of language in terms of symbolic properties and linguistic structures. Logic, rhetoric, and poetic are none of them purely 'verbal arts' in Aristotle's philosophy: they are based on the natural properties of words.

(McKeon, "ACL" 176)

Aristotle views all of language as an instrument, an instrument for verbal communication that might successfully occur both in the presence and in the absence of the speaker. Unlike his mentor Plato, he recognizes efficacy in discourse that is non-dialogic.

Aristotle may not clearly elucidate for the modern reader how this written instrument effects meaning, but his writings yield some significant determinations. Unlike Plato and the sophists, he does not offer eros as that which creates like-mindedness. On the contrary, he submits a rational, triangular framework as at least partial explanation. Rather than seducing an audience in the manner of eros, Aristotle's speaker exudes good will, ethos, that will draw a listener (reader) to him. Partnered with the logos (text) and the pathos of the listener, the speaker (writer) might elicit understanding. Burke, speaking through his Aristotelian heritage, further extrapolates.

Attempting to define the human individual, the "symbol-using animal" (Symbolic Action 3), Burke overlays Aristotle's empirical knowledge with Platonic
transcendence, a transcendence which allows for
differentiations between essence and being. Ontologically,
the individual communicates a sense of reality through
symbols. The "reality" which the words describe is absent;
nevertheless, the words themselves create their own reality
for the reader/listener.

Wendell V. Harris, in "The Critics Who Made Us,"
formulates an equation which helps explain how Burke's
system of verbal transcendence works:

\[ \text{symbols} = \text{verbal parallels to recognized patterns}
\text{of experience} = \text{formulas} = \text{definitions} =
\text{interpretations of situations} = \text{means of}
\text{orienting or adjusting to a situation}. \]

The symbol names the pattern of experience, and
at the same time interprets it and helps us
orient ourselves so as to meet it successfully.
We can neither name nor define anything without
interpreting it, and our very interpretation
orients us in our response to it.

(458)

Relating this to the rhetorical triangle, which, for the
written text, implicitly contains an absent presence, the
individual necessarily interprets those symbols before him.
The meaning of the absent author thus becomes shaped in
part by the reader as he brings his own experience into the
process. The result is that the interpretation of the
author’s words becomes more real for the reader than the
actual experience about which the author writes. The
reader, through a transcendental movement, leaps from the
essence of that author’s experience to its recapitulated
being in his mind. A similar triangle operates in the
spoken word as the hearer likewise struggles to understand the speaker. As in Derrida’s différance, understanding comes only through deferral.

This mental process that links the speaker to the listener and the reader to the writer emphasizes the power of logos, a power that creates the bridge of collaboration between author and reader. Reminiscent of the erotic power of Paris, Burke describes this collaboration in seductive terms:

Once you grasp the trend of the form, it invites participation regardless of the subject matter. Formally, you will find yourself swinging along with the succession of antitheses, even though you may not agree with the proposition that is being presented in this form. Or it may even be an opponent’s proposition which you resent—yet for the duration of the statement itself you might ‘help him out’ to the extent of yielding to the formal development, surrendering to its symmetry as such. Of course, the more violent your original resistance to the proposition, the weaker will be your degree of ‘surrender’ by ‘collaborating’ with the form. But in cases where a decision is still to be reached, a yielding to the form prepares for assent to the matter identified with it. Thus, you are drawn to the form, not in your capacity as a partisan, but because of some ‘universal’ appeal in it.

(RM 58)

Whether in agreement or in disagreement with the printed words, the reader who willingly engages in the reading process becomes a dynamic player in the rhetorical process, "surrendering" to and "collaborating" with the text. Like Helen at the hands of Paris, he may initially want to resist the "proposition" in the text. But, also like
Helen, who is unable to withstand the allure of Paris, he is drawn into participation.

The reader engages, not in a violent rape, but in what Tilly Warnock describes as a rhetorical "dance" with the writer. Warnock argues:

"Clearly the dance that Burke is describing is no solo performance on the part of either the writer or the reader, and clearly the reader's resistance and the writer's enticements, and vice-versa are parts of the dance." ("RKB" 73)

That which holds the reader and writer together in rhythmic, rhetorical unison is the appeal of the written word. And that appeal, perhaps but not necessarily universal, is interpretively sifted through the experience of the reader.

So, then, how does the transcendental element invade this process? Burke argues that transcendence occurs through the symbolic nature of language, a process which renders its own sphere of "reality." Through metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony, the writer enables the reader to grasp meaning beyond the words in mere context. Writing in "Volume and Body in Burke's Criticism, or Stalled in the Right Place," Angus Fletcher explains:

"Language as figured speech, in short, implies immediate verbal transcendence. As soon as you have poetry, figured speech, you have a beyonding of plain indication. You point, and you point beyond. Thus, in this larger view, signs can be transcendences of other signs. Words for general classes can transcend words for particulars, and
of course, as in traditional dialectic, ideas can transcend things and even other ideas.
("VBBC" 167)

Poetry, of course, applies rather universally to discourse, since virtually all language contains figured speech. As a reader then enters into the text of an absent writer, "he experiences 'critical moments' when he transcends the division between himself as a reader and the text he is reading" (Warnock, "RKB" 72). The word, or logos, thus becomes the instrument (the organon) of transcendence. Although these "instruments are 'essentially' human, since they are products of human design" (GM 283), they ascend into the realm of the symbolic, thus transcending the realm of the empirical.

Burke employs a system of metaphorical hierarchy to comment on this process: "the analogy of naturalistic correlations becomes necessarily the reduction of some higher or more complex realm of being to the terms of a lower or less complex realm of being" ("FMT" 506). This reduction in the mind of the reader becomes a representation of the writer's thoughts. Much like Derrida, Burke recognizes the slippage that is inherent in language; it is slippage which causes the necessarily reductive version of that which it linguistically represents:

"Men seek for vocabularies that will be faithful reflections of reality. To this end, they must develop vocabularies that are"
selections of reality. And any selection of reality must, in certain circumstances, function as a deflection of reality. 

(Se 59)

Ultimately, then, all language offers a reduction of reality as it seeks to replicate that which is reality. I fully recognize that the term "reality" is an abstract term. It can refer to that which is divinely real, that which allows individual transcendence to a spiritual state of Otherness; but, it also suggests that which is humanly real, experienced sensorily or imaginatively, hence determined "real" by the individual. In either reference, however, real is that which is manifest as some something that discernibly affects the essence, the being, of the individual.

And Burke posits that a writer can capture the essence of that reality through a language of words, a confusing concept that Burke attempts to explain:

Thus, if we flatly contrast existence with essence, it follows by the sheer dialectics of the case that 'essences' do not 'exist.' Nor can existence as such be an essence. In Plato, the world of being (that is, essence) was more real than the world of our everyday experience (which was for Plato the world of appearance). But Santayana has synonymized appearances and essences to the extent that all appearances are essences, though there are many more essences than there are appearances.

While I was puzzling over Santayana's way of distinguishing essence from existence, a six-year-old solved the problem for me when he explained, 'There is an Easter Bunny, but he isn't real.' I saw the application immediately:
the Easter bunny has a being, or essence, but he does not exist.

(GM 219)

The same is true of the absent presence of the writer; he does not physically exist to guide his interlocutor to knowledge through a dialectic process. Nevertheless, his presence, his being or essence, is irrefutable. Empowered by, and through, the written word, the absent presence of the writer of a given text establishes a common ground of understanding with the reader. If the reader yields completely to that presence, he can hope for at least momentary, though perhaps highly reductive, unity with the writer. The experience, which is embedded in the words, no longer exists. But the reader can capture the essence of that experience through the words that are offered by the writer.

Logos thus continues its seduction, seeking that transcendent state of perfect union which Yeats describes in "Among School Children":

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

(VIII 7-8)

Through the metaphor of the dancer and the dance or through countless other figurative images, the writer, in his absent presence, guides his reader to transcend the flat, denotative meaning of words on the printed page. The two, writer and reader, consequently engage in meaningful mental discourse.
Because the reading process was in its infancy in the time of Plato and Aristotle, these two philosophers could not adequately address the complexities of the intellectual process. What they could, and did, address is the presence of spirit, which manifests itself through a dialogic encounter. As Hall writes in *Word and Spirit*,

> The Greeks sensed this presence of spirit in the place where it most normally appears, namely, in the dynamic and lively practice of speaking to one another in the course of their everyday lives. And this sense of the presence of spirit on the level of the speech-act was perhaps all the stronger by virtue of the fact that speech was so central to Greek life.

(WS 72)

The Greeks took what they sensed, processed what they believed to be true, and placed it in a verbal construct that provided meaning for themselves and their interlocutors. Perhaps not realizing that they were on the threshold of an intellectual revolution, one made possible through the written word, they sought to understand self, world, and Other through the best, and the most logical, means available to them. Little did they know that one of their own would outline a logical framework that would allow analysis, and subsequent understanding, of the operations of a rhetorical absent presence.

Aristotle, choosing to use the written word to his advantage, gives validity to the written text. Recognizing it as an additional linguistic tool, he fashions his text *On Rhetoric* so as to perpetuate the relationship between
logos, ethos, and pathos. In so doing, he creates a textual inner dialogue, which will allow the emergence of a secondary absent presence, that which operates between a lover and an absent beloved, both of whom are characters in a literary text. Narratives of conflict between a lover and an absent beloved continue to plot the individual's epistemological journey toward understanding of self, world, and Other.

The next chapter continues this analysis, focusing on the New Testament as the text that first significantly yields a character who speaks from a text. I will argue that the journey trope and the literary absent presence (Word as character) cohere in the Christian rendering of God manifest as flesh. In order to woo his people back into right relationship with him, God offers his son Jesus as the central being in his text: Jesus, the Word of God, is the word (text) that will unite Creator and created. For the purposes of my development, the New Testament readily exemplifies dual absent presences, rhetorical and literary, that operate through a literary work.
Any analysis of the Christian text, even one such as this which advocates a plenitude of hermeneutic possibilities, is potentially vexed by the intrusion of dogma. Although I will strive for objectivity, I realize the virtual impossibility of omitting dogma from an implicitly dogmatic text such as the Bible. Since most of my discussion focuses on the New Testament, the avowedly Christian text, many of my conclusions necessarily will be stated from the Christian perspective. In no way do I come to these conclusions so as to preclude divergent postures of belief; rather, as a willing, a responsible, and a responsive reader, I filter my interpretations through the Christian milieu from which the words proceed while simultaneously sifting them through exegesis that is shaped, at least in part, by our contemporary society.

Compression and panorama, an admittedly oxymoronic approach, will determine the development of this chapter. Within this compression, which focuses on selective passages from the lengthy Biblical text, is a panoramic landscape from which emerges the absent presence as literary character. Through a textual probing of this bellwether of Western literature, I will suggest that not
one (the writer), not two (the writer and reader), but multiple absent presences (writer, reader, and character or characters) merge to create meaning from a literary text. Because the events in the New Testament are traditionally viewed as a fulfillment, a continuation, of the Old, it is critically linked to the Old, hence the panorama. But it is the text of the New Testament which produces the absent presence as character who also figures into the making of meaning for the reader.

To situate the New Testament in its intellectual and spiritual milieu, I will also make periodical references to the Greek culture which preceded it. Ronald L. Hall's *Word and Spirit* will underpin this portion of my argument, which posits that Christianity, with the Word-as-Flesh, benefited from a world-view that was denied the Greeks. It is this pneumatic world-view, spirit as speech, which allows for Christ through his Holy Spirit, spirit and speech, to become a textual presence that discernibly influences the readers of God's Word.

My reasons for including the Bible, especially the New Testament, in this study are numerous.¹ Not the least of these is that the advent of Christianity significantly alters the formerly accepted views of time and history. Pre-Christian Greeks, most notably Plato, tended to view history as cyclical, moving rhythmically within a structured and an ordered cosmos. Plato's doctrine of
Forms seeks to explain the process. A highly simplistic synopsis of that esoteric doctrine is that at death all Forms return to their beginning; there, they are reunited with True Being where the imperfections of human existence fall away. The higher the Form, such as the philosopher, the more that Form will resemble True Being.

Hall explains some of the problems attenuating this Platonic world-view:

In a cosmos, even the paradigms of temporal succession are cyclical and thus closed, finite, self-contained, and essentially timeless. It was this picture of temporal succession that Plato was relying on when he said of time that it is 'the moving image of eternity.' In such a cosmic picture of time, novelty and contingency are denied their ontological rights. This denial is the consequence of picturing time as an eternally repeating cycle of nature.

(WS 19)

In such a view, the individual is little more than an impersonal object who is subject to an "impersonal principle of being, a logos" (WS 19). According to Plato's cosmic world-view, the individual has no hope for latitude in the existence beyond: he is forever, and repetitively, for good or for bad, locked into his earthly hierarchical stratum. The individual is simply a cog in the wheel of time.

As the written word became available to the masses, allowing the individual to read and to begin to process ideas independently, Plato's theory became more and more unacceptable. Gradually came the recognition that the
individual "cog," far from being impersonal, is a person, with a personality and an intellect for thinking, with a mind for pondering "Who am I?" The very asking of the question, it would seem, admits to "novelty and contingency" (Hall, WS 19). Because Plato's questioning implied difference and individuality, it placed in doubt the cosmic view of life. If man is capable of seeing the selfhood of his being as separate from that of others, if he is capable of questioning his beginning and pondering his conclusion, he needs a world-view different from that offered by the Plato and his contemporaries.

Aristotle, departing from Plato's Doctrine of Forms, espoused a different, a more progressive, concept of man in his world. Assuming a dramatistic position, Aristotle reasoned: if man is capable of thinking, he is capable of becoming. He may (and again I over-simplify a complex theory) be a cog in the wheel of time, but he can at least move toward being the best cog in it. Regardless of his earthly hierarchical status, each individual assumes the responsibility for reaching his fullest potential. The difficulty with this theory is that the standards are arbitrary: before the individual can move toward his best, he must first recognize what his "best" is—a potentially difficult quandary for the non-intellectual.

The Christian view is dramatically (and dramatistically) different from the ones offered by Plato
and Aristotle, an analysis that William Barclay makes in his introduction to *The Bible as History*. Christianity places time in a linear sequence. No longer cyclical, time is sequential; it moves along a story-line that has a beginning and an ending. As the Bible records this beginning and foreshadows its ending, it creates a narrative. And at the center of the narrative is the individual, possessed with a unique consciousness and an independent will that assure him of "novelty and contingency" (Hall, WS 19). These novel and contingent qualities reflect man's greatest potential, but they also cause his greatest downfall. They allow him to triumph, but they also lead him to failure.

Central to the Christian narrative, which begins with the creation of man and his subsequent expulsion from the immediate presence of his Creator, is humanity's attempt to overcome spiritual difference, difference which causes separation between Creator and created. The journey trope thus dominates the text of the Bible. In his notes on *The Anchor Bible*, E.A. Speiser states that the reason for the journey "reduced to basic terms, was a spiritual one" (xlv). Most significantly a spiritual quest, it is given physical dimensions in the Old Testament. The physical is a metaphor for the spiritual. When God directs Abraham to return the people of Israel to Canaan, he offers the corporeal experience (the physical journey back to the
homeland) as a manifestation of the incorporeal experience (the spiritual journey back to God) he hopes to effect in them. Because of "the record of that progressive quest, the Bible became and has remained a factor in cultural life and an influence in world literature" (Speiser lii). Especially in its narration of the physical struggles and the spiritual triumphs of a people relating to their Creator, the Bible is a necessary link in the idea of the absent presence. Significantly contributing to Western literary thought, the Bible reveals an absent presence which dominates the text, operating within and reaching out from a textual narrative.

Ong suggests perhaps an even more convincing reason for inclusion of the Bible in a study such as this: it is the oldest extant literary work that most clearly reflects society's movement from an oral/aural to a verbally scripted world. In his book The Presence of the Word, which plots a kind of history of "word," showing its changes in society as it moves from the Greek oral medium to the Hebraic printed medium, Ong suggests that the Bible creates a standard for the communication of ideas. Vital to that standard is that which enables any communication: the word. Ong argues for numerous functions of "word," as he sees them evidenced in the Bible.

After subdividing word as it appears in the Christian text, Ong then delineates seven particular Biblical
operations: word as divine power, word as communication between God and man, word as God's communication to the prophets, word as that which is heard in sermons, word as inspiration to writers of Biblical text, word as what was actually written by those writers, and "the Word Who is Jesus Christ" (PW 182-84). Certainly the term "word" as used in the Bible functions in each of these capacities. However, each of the seven has one of two common denominators: word as text or Word as character within that text. Logos, or word as text, was enunciated by Aristotle, as discussed in my previous chapter. But it is Word as character, the physical embodiment of text, that will be the focus for this chapter. Word as character cannot be isolated from the Biblical text because its being exists in and through the text; if one accepts the text, he also accepts the Word. This premise is especially evidenced in the New Testament.

Initially the Word as character refers to the physical Jesus, God's own Son, the Word Incarnate who dwelt among man. During his time on earth, the New Testament describes him as a physical presence, as one who was raised in the household of Joseph, a carpenter. In his chronological history of the Bible, Essentials of Bible History, Elmer W.K. Mould assesses the advent and life of Jesus:

We have now reached the central personality of the Bible, Jesus of Nazareth.
There are no contemporary records of the life and teachings of Jesus. He himself wrote nothing. Nor have any documents been found to throw light upon his life and teachings which date within the generation that witnessed his life and death.

(EBH 488)

A "central personality" without textual validation other than that which was recorded "approximately forty years" after his crucifixion (EBH 488), this character in the Christian narrative represented more than a textual presence. He was parousia, or real presence, what Augustine refers to as the "flesh being" that was "assumed by the Divinity," (Enchiridion X). And his purpose was to create dialogue between God and man; teleologically, then, Christ entered into the narrative of humanity in order to overcome difference or separation.

So that he could maintain his renewed dialogue with humanity after the death of his Son, God created an additional "character" who would continue to speak his words: the Holy Spirit. From a narrative point of view, Jesus and the Holy Spirit as characters in a text represent a major development in the operation of the word. Bidden by, and integrally linked, to the author (God the Father), they speak his words to his audience. The result is that the rhetorical triangle of logos (text), ethos (writer), and pathos (reader) produces an additional triangle (what I call a literary triangle) between text, writer, and character. The writer, or more precisely, the producer of
the text, empowers his central character to be spokesman for him—to bridge the gap between writer and reader. Fully empowered by creator of the text, the absent presence of the character then speaks from the text the words of the writer to his reader. Not only are reader and writer rhetorically united through the logos, but reader and character also become linked. As the reader responds to the words and actions of the characters within the text, he relates to a secondary, and literary, absent presence.

The Bible is not the first text to suggest these separate, but simultaneous operations, but it is the first to apply them successfully—and universally. Sappho’s poetic fragments and Homer’s epics, all of which are in the oral Greek tradition, unquestionably create characters who emanate from the rhetorical triangle that links speaker, listener, and spoken text. But these characters function primarily as representative, but textually unapproachable, figures within their mythological worlds. In his book Sacred Discontent, Herbert Schneidau further assesses the character of Sappho. He says that she is "capable of seeing herself as an individual—not in the fact that she loves, but in the emotional turmoil it produces" (SD 260). However, Schneidau suggests that Sappho’s "seeing" does not lead to self-examination, which would presumably, in turn (if the rhetorical triangle were fully operational), similarly provoke her listener.
The metaphor of "seeing," in Western thought, involves more than the visual act. As discussed in Chapter 2, it is the predominant trope for knowing or understanding. Hall adds to Ong's idea that "in a field of sight there is always a beyond or a beneath which is not seen" (IW 125). He says that "what is 'seen' in the truest sense is not what is seen with embodied eyes but with the introspective 'eyes of the mind'" (WS 25). Referring to perception as the visibly objectified, Hall suggests that that which is "beyond" or "beneath" can be approached only in the mind. After the seer grasps, lays hold to, that which is beyond the visual, he potentially gleans understanding as he "sees" through the words of the writer.

Richard Jenkyns takes this discussion a step farther, noting that for Sappho "there is nothing beyond the poem itself. Her poems state; they do not examine" (TCP 22). She does not "see." Because she does not see, she cannot offer insight to her reader. If the texts of this Greek poet do not examine, then any voice that the listener "overhears" is one confined within the text itself. Such a voice does not fully span the separation between speaker and listener, inciting the listener to self-examination. A voice speaking from the text, a voice that compels the reader to attention and then subsequently leads him to self-examination, comes initially and most significantly in the Hebrew writings of the Bible. Certainly Homer's
characters speak from their texts, but these larger-than-life heroes of Herculean proportions negate the possibility of a personal identification with those common mortals who listen to their tales of superhuman valor.

In *Total Presence*, Thomas Altizer recognizes that these epic heroes were some of the first to speak in a text, but their speech was highly constricted:

> While speech cannot be said to be primal or ultimate in the Greek religious and mythical traditions as such, it is so in the Homeric epics and in Greek tragedy, and the historical coming together of classical culture and the Bible in Christendom can give us a decisive clue to the unique identity and role of literature in the Western tradition.

(PP 1-2)

Although Homer and the Greek tragedians may have first given the world speech that was "primal and ultimate," these writers did not initiate speech of critical self-examination. As Hall notes, theirs is not speech "that impinges on our lives and demands to be reckoned with" (WS 72). It does not force the individual to internalize, and thus personalize, the words of the writer. Because they do not provide personal meaning, they do not "speak" to him in his world. The association between speaker, listener, and text is present, but the relationship is a tentative one.

The Bible is the text that first profoundly bridges the gap between speaker and listener. When Isaiah, for example, prophesies the mission of John the Baptist who will herald the arrival of the Christ, we witness a self-
alienation, an abandonment of self, which will become characteristic of Western man—and of Western literature. In *The Birth to Presence*, Jean-Luc Nancy discusses this abandonment as that which God does for his people so that his voice might be heard. Filtering his ideas through Hegel and Nietzsche and equating abandonment with a kind of transcendental movement, he writes:

To abandon is to remit, entrust, or turn over to such a sovereign power, and to remit, entrust, or turn over to its ban, that is, to its proclaiming, to its convening, and to its sentencing.

(*BP* 44)

The text of the Bible, in part, relates the lives of individuals who "abandon" themselves to God, and who, if only temporarily, empty themselves of self and entrust another, their Creator, to live and speak through them. For that transcendent moment in time, they and their Creator are one—in spiritual and intellectual communion.

Implicit in such an act of abandonment is love: patriarchs and apostles abandoned themselves to God so as to become spokesmen for him; God abandoned Jesus at the cross so that his love could redeem humanity; Jesus abandoned his followers and died a physical death to accomplish the same end; and a reader abandons himself to the text so that the words of another might create meaning for him. A death-in-life and life-in-death struggle typifies abandonment, a struggle not unlike that which
occurs in a reading process: when a writer puts living, spoken words to paper, he abandons or "kills" those words; then, when a reader takes those words and makes meaning from them, he resurrects or gives life to those dead words.

Although he does not refer specifically to the rhetorical exercise, Nancy's discussion of love applies to a similar abandonment that occurs in the reading experience:

What 'the love of God' means is that love alone abandons. What is not love can reject, desert, forget, dismiss, discharge, but love alone can abandon, and it is by the possibility of abandonment that one knows the possibility, inverted or lost, of love.

(BP 41)

The love herein described is caritas, a rejuvenating and empowering love akin to agape, God's love. Unlike eros or cupiditas, both temporal forms of love, it is atemporal, allowing for transcendence. It is a love that overcomes difference, that mends separation. This passage can be applied especially to the reader. If he does not enter into a text with a genuine love for knowledge, an earnest desire to understand, he can quickly "reject, desert, forget, dismiss, [or] discharge" the words of the writer.

But, as Augustine writes in The Trinity, a word birthed in a love for textual mutuality has the potential for dynamic consequences. Allowing for both negative and positive responses from a word "conceived in love," Augustine says,
the word is born when that which is thought pleases us, either for the purpose of committing sin or of acting rightly. Love, therefore, as a means, joins our word with the mind from which it is born; and as a third it binds itself with them in an incorporeal embrace, without any confusion. (Trinity IX.viii)

Love seems incongruous with "committing sin," but Augustine addresses this earlier in the same passage. There, he differentiates between "the word of the creature and the word of the Creator." One is changeable and subject to corruption; the Other is unchangeable and allows for redemption. And the receptor determines his response, negative or positive, to the words that he reads. Only when he abandons himself to the text, only when he entrusts his mind to the "other," only when he submits himself to the words of the author might he hope to achieve a transcendent instant of understanding that will inspire him for evil or for good.

The desire for good is that which motivates the patriarchs of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament as they abandon themselves to "speak" the voice of God, who is producer of the text. The prophet Isaiah affirms this premise. Speaking of the forerunner of the Christ, the Word-made-flesh, Isaiah says of John the Baptist: his will be the "voice of him that crieth in the wilderness" (Isaiah 40:3). His will be the textually recorded voice that speaks directly to his listener, calling for universal self-examination. For the seeker of
Christ, the ultimate purpose of self-examination is to instruct him to repent from his wayward ways. And that repentance is to come through the Word of God, the eternal logos that is incarnated in the world as God's own son.

Hall reminds us that the Christian logos is different from that perceived by the pagan Greek community. Neither mere word nor "the dynamic act of speaking" nor "the impersonal, rational, and static principle of cosmic order" (WS 31-32), the Christian logos finds its roots in the Hebraic dabhar, the spoken word as spirit. The Hebrew people placed the spoken word of Jehovah (Yahweh), which was audible, dynamic, and life-altering, at the center of their reality (WS 29). God himself was "a speech-act." He was the great "I am" who spoke

the world into existence. In this picture God not only creates the world with his word but also sustains its continuity with it. Here everything that exists, including the self, is pictured as owing its existence to, and hence absolutely dependent on, the creative and providential dabhar of God. Here the paradigm of human action is established: to act is to speak as God speaks; in the act of speaking (dabhar) spirit finds its decisive expression in man. This spirit is pneuma, spirit as 'the breath of speech.' Spirit as pneuma . . . must be sharply distinguished from spirit as psyche, spirit as the natural order of the cosmos. It is precisely spirit as pneuma that Christianity first posited. In the Christian world-picture a radically transcendent spirit becomes radically immanent in the world: the dabhar--and not the logos becomes flesh.

(WS 30)
Because of its pneumatic and transcendent quality, word as spirit is that ontological means through which humanity might come to understand self in the linear span of time. As a reader of, and a player in, the narrative of humanity, he can look to the words inscribed in the Biblical text to see where he stands in relation to his world (and to others in it) and to his Creator. As Hall suggests, it opens up an "awesome realm of possibility and contingency" (WS 31).

The Bible, specifically the New Testament as it exposes Christianity to the world, is the first and certainly the most significant written text that presents the Word, the Hebraic Logos (dabhar), as a character who dominates the story and who inspires both the writer in his composition and the reader in his perusal of that created text. This is, and once more I quote Hall, the word that provides a transhistorical ground to the historical. Again, this is not the ahistorical ground of the Greek logos, but the temporally unfolding intentional and subjective ground of dabhar; here the real is grounded in a speaker whose words bring the world forth and whose steadfast fidelity holds it together through time.

In this biblical picture, human beings, created in the image of God, are vested with the power of the speech-act and hence with the power to call the world forth in its full actuality and to sustain it as such. . . . That is, human beings are not called to create actuality from nothing, rather, they are called to actualize actuality.

(WS 127)

While the New Testament may have continued the Greek emphasis upon logos (which can mean word or speech, or the
meaning or structure of either), it meaningfully expands and, as Hall recognizes, "grounds" the role of voice. Voice is actualized in the person of Jesus Christ. Both in and prior to time, the Christian logos is spirit and voice, method and matter.

Altizer addresses this issue of spirit and voice in his discussion of the parabolic language of Jesus. Plotting speech along a historical time-line, he describes it as moving from that of limited participation between interlocutors (that espoused by Plato and his contemporaries) to that which is "primal" (that of Homer and the Greek tragedians) to that which is "actualized" (that spoken within the text by a character whose identity then reaches outward to the reader). Like Hall, Altizer uses the term "actualized." He, too, recognizes that speech assumes a different role with the advent of Christianity. To paraphrase and further expand Altizer's argument, we could say that speech thus assumes a new character. Specifically it becomes a character, one who is "actualized" within the text:

Nothing quite like this was previously present in either Greece or Israel, for only with the birth of Christianity does a speech appear and sound which is simultaneously praxis and voice. Christian anamnesis is not mere remembrance or recollection, it is rather a renewal or re-presentation of an identity which is originally act and voice at once.

(TP 5)
Underscoring a critical tenet of Christianity, Altizer succinctly explains the role of Jesus within the biblical text while also explaining the provocative role of the New Testament.

To state Altizer's premise in theological terms, Jesus as the eternal logos is both the message (praxis) and the messenger (voice). He is both the Word and the means whereby that word finds utterance. And the avenue for that utterance is the New Testament. Departing from Homeric epics and Greek tragedies which provide "a mere remembrance or recollection" of characters within an action, the Christian text espouses "a renewal or re-presentation of an identity," namely the identity of Jesus Christ, the incarnated Son of God. Successful textual communication is, in great part, determined by the voice that speaks from the text to the reader. If that voice succeeds, it functions in a unique way: it intrudes into the inner sanctum of the individual.

Richard Kroner argues that "Christianity interfered much more seriously with the inner life of a man than Greek religion had ever done" (SR 16). Perhaps nothing better exemplifies this interference than the life of St. Augustine. Although Augustine lived and wrote almost four centuries after the advent of Christianity, his autobiographical writings dramatically depict this spiritual interference. Because of the extensive and
highly descriptive account of his personal struggles, especially in his *Confessions*, we see the various stages of Augustine's response to the voice that reaches out to him from the biblical text. In his autobiography, Augustine plots his struggle with the voice that would have him become a Christian. Responding to that "actual actuality" (God Incarnate), he first rebels against the voice, living a life of debauchery and becoming a member of the Manichean sect. Then he ignores the voice, seeking life's answers through philosophy. Ultimately he can no longer disregard the "meddling" voice that projects from the biblical text; as a consequence, Augustine's life is permanently altered as he finally succumbs to the voice, yielding himself to the priesthood. His response to that dominant voice suggests that speech emanating from the Biblical text is quite different from its predecessors. It is a voice which not only allows but forcefully demands participation from its hearers (readers).

A beneficial adjunct to this dynamic activity is that the Christ, who is "spoken" through the text, works as a positive force in the individual. Allowing spiritual movement into that which is beyond the printed word, Hall tells us that Christian Speech provides us with resources for situating ourselves within a world and with the resources for stabilizing our existence within historical continuity. And it is able to provide this
stability within immanence without robbing us of our dynamic transcendence.

(WS 53)

This transcendence, effected through the words in the text, allows the individual to "see" the spirit, which is self, in relation to spirit, which is other, and to Spirit, which is Other. In "'Narrative' in Christian and Modern Reading," Hans W. Frei refers to this act as "the disclosing power" of the text ("NCMR" 159). It is dynamic, active, and capable of mediating. The written text, in a way precluded by the spoken word, allows the reader to internalize thought, to suspend it in his mind, to return to it time and again if necessary so as to apprehend its meaning.

These dynamic, concrete, and provocative operations within the rhetorical triangle of Bible/God/Christian depart significantly from those espoused by Greek rhetors of the classical age. Although it claims to be powerful, Christian mediation between author and reader does not presume to be the result of Eros, magic, sorcery, or the physical penetration of the word through the ear. The textual logos of Christianity does not assume materiality; it thus opposes the Gorgian theory of the materiality of both word and soul. It also negates the premise that the rhetorical exchange is a psychic or physical experience, one that Gorgias compares to Paris' rape of Helen (Encomium on Helen). Neither is it comparable to Plato's form of
logos which creates a hegemonic relationship between the more knowledgeable older speaker and his willing, but inexperienced interlocutor. Plato may presume to establish a rhetorical relationship that reciprocates between speaker and listener, but in actuality he creates a hierarchical exchange. The dominance may be subtle as the speaker guides his listener, but it nevertheless determines the structure of the discourse. Such dominance is non-existent in Christian rhetoric. Assuming a radically different rhetorical stance, Christianity eliminates the dominant aspect of the logos that is found in Greek dialogue. In its stead, it creates a rhetoric in which the logos produces full reciprocity between author and reader.

In his text Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality, Paul Tillich explains this fundamental concept of Christian logos, the basic concept that distinguishes it from its Greek counterpart:

Man is asked to listen, but he is left free to decline. He is not supposed to be overpowered by the word, as in sorcery, where the word is used as a physical cause, or in magic, where the word is used as a psychic cause, or in suggestive talk, where the word is used as an emotional cause. These uses of the word are possible, but they eliminate the essence of the word, its quality as the bearer of meaning.

(BR 32)

Success of the Christian logos is totally dependent upon the will and receptivity of the individual. Specifically, its success is radically contingent upon the individual.
The Biblical text appeals directly to the human intellect, to that part of the individual that seeks to understand himself in relation to his universe and his creator. Through a dialogic interchange with the author, the reader can hope to find meaning for his personal life. He may not fully conclude his ontological search, but he can at least ease some of his concerns about his being.

Though not provocative in the sexual sense, the Christian logos is highly provocative as God, producer of the text, seeks to inspire, to move his readers to an understanding of world, Creator, and self. Robert McMahon addresses this issue in *Augustine's Prayerful Ascent*. Analyzing the roles of the players involved in the rhetorical triangle of God/Logos/Christian, he writes:

> Interpreting Scripture involves seeking God's *voluntas*, the intention or desire that stands at the origin of his words, as of all communication. That search is to be conducted by means of the *voluntas* of Moses, the inspired scriptor of Genesis, and these related voluntates are approached through the *verba* of the sacred text. Interpreting Scripture, thus, clearly involves a return to origins: movement from material signs to the divine voluntas at the origin of the text. *(APA 131)*

*Voluntas*, in its rigidly defined state, is selfishness or self-loving. As McMahon applies it, however, it becomes the intention or desire of the writer to effect meaning through his text. In either its pejorative or non-pejorative sense, voluntas (for vain reasons of self-perpetuation or for more honorable reasons of perpetuation
of knowledge) is essential in the writing process. But, on the opposite side of the text, the reader also must exhibit voluntas, a desire to gain meaning. It is personal voluntas that incites the individual to probe the text, sacred or secular, so as to glean understanding.

This activity, exegesis of the Christian text and hermeneutics of the secular text, affirms the absent presences of writer, speaker, and reader. And those absent presences, as they operate in and through the New Testament, will be my focus for the remainder of this chapter. To understand and to ground their origins, we first must look to that which precedes the Christian text.

The Old Testament, a preamble to the New, lays the foundation for the spiritual and literary operation of the absent presence in the New Testament. As the Old Testament describes Jehovah or Yahweh, God who is pure spirit, it also foreshadows his spirit which would take on physicality. Conceived of a virgin, this spirit-made-flesh would be both presence and speech (pneuma):

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereeto I sent it.

(Isaiah 55:11)

This dual activity of God's Word (both presence and speech) required a means whereby it could accomplish its task of establishing direct communication and thus restoring relationship between God and man. In order for this
physical/audible sign of God's Word in his created world to become known to mankind, a medium necessarily had to be provided through which God's spirit could be made manifest. The New Testament becomes that medium. It is the textual "stage" through which God places himself, in the form of Jesus, as a literary character within the history of creation.

The Old Testament provides us with only limited examples of man interacting with God's text, his word. Even then the rhetorical triangle is skewed, picturing God as the omniscient/omnipotent/omnipresent Jehovah and man as his tentative interlocutor who seldom dares to pose a question to his Deity. And when he does dare, as with Job, he fears possible annihilation. Although conversations are recorded between God and Adam, God and Abraham, God and Moses, God and Job, and God and the prophets, the tenor of the rhetorical situations is that of the powerful speaker addressing the powerless listener. In the Old Testament, we see virtually no empowerment of the listener. Repeatedly, God's word passes through his spokesmen to his chosen people without permanently transforming hearts of rebelliousness into a people of faith. The Israelite nation follows God's text of obedience for a time; then they stray into flagrant disobedience, blatantly disregarding the words of Jehovah. Because of their stubborn, "stiff-necked" ways, their communication with God
is broken and one-sided (Exodus 32:9, 33:3, 34:9 and Deuteronomy 9:6, 13; 10:16). Obstinately refusing to follow God, they deprive themselves of the potential power that is theirs as Jehovah’s chosen people if they would only adhere to his word.

A foreshadowing of the Christian rhetorical empowerment of the listener begins to emerge in the Greek texts of Plato (especially Phaedrus and The Republic), becoming even more evident in Aristotle’s On Rhetoric. As these texts suggest the absent presence within the hegemonic relationship between speaker and listener, they span the gulf between the Old and New Testaments. Not only do they highlight man’s growing contemplation of himself as an integral player within his personal world, but (as my second chapter details) they also point to the emergence of an absent presence within the rhetorical text between author and reader.

The rhetorical and philosophical concerns of Greek society did not die with the advent of Christianity. Quite the contrary. Early Christian writers took the existing modes of thought and practice and adapted them to their tenets of belief. A case can certainly be made that early Christian writers infused existing Greek philosophy with their revealed insights, irrevocably wedding the two. As Richard Kroner argues in Speculation and Revelation in the
Age of Christian Philosophy, "Philosophy and religion are intimately related" because both focus on

the same ultimate issues: God, man, and the universe. Consequently, no matter how devious their approach, philosophy and religion in the past either have overlapped or have been opposed in respect to the same ultimate goals. Complete union is impossible, but like Hero and Leander, they also cannot resist embracing. (SR 13)

And the texts that arise from philosophy and religion also "embrace" or overlap, each influencing the other either negatively or positively. Judeo-Christian treatises often reflect or question ideas of Greek thought just as Greek writings frequently suggest or contradict some concerns of Judeo-Christian beliefs. A given text is not created in isolation; neither does it exist in isolation.

David Klemm, in "The Autonomous Text, the Hermeneutical Self, and Divine Rhetoric," comments on this quality of the written word:

The text is not reducible to the thoughts inscribed within, nor to the materiality of the individual object. Every text engrafts other texts and is in turn grafted onto other texts. ("AT" 6)

If an author has read previous texts and if his text is subsequently read, ideas between those texts conflate or contradict, confirm or deny. The same is true for the Bible. Most Christians generally accept that "all scripture is given by inspiration" (2 Timothy 3:16), although theological views do differ on exactly how this
inspiration came to man who lived and wrote in a decidedly Greek intellectual milieu.

The authorial task would necessarily be formidable. Not only would these writers have to situate God in history, they would also have to verify his being. Unlike Plato who could develop an abstract philosophy that defies proof, these writers (especially those of the New Testament) were commissioned to present God not as a shadow but as a reality—a living, breathing, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, spiritual essence who interacts with his creation. Platonic philosophy had, without universal success, attempted to answer the questions: "What is true?" and "What is real?" The closest this philosophical enterprise came to resolving the issues of truth and being was to outline a complex program of True Being through which only a privileged few, namely philosophers who devoted their lives to the pursuit of knowledge, might ever achieve the source of ultimate truth and discernible reality (Republic).

The difficulty with Plato's theory of True Being is that it depicts truth, being, and reality as highly nebulous concepts, existing only in the minds of philosophers. New Testament writers could not espouse such theoretical beliefs because they were writing for the understanding and the acceptance of all—not the privileged, educated few. They thus confronted the
enigmatic task of textually proving a spirituality, of proving beyond doubt (at least to those who would be receptive) the reality of God. To do this, their text necessarily had to affirm the existence of God through the death of Jesus, the power of the Spirit as it supplants the powerlessness of the Christian. Such is the mystery and paradox of Western literature that is "structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities: good vs. evil, being vs. nothingness, presence vs. absence, truth vs. error" (Johnson vii) and illusion vs. reality. New Testament writers necessarily had to address the question of illusion or reality if they were to convince their readers of the existence of their God. Therein lay their monumental task. Like Plato before them, the New Testament writers would have to confront the question: "What is real?" But unlike him, they would have to validate their answer. In doing so, they necessarily would, as Ong writes in The Presence of the Word, "encounter a paradox" (171). According to Ong, this paradox results from the binary operation of the objective and subjective senses.

Aristotle's writings suggest that he was aware of these binary operations: a student of scientific and empirical knowledge, he heralds happiness, an arbitrarily subjective emotion, as the ultimate goal of human action (Rhetoric I.5). Aristotle may have sought to rationalize the paradox between the objective and the subjective, the
physical and the spiritual, even though his extant texts do not fully substantiate such an assumption. He, like Plato, focused his attention on language in the field of philosophy—on rhetoric, on that "faculty of observing the possibly persuasive concerning anything at all" (Gellrich 243). As a result, his corpus also lacks a verbal program that offers proof to the questioning individual that he can hope to find a practical knowledge of self in his relation to world and Other.

Proof, as Aristotle's empirical training would have taught him, generally arises from objective observation, but "spiritual proof" defies objective observation, thus making the term itself an oxymoron. Because of the highly subjective nature of anything that is spiritual, anything that is beyond tactile determination, the New Testament writers sought to accomplish that which Plato and Aristotle could not: to overcome the paradox between the objective and the subjective. In affirming the subjective through the objective, they set out to prove the existence of a spiritual God through the physical life, death, and resurrection of his Son. Scripture in the King James text provides neither a definition nor a discussion of "real." Cruden's Complete Concordance does not even list the word "real" as occurring in the King James version of the Bible.

The New International Version, which is offered as a closer translation of the original Hebrew, Aramaic and
Greek texts, does include "real," most notably in words that Jesus uses to describe himself. The original Greek word alethes, which means "real, true, truth, actual," can be found in two verses in the gospel of John that relate to transubstantiation, the physical assuming the spiritual and vice versa:

Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of heaven is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.  
(NIV John 6:32-33)

and

For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink.  
(NIV John 6:55)

Writers of New Testament scripture view the reality of God as a given: the words of Jesus are life-sustaining, the "true bread from heaven," and his blood is real blood that coursed through the veins of the one who spoke to them.

In pondering this issue and seeking to allay all doubt concerning the Godhead, Augustine determines:

But God is without doubt a substance, or perhaps essence would be a better term, which the Greeks call ousia. For just as wisdom is so called from being wise, and knowledge is so called from knowing, so essence is so called from being [esse].  
(Trinity V.ii)

Through the process of deductive reasoning, Augustine seeks to rationalize the existence of God: God is because humanity observes and personally validates the effects of
his being. Unlike the passage quoted in Chapter 2 where Burke analogizes being and essence through the Easter Bunny, Augustine grounds God, giving his being verifiable substance, ousia. That substance manifests itself through the lives of those who respond to his Word, allowing it to make and shape their reality. For writers of the New Testament, for Augustine three centuries later, and for individuals today, reality is that which they witness or experience; it is that which personally impacts their lives. Reality is thus personal and subjective, but it can be grounded objectively.

In *The Presence of the Word*, Ong outlines a method for determining those grounds; he explains how an individual might know that which is "real." While it parallels the one used by writers of the New Testament, Ong’s method also echoes Augustine’s discussion of ousia, a verifiable essence:

> When I say real, something existing outside my own consciousness of it, something out there and in this sense objective, I do not actually mean existing with no relationship to me. Because my concept of reality is tied up with the sense of touch, it is also tied up with my sense of my own being. ‘Real’ means, in this way, not just something out there but something that I am involved in and that is involved in me (or, by extension, something that I could be involved in or that could be involved in me). The objective reality of something is in this way measured by one’s own subjective awareness (as caught in the sense of touch), not merely by something out there but rather by something out there interacting with something in here.

*(PW 171)*
If we define real, then, as that which can be proved both objectively (impersonally existing outside the individual consciousness) and subjectively (personally affecting the individual consciousness), the New Testament writers proceeded to prove the reality of God both objectively and subjectively. The four gospels record the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, objectively placing him in a historical context. The remainder of the New Testament successively records the residual effects resulting from that life, death, and resurrection. Although these residual effects are highly subjective, they are recorded as unmistakably life-altering events for those who encountered the Living Word.

We cannot overlook the fact that the New Testament writers who recorded these events lived in a particular part of the world during a particular time with particular social mores, particular philosophical and spiritual questions, and particular rhetorical styles. Although early Christians may have engaged in a refutation rather than a corroboration of Greek beliefs, an inescapable infusion of philosophical Greek overtones finds its way into Scripture. This recognizable infusion does not necessarily dilute the accepted tenets of Christianity, but it does affirm that Scripture is the physical product of a particular time in history, a time that witnessed the movement from esoteric philosophy to applied religion, the
movement from an oral to a textually scripted culture. Inherent in that move was the potential for the concrete, physical, and audible logos (dabhar) to supplant the abstract, universal logos.

Kroner recognizes an obvious distinction between the abstract and the concrete, between "ancient speculation and Christian revelation" (SR 15), but he also argues that "undoubtedly there is a striking kinship evident in the speculative idealism of Plato and the revealed faith of Christianity" (SR 24). He even describes Plato's republic as religious in character. "Such a community is, according to our language, no longer a state; it is what we call a church" (SR 26). Because Plato's ideal state is "a picture of the 'best life' that man could and should love," Kroner determines that the philosopher's community, though devoid of faith and revelation, has an "unmistakably religious character" (SR 25).

Kroner concludes that the objectives of church and ideal state are similar: the pursuit of wisdom, truth, highest good, and happiness. What distinguishes the two is that one functions through faith and revelation and the other through intellect and speculation. Even if Kroner does not succeed in convincing us that Plato's ideal state is a church, part of his argument is valid: at least one aspect of Plato's idealism is worked out in Christian thought. Specifically, Christianity proposed the solution
to Plato's conundrum of man, his creator, and the role of each in the universe. Christianity moved man from Plato's confusing, enigmatic world of shadow to Jehovah's faith-centered, revelatory world of concreteness, a concreteness-with-God-in-it. By incarnating himself as the Word in the form of physical man, God enabled man to validate not only his own existence but the existence of a Prime Mover, the instigator and preserver of creation.

The action culminating in God's incarnation was necessarily complex and would involve all three persons of the Trinity: God the Father, the omnipresent spirituality; God the Son, his omniscient physical presence in the form of man; and God the Spirit, his omnipresent absent presence who is presumed available to all of mankind. This same-but-different quality of God confuses many who seek to understand the Trinity. Augustine is numbered among those in this struggle. Attempting to explain it in terms of himself, he says:

For I am, and I know, and I will. I am a knowing and a willing being; I know that I am and that I will; and I will to be and to know. In these three functions, therefore, let him who can see how integral a life is; for there is one life, one mind, one essence. Finally, the distinction does not separate the things, and yet it is a distinction.

(Confessions XIII.xi)

Through his training in philosophical analysis, Augustine could, at least occasionally in moments of divine
inspiration, come to terms with those seemingly inexplicable, faith-demanding aspects of Christianity.

Many fundamental purveyors of Christian doctrine after the time of Augustine, however, came to doubt the usefulness of Greek philosophy; they even came to fear the consequences of the same philosophical musings that had aided Aristotle in his understanding of Scripture. Some "Christian philosophers disdained Greek speculation altogether. This speculation finally acknowledged that it could not establish any sure knowledge out of itself" (Kroner, SR 103). Doing a tremendous injustice to theological hermeneutics, those vehement critics of philosophical speculation failed to recognize that "the New Testament was not only written in a Hellenistic atmosphere, but [that it] was definitely influenced by Greek ideas and concepts" (Kroner, SR 20). We need to look no farther than to the most prolific writer of the New Testament to find the greatest evidence for this fact. Saul, whose Christian name was Paul, the writer of thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, typifies the amalgamation of the cultures of his time. This amalgamation necessarily influenced Paul's reception of God's words to him while subsequently determining his presentation of God's words to his readers.

A Roman citizen by virtue of his birthplace, Saul, a Hebrew, spent his early years in the Greek city of Tarsus,
which "was the home of a philosophical school, a university town, where the intellectual atmosphere was colored by Greek thought" (Zondervan 828). Although there are no records showing that Paul, who was a tent-maker by profession, received a formal education while in Tarsus, we can assume that he was at least exposed to the concept of higher education. We do know, however, that he studied Hebrew "at the feet of Gamaliel," the most prominent Pharisee of first-century Judaism (Acts 22:3).

The Interpreter's Bible further describes Gamaliel as a personification of the elder statesman. His counsel is one of wise restraint. Do nothing for the time being. Wait. See what happens. If the [Christian] movement is bad, God will destroy it. If it is good, no one will be able to destroy it. He is a perfect instance of the moderating influence of the judicial mind.

Gamaliel and his kind might be called well-balanced people. They see both sides of a situation. They are able to stand apart from it and look at it with dispassion.

According to this description, Gamaliel was a practitioner of the dissoi logoi, a common Greek exercise in which the rhetor sought to understand and then argue both sides of an issue. As a Jewish Pharisee, Gamaliel may not have argued the case for Christianity, but his wait-and-see attitude suggests that he inculcated the practice of the dissoi logoi among his students, not the least of whom was Saul. If indeed Saul was instructed in this skill, we might view his Damascus Road experience as a logical movement into the
more convincing argument. Rather than a "sudden" revelation, his conversion experience might have been the rational culmination of a long period of philosophical and spiritual debate between Christianity and Judaism.

In Saul's day, Gamaliel and his Pharisaical sect performed similarly to the Greek philosophers of Socrates' day. They lived their lives in search for the truth concerning God, man, and world. Instead of debating in the Forum or the Acropolis, though, they conversed in the Temple (Z 298, 627-31). If Saul, the Greek, studied in this philosophical milieu, then we must conclude that Paul, the Christian, incorporates a similar mode of thinking into his New Testament epistles. But Paul radically departs from pure philosophy, overlaying its speculation with what he describes as revealed faith, a faith that he argues was indisputably and personally revealed to him on the Damascus road (Acts 9). As Paul records his experience, which is his personal validation of God-in-the-world, he employs the rhetorical techniques of his Greek-centered society.

In his brief but informative text *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, Burton L. Mack convincingly places all of the writings of Paul, and of the entire New Testament, in the historical context of the classical Greco-Roman world. Mack's thesis is that the Christian text follows many of the rhetorical practices that were developed in the philosophical era of the Hellenistic period. As he focuses
on specific passages from the New Testament, analyzing their content and structure according to Greek rhetorical paradigms, Mack shows how all of the New Testament writers were unabashed practitioners of persuasion.

Although these Christian writers may have blurred the distinguishing parameters of judicial, deliberative, or epideictic speeches as outlined by Aristotle, Mack observes that they nevertheless retain the vestiges of Greek rhetoric:

Early Christian rhetoric was a distinctively mixed bag in which every form of rhetorical issue and strategy was frequently brought to bear simultaneously in an essentially extravagant persuasion. Thus the occurrence of traditional patterns of argumentation may not always be a firm basis upon which to judge the intention of a speech. . . . In general, early Christian rhetoric was deliberative in the sense that every aspect of the new persuasion (including the imagination of founder figures and founding events, beliefs, behavior, and the adjudications of social issues) had to be approached as a matter of policy that would determine the future of (membership in) the community.

(RNT 35)

Like Plato, the Judeo-Christian world disdained sophistic eloquence, condemning the "eloquent orator" (Isaiah 3:3) and re-educating the "eloquent man" Apollos "in the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:24). The "way of the Lord," what Mack refers to as Christian "policy," is presented clearly and logically (albeit sometimes parabolically) in order to appeal to the masses of interested listeners, to those willing interlocutors who would be receptive to the Word.
The clear and logical presentation certainly harks back to Plato and Aristotle, but Christian policy radically broadens the scope of its rhetorical audience, claiming to speak to every man, to each individually, in his specific circumstance or situation. Additionally, it assumes the character of an applied philosophy, one that addresses man in his personal world and shows him in relation to his creator. Christian philosophy thus positions itself as the answer to Plato's questions concerning man, creator, and universe. It would seem, then, that those critics who disavow the link between philosophy and religion ignore New Testament textual evidences that cannot otherwise be explained, and they also overlook a substantive link that can be found in the last book of the Old Testament, the book that bridges the gap between Judaism and Christianity.

Malachi (5th century B.C.), the author of the book which bears his name, was a contemporary of Socrates, although it cannot be established that the two actually met. Nevertheless, Malachi's writing suggests that he was well-acquainted with the style of his Greek counterpart. His book is presented in the Socratic method, a dialectic between the speaker, God, and his interlocutor, Malachi, who represents the nation of Israel. The book seeks to establish a dialogue, a dialogue of faith and commitment between God and his disillusioned and repetitively "stiff-necked" and errant people. Of those who had recently
returned from Babylonian captivity, only the faithful remnant, the few who "feared the Lord spoke often to one another" of God's call to commitment (Malachi 3:16). But even these faithful few were not yet ready to hear the Word because the kairos, the right time, had not yet come. They were not yet prepared to meet God in their world and establish a personal relationship with him.

From Malachi's writing in the Old Testament to the time of Matthew's writing in the New Testament, roughly 435 years lapsed during which God was, as far as Scripture indicates, silent. Writers of The Bible and History refer to these years as the "intertestamental period" (155). Ironically, it was the period during which man first became notably vocal in his search for understanding of himself, his creator, and his world—the ontological search for ultimate meaning and reality. Greek learning reached its pinnacle during this time, expanding its influence beyond Greece to the rest of the civilized world, and especially to Rome. Historians and theologians alike recognize that "the full impact of Hellenism [was] felt among the Jews" during this "intertestamental period" (BH 165). And it was in the Roman province of Palestine (or Judah, in the Old Testament) that God chose to break his silence and propel his Word into the midst of humanity.

The idea of the divine Logos breaking the silence of God is very profound. It means that the divine abyss in itself is without word, form,
object, and voice. It is the infinite silence of the eternal. But out of this divine silence, the Logos breaks forth and opens up what is hidden in this silence. He reveals the divine ground. (Tillich, HCT 22)

According to Tillich's analysis, this "divine ground" is that which also grounds humanity; it is that which answers the ontological ruminations of mankind. The Greek concept of the universal "logos" could not adequately encompass the paradoxical ramifications of the eternal Logos. The term, therefore, underwent a necessary transformation since "Logos is a universal principle, whereas Jesus is a concrete reality. His is a concrete personal life described by this term. This is expressed in the great paradox of Christianity: the Logos became flesh" (HCT 15). The abstract logos thus manifest itself through the concrete Jesus Christ. This complicated intrusion of God into his world set into motion the essential mediation that had been lacking between man and his creator. Through his Mediator, the Christ who is his Word, God invites man to engage in a dialogic exchange, an exchange that will necessarily demand something from the listener/reader.

According to Augustine in his Enchiridion, that demand is belief in the "statement that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,' so that we should then believe in 'the only Son of God the Father Almighty, born of the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin.'" As Augustine continues his handbook to the Christian, he argues that such a demand is
not too difficult if man realizes that when the "Word was made flesh, the flesh being [was] assumed by the Divinity, not [that] the Divinity being [was] changed into flesh" (Enchiridion X). In a unique way God imparted his Spirit into human form, thus creating physical, spiritual, and verbal mediation between himself and man. In its proclamation of an interceding logos which "became flesh," Christian theology parts company with Greek philosophy. The Logos is no longer a matter of speculation; it is a matter of revelation. As a result of this period of kairos, Greek philosophy and its ancient world begin a downward spiral which will lead to their demise.

The revealed Christ, the Incarnate Word, does not specifically operate as a character in the Old Testament, although subtle suggestions are made of His existence (along with that of the Holy Spirit) as early as Genesis 1:26: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." The pronoun "our" suggests that the Trinity existed before recorded time and that all three (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) were present during the creation of world and man: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). Gerard Loughlin likewise argues, "Precisely as the figure who meets us in the New Testament, Jesus the Christ is already prefigured in the Old" ("MP" 100).
In his *Confessions*, Augustine ponders this complex issue, this "enigma" of the Trinity. He comes to exclaim in revelatory insight:

> See now, how the Trinity appears to me in an enigma. And thou art the Trinity, O my God, since thou, O Father—in the beginning of our wisdom, that is, in thy wisdom born of thee, equal and coeternal with thee, that is, thy Son—created the heaven and the earth.

(XIII.v)

Augustine, the philosopher/teacher/theologian admits that the concept of a Triune God is confusing, but he argues that understanding is made possible through the wisdom that God gives to man if he willingly enters into a rhetorical exchange with his creator. The implication is that knowledge begets greater knowledge as man submerges himself in dialogue with God. Knowledge of God, universe, and self increases through a kind of hermeneutical spiral as man submits his intellect to the wisdom of God.

Like the poet in Yeats' "The Tower," man ascends to ever-enlightening levels of understanding; but unlike the poet who finds "decay" and "dull decrepitude" or "worse evil" at the top, the Christian finds hope for eternity. As he continues to engage God's text, which is the New Testament, man will learn that the Son, the one who becomes the Word in the New Testament, is further described as the head of creation, the one who "made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:2):
For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers—all things were created by him and for him.

(Colossians 1:16)

As John continues his account of creation in the first book of his gospel, he likewise credits Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, as the sculptor of the universe and the life therein: "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made" (1:3). Jesus Christ, the Word, the eternal Logos, then assumes the unique role of both Creator and created as we view him as the one who not only made the worlds but who then becomes an integral player, if you will, within the story of his own creation, specifically within the New Testament story of his personal relationship with mankind.

Scripture then becomes "a moment in God's own reading of his own life. It is because the Bible is in this sense God's own reading of himself and his action, God's reading of his own story, his dealings with the world" (Loughlin 104). God's Word is thus two-fold: it is a rhetorical text that unites God (author) to his reader (Christian), and it is also God's Son, a character within that text. The rhetorical triangle (author, reader, text) thus branches out into another triangle, the literary triangle comprised of author, text, and character. As a character who has enabled the writer to present his message (Jesus
willingly died on the cross so that God's story could be told), the eternal Word likewise empowers the text, whose consequent purpose is to empower the willing interlocutor, the Christian who embraces the Word.

This embracing the Word is a significant departure from the stance in the Old Testament which repeatedly warns that man could not approach God; he could not look upon the face of God. "And he said, Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me and live" (Exodus 33:20). If man does encounter God in the Old Testament, God's presence is camouflaged. When God gives the ten commandments on Mt. Sinai, Moses meets him in a cloud which shields the presence of Jehovah: "Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee" (Exodus 19:9). Later when the Israelites wander through the wilderness, God's presence is as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Nehemiah 9:19).

With the advent of Christianity, man not only can look upon the absent, but very real presence of God, but he can also converse with him: the Word speaking the words of God directly to man.

The New Testament goes even farther than the Old in what it makes of the word. It presents the word of God as even more the center of its teaching, announcing that the Word was made flesh and dwelt, a Person, among us. As is the case in no other religion, the Word is here the proper name of a person, the Son of God, himself God. (Ong, PW 13)
Christ as teacher of God's Word, like Plato and Cicero, lived in a predominantly oral culture, and the New Testament as a written text grew out of his oral performance. Because of this unlikely orator, who wore the practical cloak and girdle of a carpenter rather than the luxurious mantle of a philosopher, God's 435-year silence was broken. Speaking simply but convincingly, he established a new order of communication between God and man; in so doing, he also created an additional element, the absent presence of himself, to effect communication between writer and reader.

God supplanted his silence of four centuries with his absent presence, first in the form of Jesus, the Christ, and later in the form of the Holy Spirit. Absent presence is not the same as full presence (parousia). For God to be fully present would be for him to negate his own existence as the great "I Am" which was before, and now, and evermore (Revelations 1:18). Altizer explains why God's presence on earth is not parousia. He argues that God cannot be totally present, and cannot be finally present, for to be finally and totally present would be to cease to be before and above. Moreover, it is the transcendent identity of God which realizes itself in consciousness as the God who is beyond, who is wholly other, and wholly other and beyond every possible form of identity or consciousness.

(TP 52)

Man's finitude prevents him from identifying with God "who is wholly other." Another means had to be implemented
through which man might penetrate the infinitude of God. That means was the Christ, God-in-the-world. Ong analyzes this juncture in history, a juncture establishing innovative, and eminently personal, textual communication:

God entered into human history in a special fashion at the precise time when psychological structures assured that his entrance would have greatest opportunity to endure and flower. To assure maximum presence through history, the Word came in the ripeness of time, when a sense of the oral was still dominant and when at the same time the alphabet could give divine revelation among men a new kind of endurance and stability. (PW 190-91)

God thus burst into the world in the form of a babe, Jesus, who would grow into a man, the Christ, the incarnated Son of God. While on earth, Christ sought to establish "personal presence" with all of mankind (Ong, PW 113). Because full presence (parousia) is predicated upon sound, upon the speech-act, personal interaction was made possible. As Ong comments, "the word has immediate religious significance" (PW 113), but it also has far-reaching societal significance, allowing person-to-Other spiritual transcendence between Creator/created and person-to-person intellectual transcendence between created/created.

A.I. McFayden addresses this idea in "The Call to Discipleship." Inherent in the Christian concept, "disciple" is a to/for mandate: the individual is a disciple to Christ and a disciple for others. That is, he
subscribes to the words of the Master and then shares those words to willing listeners. This vertical and horizontal matrix of communication was made possible through the advent of Christianity, and it is operational when anyone reads the text of another then interprets that reading for others. McFayden refers to this as "the meeting point," and it was instigated by the Christ. Because Christ represents "the meeting point between God and humanity," he became

the person in whom God's Word and obedient human response are conjoined. In this he is an individual but at once more than an individual, the mediating point between all humankind and God. As such he is turned towards all humankind becoming not only the mediation of our relation to God but of our relations to one another. ("CD" 477)

The Word of God, like many texts, is a tool of ontological mediation—between writer/reader, between reader/other, and between reader/Other. Hall reminds us that mediation, all mediation, results from the pneumatic, or Christian, worldview. Unlike the psychic world-view (spirit in a closed cosmic structure) envisioned by the Greeks, the pneumatic world-view recognizes spirit as the "breath of speech" (WS 31). Neither static, closed, nor rigidly silent, this pneumatic view empowers the individual to move along, to mediate within, and to assume at least limited control over his life.
According to Hall, this "positing of the pneumatic world-picture then provided the necessary conceptual context for spirit, in its dynamic and temporal transcendence, to appear in the world in its full existential actuality and power" (WS 30). In this "new" pneumatic context, the advent of the Word (both text and person) provided humanity with an actualized method for "presenting themselves to one another in their words and deeds" (WS 73).

The Greeks, Hall continues, could not accomplish this feat of Christianity because they lacked "a pneumatically qualified world-picture" and thus were not able to acknowledge or embrace this incipient presence of spirit. Lacking such a picture, temporality and contingency were terrifying; indeed it is no wonder that the Greeks sought to flee into eternity, necessity, fate, stasis, and silent contemplation. (WS 73)

Failing to recognize spirit as a temporality, failing to place it in a historical context, failing to see it as an individual's contingency, the Greeks could not comprehend their own reality. Not necessarily a fault with their intellect, they, we might conclude, were simply born too early. Their era predated the interstitial elements that would collide and permanently impact humanity. As the historical (birth of Jesus), the linguistic (printed medium), and the spiritual (the embraced concept of the Christ) converged in time, within its linear construct,
humanity was given a dynamic, spiritual, and transcendent part to play. Without pushing the comparison too far, the Word of God as text became the individual's script; it became his prescriptive handbook for relationships. Though far removed from the rhetorical handbooks of Greek culture, it is in some ways analogous because it, too, is a handbook—a spiritual handbook.

Enter another character in the biblical text: the Holy Spirit who becomes the viable and powerfully absent presence of God the Father, the presence that transcends the limitations of time and space, reaching across textual boundaries as he speaks not only to men of first-century Palestine but also to men of the current age. Mould describes the advent of the Holy Spirit as the most "mystical religious experience connected with the origin of Christianity" (EBH 529). Certainly it was a mystical experience, but I suggest that transcendence, rather than mysticism, better describes the rhetorical relationship that the Holy Spirit effects between Christian and Christ, between believing reader and text.

Although I have argued that the Holy Spirit, like the Christ, is prefigured in the Old Testament, it is only with the death of Christ that the perpetual and pervasive essence of the Trinity is released into the world to confront mankind personally and individually. Conversely, it is only by the agency of the Holy Spirit that one can
call God by name. God-to-man through the Holy Spirit and man-to-God through the Holy Spirit is the rhetorical construct that firmly establishes the pneumatic world-picture in Western thought.

John writes in his gospel that the text of God in his world follows a particular sequence: God as Jehovah in the Old Testament, then God as Christ in the New Testament, who subsequently releases God as Holy Spirit who is confined by neither time nor space (John 7:39). When the redemptive mission of the physical presence of God is instituted with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, God does not end his communication with man. Rather, he continues the personal communication initiated by Christ, further developing his text through the Holy Spirit. After the ascension of Christ, God reads himself as a discernible, albeit spiritual presence, who continues to move and to speak in his world. "For though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit" (Colossians 2:5). Although these are the words of Paul to the church in Colossi, they typify the operation of the absent presence of God. His voice may no longer be as audible as it was through the spoken words of Jesus, but Scripture asserts that it is just as powerful—perhaps even more so because of the omnipresent quality of the Holy Spirit.

Addressing this issue of the pervasive power of the Spirit who would come after him, Jesus said, "He that
believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and
greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my
Father" (John 14:12). The "greater works" would be made
possible through the number of individuals who could hear
and respond to the absent present of God through the Word
and the Spirit. No longer would the message be limited to
the voice of one individual, Jesus Christ, who enlisted a
few followers to share his message. In a death-defying act
of total abandonment, the physical Christ committed his
final, and most convincing, deed of love. He sacrificed
his life so that humanity could embrace a radically
different world-view, so that they would no longer be
"denied their ontological rights" of "novelty and
contingency" (Hall 19). Still, and always, fully human,
they, too, would be fully spirit—capable of transcendence,
a transcendence which allows ideas to prompt, even to
change, the spirit that is self.

But without a recorded text and without a pervading
spiritual presence to reach the willing receptors, the
redemptive message of God was not fully operational. That
was to happen with the loosing of the Holy Spirit and its
subsequent operation through the printed text. With the
New Testament dispensation of God's Spirit, Jehovah
fulfills the Old Testament promise of the "new covenant"
that he henceforth will "write in their hearts" (Jeremiah
31:31, 33). This covenant involves listener, text, and
speaker (now the Holy Spirit) who empowers the recipient of his Word.

As it appealed to first-century individuals to embrace this covenant, Christianity created an irrevocable break with Platonic philosophy. Essentially it reversed Plato's concept of being, which argues that reality is not experienced through the senses, but that it exists through the immaterial reality of another realm. In his scheme of being Plato describes the soul as the tri-partite life-force of mortal man. Although Plato views the soul as immortal, as once having had access to True Being, he suggests that the possibility for reunion, for regaining immortality, is ambiguous. Certainly the common throng cannot aspire to reunite with True Being, but perhaps those philosophers who spend their lives in search of the truth have at least a vague hope for restoring that broken relationship which was caused by their mortal existence. Hope for mortals becoming immortal is bleak at best within Plato's realm of True Being.

Conversely, the possibility of immortality is the nexus of Christian thought, primarily because the Christian concept of soul is radically different from that which is espoused by pagan philosophers who preceded Christianity. For the Christian, the soul is that which makes the mortal immortal. Augustine describes it as the "inner man," that
space where "I turned my thoughts into myself" and "sought my God" (Confessions X. vi). Tillich further explains:

The soul is the inner realm, in contrast to Greek philosophy in which it is the power of life. The discovery of soul in this sense is one of the most important consequences of Christianity. In includes the world as the sum of all appearances. In contrast to the Greeks, where the soul is a part of all things, the world now becomes an object. The world is an appearance for the soul, which is the only real thing.

(HCT 113)

In Christianity, then, the soul, the part of man that communicates with God through his Word, is the only "real" part of existence, the only part that exists beyond mortal time. But even more significant in Christian belief, that immortality is possible for everyone. Through communication with its creator, the Christian soul becomes that which allows the biblical rhetorical and literary triangles to engage completely. The soul is that part of man which enters into dialogue with the Word, through the Spirit.

This is not a mystical, purely emotional interchange, although the activity may temporarily assume characteristics of mysticism or emotionalism. Rather, it is a transcendent encounter in which the finitude of man meets the infinitude of God. Such an encounter discernibly affects the individual. It is the "something out there" of God which personally and discernibly interacts with the "something in here" of the individual (Ong, PW 171).
Paul’s life-changing encounter on the Damascus Road explains such an experience. A Jewish zealot who was en route to Damascus to persecute Christians, Saul was personally confronted by God’s Spirit. As concrete, objective evidence of the spiritual, Saul saw "a light from heaven" and heard the voice of Jesus, a voice that so interfered with his personal being that his life was forever altered. Saul, who aimed to destroy Christianity, became Paul, who sought to perpetuate Christianity. Ultimately, this permanent life-change was the objective "proof" that appealed to Paul’s listeners, both Jew and Greek.

The movement from non-believer to believer, however, is not always so clearly defined. Early Christian theologians struggled to understand what happens in the transition. Tillich paraphrases the words of priest-philosopher Augustine who labored to satisfy those who questioned this spiritual process: "After going into your soul, transcend yourself. This means that in your soul there is something which transcends your soul, something immutable, namely, the divine ground" (HCT 113). By willingly engaging in communication with the eternal Logos, by transcending himself, man has the potential for dispelling the Greek notion of aporia, that state of being which is "without a way" (Tillich, BR 6). Christianity thus appeals to the intellect, to the will of the
individual who can choose either to accept or to reject the triangular relationship between God, Word, and self.

Even so, textual communication and subsequent understanding are not automatic; they are not achieved through some kind of spiritual trance or by "magical" osmosis. Rather, they necessitate ability on the part of the reader. If the writer has followed prescribed rules of grammar and syntax, if he has written with his voluntas, and if he has created a sound and meaningful body of ideas, then the reader must come equally prepared to the table of discourse. In the words of Frei, he must have "an ability to use it [language] appropriately in specific texts." He then explains how the reader might accomplish this:

To understand concepts is to have the ability both to explicate and to apply them, without necessarily resorting to a theory that would indicate how to couple the two. In the case of the Bible, this finally cannot be done without learning how to use the Bible, including its narratives, within the church and as its canon. ("NCMR" 160)

Conceptualizing, explication, application—not simply esoteric knowledge is necessary for understanding a text. Frei suggests that any meaningful textual relationship, but especially that which is engendered through the Bible, is the result of work from either position on the rhetorical triangle.

If the individual accepts the relationship and enters into the Christian "way," which is discourse with God
through his absent presence of the Holy Spirit, he enters into a rhetorical exchange. In order for that exchange to be successful, the reader (listener) necessarily becomes an active participant. "It is a communication that requires interpretation and partnership between speaker and listener. It is a relationship that provides communion through mutuality" (Zelechow 166). This mutuality does not imply that the Christian is equal to God, but it does suggest that his relationship with God is a reciprocal one. As a "joint-heir" with Christ (Romans 8:17), the reader who embraces the notion of a living/dying/buried/resurrected Jesus enters into a "person-to-person relationship [that] is actual through the word. One is related to a person in speaking to him, and one remains in relation to him only if he answers" (Tillich, BR 31).

This dynamic premise of God speaking to man and man responding in turn is that which fuels the triangular operation of God, Word, and man. In Oneself as Another, a text that examines the speaking subject in its quest for selfhood, Paul Ricoeur comments on the kind of reciprocity that is involved. Without positing a Christian stance, Ricoeur comments that

the idea of God is in me as the very mark of the author upon his work, a mark that assures the resemblance between us. I then have to confess that 'I perceive this likeness . . . by the same faculty through which I perceive myself.'

(QA 9)
This perception, which arises from the innate spirituality that is within man, is the result of momentary transcendence, a transcendence that is mediated through the Christian logos (dabhar).

According to Karl Barth in *Dogmatics in Outline*, this transcendence occurs at the point where the divine reason, the divine Logos, sets up His law in the region of man's understanding, to which law human, creaturely reason must accommodate itself. When that happens, man comes to knowledge; for when God sets up His law in man's thought, in his seeing and hearing and feeling, the revelation of the truth is also reached about man and his reason, the revelation of man is reached, who cannot bring about of himself what is brought about simply by God himself.

(Do 24)

Christianity thus posits faith as the element that is missing in the Greek equation of God, man, and universe. Barth argues that faith is a conscious and rational "decision," one that creates an "event" between God and man (Do 28). This meeting place between God and man is that moment of transcendence in which at least partial understanding of God, man, and universe becomes possible. Because man cannot come to knowledge of himself through his own finite analysis, he must willingly and consciously look outside himself for any hope of quieting his questions about his being, his creator, and his place within the universe.
Tillich applies the idea of spiritual/intellectual transcendence more universally, arguing that if man engages in any ontological questioning, he automatically aligns himself with his Creator. As one questions, he admits (consciously or unconsciously) the existence of a power greater than he is, of a mind infinitely more knowledgeable than his own (BE 11-14). The Christian, even the uneducated and inarticulate one, becomes philosopher, though perhaps involuntarily, because he is engaged in the same kind of ruminations that occupied Plato. But unlike his renowned predecessor, the Christian has the rhetorical and literary schemes fully in place to assist him. By willingly aligning himself with the Holy Spirit, God's absent presence, he can hope to gain personal, and potentially beneficial, understanding through the Bible, the word of God. As the character of Jesus speaks from that text, the Word then filters through the mind of the individual, where it is hermeneutically processed as precepts for life—and for the world beyond.

The Christian refers to this hermeneutical activity as the "priesthood of the believer." Within this spiritual situation, the Holy Spirit empowers the Christian individually through the Word of God, giving him the skills of discernment and interpretation. The process is never complete. With each reading of the text, with each encounter with the Word, the individual presumably has
lived, has experienced, and has matured so that he is neither intellectually nor spiritually the same person who previously engaged in the rhetorical exchange. In the words of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus: "One cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers; it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs" (LI). Understanding, then, is progressive; for the Christian, it is the progressive revelation of God, which is made possible through spiritual dialogue.

In *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Hans-Georg Gadamer provides a contemporary assessment of the Christian's dialogic encounter with God's Word. When he enters into the triangular relationship with God and Word, the text does not simply speak its word, always the same, in lifeless rigidity, but gives ever new answers to the person who questions it and poses ever new questions to him who answers it. To understand a text is to come to understand oneself in a kind of dialogue.

(EP 57)

This argument does not refute the New Testament description of God's Word, of "Jesus Christ [who is] the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Rather, it affirms that spiritual and intellectual quality of humanity that allows growth and understanding; it is the same quality that enables the finitude of man to encounter the infinitude of God. And the rhetorical triangle of God, man, and text provides the matrix for the encounter. While
participating in this rhetorical grid, the reader additionally "meets" the primary character, the Word of God who speaks to him from within that literary text.

A similar activity occurs in any aesthetic activity, a premise that I will elucidate in the next three chapters. As I move from the sonnet-sequence of Sidney, to the sonnets of Shakespeare, and through selected poems of Dickinson, I do so on the assumption that the Bible, especially the New Testament, establishes the literary precedent for Western aesthetic literature. Implicit in that precedent is that the reader, comprised of spirit and intellect, is capable of responding to the words of the writer as they are verbalized through the characters in his text. The next three chapters will highlight some (and certainly there exist numerous others) of the variations of this activity that dominates the reading process.
Chapter 4
The Absent Presence
in
Sidney's Astrophil and Stella

The movement from the spiritual arena in which man "meets" God through his son Jesus, who is the Word, to the aesthetic world of poetry in which man most frequently encounters himself in a word, may seem to be a confusing, if not an insurmountable, leap. But if aesthetics is, as Immanuel Kant suggests in his Critique of Judgement, man's attempt to bridge the gap between the spiritual and the material, between the physically absent and the verifiably present, then the step from the New Testament to poetry may not be so great after all. Defining the term "aesthetic idea," Kant explains that it

is a representation of the imagination, annexed to a given concept, with which, in the free employment of imagination, such a multiplicity of partial representations are bound up, that no expression indicating a definite concept can be found for it—one which on that account allows a concept to be supplemented in thought by much that is indefinable in words, and the feeling of which quickens the cognitive faculties, and with language, as a mere thing of the letter, binds up the spirit (soul) also.

(CJ 179)

Aesthetics, much like spirituality, is individually conceptualized, exacting different intellectual and emotional responses from those who enter its realm.
Though sometimes "indefinable," aesthetic meaning, according to Kant, can be discerned through the "cognitive faculties" of the seeking individual. Kant organizes cognition into two distinct categories: that which is a priori (that which comes from experience) and that which is a posteriori (that which is not experiential but can nevertheless be known). Kant proposes that aesthetics falls under his latter premise: one can come to knowledge through the reading of a text, through textual, or aesthetic, experience. Similar to the spiritual sojourner who seeks to understand self in relation to God and world, the aesthetic habitué embarks upon a quest in the mind. This quest, which occurs through the aesthetics of poetry, is perhaps an individual's greatest effort to understand the infinitude of the spirituality that comprises the human soul in terms of the finitude of the material world that can be sensorily determined. Any understanding that occurs between poet and text, and subsequently reader and text, is accomplished through the language of the writer.

Transforming ideas into a language of metaphor and symbol, the poet, through his poetry, allows both himself and his readers to translate that which often seems beyond translation into at least a brief glimmer, a momentary space, an epiphanic vision of understanding. As it enables the poet to probe the "otherness" of that-which-is-not-I and place it in relation to the "thisness" of self, it
subsequently allows the reader to comprehend that which is absent in terms of that which is present. The process and the language may be different, but the purpose of the poet's journey is the same as that of the philosopher and the theologian: to contemplate self, world, and creator in all their complexities. Poetry then, like philosophy and religion, is an ontological journey; it is a search for understanding the core of human existence. In "An Essay on Art," Jacques Maritain goes even farther in his assessment, stating that poetry is ontology because "it realizes in act one of the fundamental aspects of the ontological likeness of our soul with God" (87).

The writings of any number of poets could substantiate the ontological premise of poetry. But in an attempt to show this idea through the operation of the absent presence, which is totally "other," I delineated several common denominators as a means of limiting my field of poets to Sir Philip Sidney, William Shakespeare, and Emily Dickinson. Although numerous differences inarguably separate them as singular geniuses whose art makes them unique, their poetry and underlying poetic philosophies share unmistakable similarities. Each of the three wrote for a small circle of friends: Sidney penned his poems for the entertainment of his courtly acquaintances; Shakespeare wrote his sonnet sequence for his immediate friends; and Dickinson apparently intended for her poems, which she
carefully arranged in personally crafted fascicles, to be read only by her family and few friends. Seemingly none of the three wrote for publication; they each envisioned a small, personal audience with whom they could share intimate musings of their inner beings. The imperative of Sidney's Muse to "looke in thy heart and write" applies to the personae of each.

The remainder of this study will develop from the premise that even Sidney and Shakespeare, who may not have had vocabularies fully sufficient to explain what they recognized as the inner voice, nevertheless specifically recount the musings of that inner being. Anne Ferry's book *The "Inward" Language* provides a thorough analysis of the difficulty that sixteenth-century writers faced as they struggled to verbalize the inward state in terms of the outward self. She cautions us to remember that we quite readily take for granted references that apply to the workings of the mind; as post-Freudians, we are cognitively conditioned to understand even subtle allusions to that inner being which truly defines the individual. Ferry argues,

> These [references] are so embedded in our language that we use them concurrently or interchangeably, without remembering their different origins, or troubling about their possible inconsistencies or their conflicting implications. The reason for their often unquestioned acceptance is, I believe, that they are all associated with our now deeply held belief in the existence of an inner life or a
real self, phrases so familiar, so rooted in our view of human nature, that we have virtually ceased to think of them as metaphors.

(II 7)

Although great strides were made in the study of the human psyche between the Renaissance writings of Sidney and Shakespeare and the nineteenth-century writings of Dickinson, even she did not share our Freudian vantage. Because of Freud and his successors, we have an extensive vocabulary that conditions us to analyze and then to express the psychological operations of the inner man.

Ferry’s argument is convincing—to a point. Focusing on psychoanalytic theory, she ignores the role that literacy played in these cognitive operations. To refer again to Ong and The Presence of the Word, literacy fostered, or at least significantly enabled, an individual sense of interiority. Ong asserts quite emphatically that "formal logic was invented in an alphabetic culture" (PW 45), noting that "Aristotle’s Art of Rhetoric could not come into being without writing" (PW 26-27). We might also conclude that the same assertion applies to Psalms, Augustine’s Confessions, Dante’s Inferno, or any aesthetic text that provokes self-examination.

Ong argues that the written word, especially the poetic text, or what he calls "verse," empowers the individual to interiorize thoughts, a process which then allows communication with the inner self:
Verse grows more directly dependent on writing than oratory does, probably because verse is the sort of thing that invites exact repetition more than does an oration. Writing expedites repetition for the many who have not mastered the extraordinary skills of the oral epic singer. But in implementing repetition for those without such skills, writing also changes the basic nature of repetition from the thematic to the verbatim.

(PW 27)

This movement from the "thematic to the verbatim" results in individualism, which is an interiorizing of the self. Applying Ong's argument to spiritual and aesthetic worlds, it is the text, the printed word, that allows individual meditation. Because of reading, of taking another's thoughts into the being of self, any provocative work (Psalms, Augustine's Confessions, Dante's Inferno, poetry) creates a textual "reality" for the reader.

I suggest that this premise is especially true for any aesthetic text which recounts a poet-lover and his absent beloved. Through such a literary encounter, the inner being of the reader can allow absence (of a lover or an author) to become an absent presence that might intellectually and emotionally act upon her present. Because of the written words that allow the reader to take the aesthetic experience into the self, she can interiorize the thoughts of the writer who is other. Certainly some writers are more skilled at this than others. I will argue that Sidney, Shakespeare, and Dickinson do not simply allow their readers to interiorize; they demand it.
Crucial to the argument hereinafter set forth is that the personae of all three are poet-lovers. And love is key to understanding their work; in a causal relationship, it is the inspiration that yields the poetry. It was Plato's love of knowledge (philosophia) that drove him to seek a verbal plane of greater knowledge with his like-minded interlocutors; and, in a similar manner, the Biblical text represents God's love for his creation, prompting him to incarnate himself through his Son, the Word, who is paradoxically both the character in and the text of the New Testament. The relationship between love and the texts of Plato, God, and poet-lover is that of cause-and-effect. Love may not create the text, but it is the animating factor in the writing process; it incites voluntas. Love also operates from the opposite side of the text, compelling the reader to enter into dialogue with the author through the printed word. If we are willing to recognize, as George Steiner does in Real Presences, that "Eros and the aesthetic experience are close kindred," then we can begin to ferret out the element that controls the absent presence of poetic expression (RP 182-83).

Commenting on this subject in his study of Emily Dickinson's poetry, Inder Nath Kher further argues that love is the force which empowers that "aesthetic experience" (Steiner, RP 182) and thus enables the reader's imagination to embark upon a poetic journey with the writer
of the text. Love, as Kher defines it, is antinomical in nature. Much like Heraclitus, who viewed all of life as comprised of endless opposites, Kher sees a creative tension operating in and through love, which is both the spiritual and physical life-force of humanity:

Love is energy; it is imagination to which alone all forms are possible. It is inclusive of the contradictory postures of self-other, living in death and dying into life. It generates the opposing moods of happiness and woe, pleasure and pain, remembering and forgetting, freedom and bondage. It is sensuous, it is spiritual. It is fleeting, it is abiding. It is speech, it is silence. It is ignorance, it is wisdom. It is water, it is fire. It is dark, it is light. It is absence, it is presence.

(LA 136)

The emotional stress operating within a poetry of love is that which yields the absent presence. Though comprised of opposites, absence versus presence, the two paradoxical elements (ek-dēmeo and en-dēmeo) affirm the other. One exists only in oppositional relation to the other.

Although overtones of deconstruction necessarily emerge in such an assessment, I do not presume a strictly deconstructionist stance. Rather, I simply suggest that much of Western literature relies upon oppositional elements as one means of establishing communication between writer and reader. Lexically conjoined terms, such as "absence" and "presence," are linguistic opposites, but, as Derrida suggests, they are not strictly an either/or, neither/nor pairing. Rather, the opposing terms create a
reciprocal relationship, with the first term sharing commensurately with the second.

The terms "present" and "absent" do not preclude each other; on the contrary, each heralds the other. Commenting on the term "absence," Susan Handelman cautions us to remember that "absence does not equal nonexistence" (98). Rather, absence is the otherness of presence. Only through absence of the reader does the writer create the text, and only through the absence of the beloved does the poet create the absent presence within that text.

A recurring theme in the next three chapters is the erotic opposition that paradoxically allows unity between the poet and the absent reader through the poetic medium that depicts a poet-lover who seeks solace through the absent presence of a departed beloved. The opposition that arises from the contradictory elements of love that was yet still is produces rhetorical unity between writer/reader/text while subsequently, though perhaps only temporarily, reconciling absence and presence into an absent presence.

If we view love as a positive force (agape or caritas) that yields equally positive rhetorical reactions, we can observe that love is multi-dimensional in the aesthetic world, operating sequentially and on several levels. The first overture of love is, according to Sidney, that between Creator and poet. As a further means of
establishing communication with mankind, God makes the poet, in the words of the Renaissance humanist, "the first light-giver" (Defense 606). As God "gifts" the poet with discernment, he arms humanity with an aesthetic means for coming to partial understanding of that which comprises the emotional and intellectual life of humanity. The poet then uses his gift as the creative means through which he presumes to establish a relationship with his reader. Such a relationship derives from, and is fostered by, love.

A.C. Hamilton recognizes, in Sir Philip Sidney: A Study of His Life, this love of writer for reader "is experienced in the act of giving [the drama] poetic form" (85). The final performance of love, the one that completes the triangular loving relationship, is that of the reader as she encounters the text. As with any loving relationship, she must make herself vulnerable to the text. She must be willing to sacrifice her preconceived notions of self/world/creator and be wooed by the inscribed words on the printed page. She must listen to the voice of the persona who speaks from the text. These players from each point of the triangular relationship necessarily depend upon the others in order to produce meaning, in order to create understanding.

The writers who create rhetorical exchanges incorporate "voices" whereby their words can find believable expression. Most frequently, as with Sidney,
Shakespeare, and Dickinson, textual voices come through their personae, all of whom are poet-lovers. As Sidney’s Astrophil, Shakespeare’s older poet, and Dickinson’s female counterpart relate their tales of lost or distant love, as they expose their internal struggles with self in relation to lover, each poet-lover also shares his or her views of poetry and art. Shakespeare and Dickinson may not have written critical texts comparable to Sidney’s *Defense*, but they did insert critical remarks into their poetry. Taken cumulatively, these comments about poetry and poet help us to determine their philosophies of art. All three describe the transcending power of words; through words, their disappointing relationships are transformed into something worthwhile. Specifically, emotional turmoil that is brought about by absence of the beloved prompts artistic endeavor which, in turn, results in works of art that "speak" from the pages and across the centuries to their readers.

Yet each poet-lover also recognizes the inability of words to bridge completely the gap between the actual and the recreated experience. If we consider both the literary and the rhetorical perspectives, we note that dual gaps exist for these poets. The first is both literary and rhetorical as the author struggles to translate verbally to the reader that which was formerly fully present (either a physical or imaginative experience) into a textually
dynamic absent presence. In creating personae, these three writers especially succeed in developing textual presences who act to motivate, to control, and to give meaning to the composition of the poetry. Each persona then "speaks" that (or another) meaning to the reader.

The second gap, which is rhetorical, occurs during the reader's subsequent perusal of the text as she attempts to decipher the nuances of the author's language, recognizing all the while that the hermeneutic possibilities preclude any prospect of total union with the writer. This study of the sonnet sequences of Sidney and Shakespeare and of selected poetry of Dickinson will necessarily be highly selective, focusing on those sonnets and poems that suggest most substantially the operation of the absent presence on either of these two levels—that of author as he or she creates the literary text and that of reader as she rhetorically enters into dialogue with the text.

My premise is that dual absent presences are the primary means by which these two gaps may be at least partially bridged. Inherent in these absent presences that operate in and through a text is the idea of transcendence. As George Steiner proposes in his book Real Presences, "This essay [too] argues a wager on transcendence. It argues that there is in the art-act and its reception, that there is in the experience of meaningful form, a presumption of presence" (214). And that presence assumes
a kind of spirituality, a kind of God-likeness, because it enables one intellect, one human mind, to comprehend and share in that which was experienced or conceptualized by another individual.

This ability separates rational man from irrational animal and places him on a spiritual plane of intellectual and emotional discernment. In the words of Steiner, it then would seem

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\text{that any coherent understanding of what language is and how language performs, that any coherent account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God's presence. I will put forward the argument that the experience of aesthetic meaning in particular, that of literature, of the arts, of musical form, infers the necessary possibility of this 'real presence.'}
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(RP 3)

Such a critical assumption, however, does not require that the poet must necessarily postulate metaphysical ideas concerning the divine nature of poetry and the poet. Nor does it require a belief in God, an absent presence which is wholly Other. Rather, it suggests the rudimentary level at which the poet recognizes the power of words to communicate meaningfully with a reader.

In her book *Poetry as Epitaph*, Karen Mills-Courts argues that the poet, perhaps more consciously than other writers, struggles to affirm presence because it is in presence that meaning is gleaned from the written word. She says that poetry is "the most powerful attempt to
incarnate voice, meaning, intelligibility, even 'Truth,' in language. Poets, more than any other writers, need to secure presence in their work" (PE 3). Although that presence, according to Mills-Courts, simultaneously heralds loss through its written expression, it nevertheless holds the potential for yielding an instant of symbolically embodied meaning to the reader. Beginning with Sidney, then moving to Shakespeare and finally to Dickinson, I will attempt to show that these three poets, who may be separated by religious beliefs, by gender, or by centuries, nevertheless share a critical tenet that underlies their poetry: they each rely significantly on the literary and rhetorical operations of absent presences to create and then to perpetuate meaning through their work.

Having provided prefatory information that outlines the critical landscape from which this chapter will develop, I now turn to the Protestant humanist Sidney who provides a logical transition into poet and poetry. Indeed his personal and poetic views underscore the paradox of Western thought: Christian orthodox commingled with pagan Greek. Believed to have translated at least portions of The Rhetoric, Sidney processed his ideas of moving the reader to action (energeia), of imitating that which is in nature (mimesis), and of seeing the "poet as maker" through Aristotle's Poetics. Though he might have been an accomplished scholar of rhetoric and philosophy, Sidney
could never get very far away from his Calvinist teachings of Providence at work in man's world. He recognized his role of poet as that which was made possible by the divine Creator and thus "could never have supported, for instance, the verbal effort to divinize the self" (Doherty xxv).

Because of the Edenic fall, man as poet is forever fallible. His mind, which is God-like with creativity and discernment, may imagine perfect communication of ideas, but his verbal ability to express those ideas somehow always falls short of perfection.

Sidney laments in his Defense of Poesy that "our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it" (DP 608). Because of his "erected wit," which encompasses his dual ability to perceive man in relation to his world and then to express that relationship through his manipulation of language articulated by metaphor and symbol, the poet is potentially capable of expressing that perfect truth of man's being, that truth of man in relation to self, world, and creator. However, a discernible breach exists between wit and will, between gnosis and praxis. The poet may know some of the truths of his existence, but he does not always succeed in imparting those truths to his audience. This breakdown frequently results from lack of presence—from his Creator who is teacher and from his reader who is interpreter. Although he may seek plenitude (connoting
presence), the poet's "infected will," which implies a lack in both perception and verbal expression, inhibits his incarnation of exact or full presence (parousia).

Mills-Courts argues that a verifiable presence, a presence which is almost "spiritual," dominates Sidney's poetic process. She likens it to the 'cleared' vision that enables David's divinity. The poet's 'golden' world is not a truth delivered by the voice of God, but the expression of the 'truth' that God has already created and that already resides within. The poet is not possessed by God, but through God's grace he is in possession of an 'erected wit,' which clears the muddiness of the 'infected will' and 'invents' images superior to the world humankind has wrecked with its Fall.

(PE 26)

As Mills-Courts recognizes, Sidney does not credit the poet with creating "truth." Only God is creator. That same God, however, provides the poet with the mental perception and the verbal ability to translate that truth to humanity. If we apply this analysis to Sidney's Astrophil and Stella, it would seem then that the poet in the persona of Astrophil does not create presence in lieu of absence; rather, he "invents" an absent presence, thus replicating Stella's presence through artistry.

Not just an imitation, this replicated absent presence is duplication—the best, albeit inexact, duplication that the poet can make possible with an "infected will." Robert Kimbrough rightly argues, "The poet is a maker; he imitates. He takes the stuff of life, molds it, and
projects it as art" (SPS 52) in an attempt to duplicate the life experience through verbal reenactment. According to Sidney's own assessment in his Defense, that duplication (which is artistic imitation) has merit; precisely, it has power to affect the reader in a manner similar to that of the actual experience: "For that feigned example hath as much force to teach as a true example (for as for [sic] to move, it is clear, since the feigned may be tuned to the highest key of passion)" (DP 611). The poet, through his erected wit, can elicit passion in his readers. But something is lost in the process; an absence results, since duplication through language necessarily implies loss and reduction of full presence.

To restate Kenneth Burke's premise of the reductive quality of language, Sidney and other poets undoubtedly seek for vocabularies that will be faithful reflections of reality. To this end, they must develop vocabularies that are selections of reality. And any selection of reality must, in certain circumstances, function as a deflection of reality.

(GM 59)

Reflection - selection - deflection results in what Sidney refers to as "another nature" which comes from "the vigor of his own invention." Especially for the Renaissance poet Sidney, who lacked a vocabulary that could express the reality of the inner man, "Invention" was not optional; it was necessary in order to approach and decipher those God-given truths.
Invention, which comes through the poetic process, is thus closely aligned to Aristotle's concept of mimesis. According to Richard McKeon's assessment of Aristotle's theory, poetry is mimesis. It is an imitation of things as they are or ought to be, and each kind of poetry produces its proper pleasure; but it is also a whole, complete in itself, with a beginning, middle, and end and with all the organic unity of a living creature. ("ACL" 212)

But S.K. Heninger, in his preface to The Poet as Maker, argues that Sidney takes Aristotle's position a notable step farther.

As its distinctive feature, poetry no longer reflects heavenly beauty or echoes cosmic harmony—it isn't rhyming and versing that make a poet, Sidney insists. Instead, poetry becomes a depictive art, an activity that produces images, a narrative with semantic content. (PM x)

We thus see a significant literary progression from Aristotle to Sidney as poetry moves from pure pleasure that is elicited through Aristotle's mimesis to artistic depiction of inherent truth, the idea which embodies Sidney's use of "Invention."

Basically, then, Sidney's "Invention" is, as Kimbrough describes, "the discovery or uncovering of a truth that exists in nature or beyond nature" (SPS 61). These truths, which for Sidney comprise the Christian Logos, are already operational; they were put in place by the Creator. The poet's role is to discover and translate those truths to
his readers. For Sidney, Invention becomes the means whereby the poet might fashion "things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature" (DP 607). Tempering this Aristotelian argument with his Christian beliefs, Sidney argues that the moral mandate of the poet is to "teacheth and moveth to virtue" (DP 616). For him, the poet is the noblest teacher, ranking higher than the philosopher, the historian, and the scientist; and the poem is the preferred instrument of learning, performing more effectively than philosophy, history, or science. As a result of the poet's efforts, poetry, that noblest vehicle for learning, exposes through artistic representation the manifold truths in reality. However, because poetic reality is inhabited by absence and reduced by language, its relation to reality is necessarily the same-but-different. This same-but-different aspect is that which defines aesthetics, and it is the focus of the remainder of this study as I analyze the poet's attempts to express the spiritual, his emotions, through the material, his words.

Through the creative act, the poet produces an aesthetic "reality" which allows the reader to implicate herself in that which the poet describes. This "reality" may even be reproduced as fiction. When the poet undertakes this reproduction, he reifies reality through
the printed word, a process that Sidney outlines in Sonnet 45:

Stella oft sees the verie face of wo
Painted in my beclowded stormie face:
But cannot skill to pitie my disgrace,
Not though thereof the cause her selfe she know:
Yet hearing late a fable, which did show
Of Lovers never knowne, a grievous case,
Pitie thereof gate in her breast such place,
That from that sea deriv’d teares spring did flow.
Alas, if Fancy drawn by imag’d things,
Though false, yet with free scope more grace doth breed
Then servants wracke, where new doubts honor brings
Then think my deare, that you in me do reed
Of lovers ruine some sad Tragedie:
I am not I, pitie the tale of me.

Prior to this sonnet, Sidney has described, through his persona Astrophil, love and suffering that are real. (At least they are punctuated as "real" in the poetic drama.) But the beloved Stella is moved neither by Astrophil’s pronouncements of love nor by his remonstrations of suffering. Almost accidentally the poet-lover discovers something that might make Stella sympathetic to his plight.

Observing that his beloved heard and was moved by a "fable" that parallels his situation with her, he recognizes that fiction affects her in a way that disclosure of his true feelings has not. Although he may not understand how and does not attempt to explain why, he realizes that the fiction, the "fable" that duplicates his feelings for Stella, has greater emotive power than his personal story. He thus justifies using the fiction of
"Lovers never knowne" to further his erotic cause. This fiction, which applies universally, is the same as his reality—a lover rebuffed by his beloved—but it is necessarily different because of its fictive recreation. He proposes ambivalently that "I am not I," but he seems to suggest that "I am emotionally the same as the I in the recreated fiction."

Implicit in the poet's fictive recreation is the rhetorical death-to-life concept of putting the words to paper so that they may "live" again in the mind of a future reader. Theodore Spencer contends in "The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney" that something else is at work in the love sonnets of Sidney's personae: through a life-in-death experience, the poet-lover discovers himself:

But there is one constant fact which is true of all poets and at all times; the discovery of oneself depends on an act of submission. For the poet, as for the human being, to lose one's life is to find it. In our time this fact has been widely recognized, though it has been expressed in widely differing terms. In a minor way it is what Pound means when he calls his poems 'Personae'; it is what Housman discovered when he spoke through the mouth of the Shropshire Lad. It is the fact that lies behind the search of W.B. Yeats for the anti-mask—the discovery of the self by contemplation of its opposite; it is what T.S. Eliot expresses by his theory of 'objective co-relative' and by his requirements that poetry should be as 'impersonal as possible.'

In the sixteenth century this saving loss of personality, this discovery of self through submission to an 'order,' could be accomplished to a considerable extent through convention. Convention is to the poet in an age of belief what the persona is to the poet in an age of
bewilderment. By submission to either the poet acquires authority; he feels that he is speaking for, is representing, something more important than himself—or, in the case of the persona, he is at least representing something different from his own naked and relatively insignificant ego; in both cases he has taken the first step toward universality.

("PSPS" 46)

This is a lengthy quote, but it is important because it clearly and specifically explains what Astrophil, Sidney's poet-lover, does within the sequence: he discovers his artistic self through the absent presence of his beloved. Through his painful, and frequently retrogressive, coming to terms with the loss of Stella's present presence, he gradually acquires authority over the creation which houses her absent presence as it interacts with his persona. The result is poetic power, a discernible artistic self, that reaches out from the text to the reader.

Contrary to Thomas Roche's vilification of Astrophil in "Astrophil and Stella: A Radical Reading," the poet-lover's "infernal heroics" do not "mask a basic childishness, which he transfers immediately by making his idol Stella into a child to be whipped into shape" ("AS:RR" 207). From his truly radical point of view, Roche sees no redeeming qualities in Astrophil. The best that he can say about him is that "He teaches morality by negative example" ("AS:RR" 188). I disagree. As Sidney partners himself with his persona, he moves his reader from a negative to a positive state, from an actual to a fictional world.
In so doing, Sidney uses Astrophil’s emotional transference from fact to fiction, a kind of aesthetic transcendence, as the basis for his personal defense of poetry from his own Renaissance critics. Kimbrough paraphrases Sidney’s argument, saying that

Poetry is made; it is a fiction. Because fiction is projected from the mind of the poet, because it is imaginative, the word has the connotation of ‘not true.’ But fiction only stands for life, is a reading of life, and can be lifelike; it does not pretend to be life.

(SPS 49)

Poetry is not life because it is comprised of words, whereas life is comprised of living, dying, loving, hating humanity; but poetic words allow a "reading of life" that can duplicate the emotions that arise from all of that emotionally throbbing life.

And Astrophil, the poet-lover, who has failed to excite passion in his real-life situation with Stella, decides to chance the fiction. He wagers that Stella’s reading of his "lifelike" fiction may sway her in a way that he cannot. As she reads his text, she may find something to move her that even he did not envision:

Looke on againe, the faire text better trie:  
What blushing notes doest thou in margine see?  
What sighes stolne out, or kild before full borne?  
Hast thou found such and such like arguments?  
Or art thou else to comfort me forsworne?  
Well, how so thou interpret the contents,  
I am resolv’d thy errour to maintaine,  
Rather then by more truth to get more paine.  

(Sonnet 67)
Astrophil encourages Stella to read his story; in so doing, he seeks an alternate way of wooing her. Astrophil thus proposes to Stella a reciprocal relationship, one in which he empowers her to interpret his words. In the process, the poet-lover establishes parameters for his proposed rhetorical relationship. Sidney, through his persona, relies on a textual operation that functions similarly to Plato’s concept of Idea.

A reductive rendering of that theory of Forms is that it allows for an archetypal correlation between phenomenal realities and their corresponding invented representations (The Republic V). Sidney attributes this action to the poet, a kind of Renaissance philosopher. As the poet-lover, who is foremost the poet, translates that which is into his poetry, he limits the borders of interpretation, artistically corresponding the actual (the phenomenal reality) with its most exact metaphor or symbol (the invented representation). Relying on this process, Astrophil implores Stella to engage herself with his absent presence, hoping that she might understand and then respond in kind to his feelings for her. Even if she misinterprets his fictive efforts, even if he does not succeed in establishing exact boundaries for her interpretation, he is willing to take his chances on the fable. If he must, he determines her "errour to maintaine." Realizing that her misinterpretation of his fable can be no worse than the
"truth" of their actual relationship, which she deems nonexistent, he goes with the fiction. So he gambles with the persuasive power of the artistic word, only to be disappointed again.

Gary Waller analyzes this triangular relationship between writer/text/reader in *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century*. He argues that the role of the reader is crucial, if not the most important element, within the rhetorical triangle. "It is the reader's cognitive processes that create the reading, not the author's intentions" (*EPSC* 57). Certainly textual understanding is dependent upon a reader; however, the reader operates in conjunction with the other two equally significant elements in the rhetorical triangle. Like Wimsatt and Beardsley in "The Intentional Fallacy," I disregard as fallacy the idea that a reader/critic needs to determine the author's intentions in order to understand and find meaning from a poem. They state "that the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art." Since a poem is "embodied in language," whose syntax and semantics can be artfully manipulated by a writer but can never be exactly recovered by the reader, "the work is measured against something outside the author" (*IF* 3, 5, 10).

Addressing that "something" in "The Affective Fallacy," Wimsatt and Beardsley ultimately conclude that
the cognitive and affective effects of poetry upon the reader are inseparable:

Poetry is characteristically a discourse about both emotions and objects, or about the emotive quality of objects. The emotions correlative to the objects of poetry become a part of the matter dealt with—-not communicated to the reader like an infection or disease, not inflicted mechanically like a bullet or knife wound, not administered like a poison, not simply expressed as by expletives or grimaces or rhythms, but presented in their objects and contemplated as a pattern of knowledge. Poetry is a way of fixing emotions.

("AF" 38)

To extend Wimsatt and Beardsley’s metaphor: unlike the pathologist who can dissect a body to determine the specific cause of death, the reader cannot similarly isolate the various elements within a poem to determine the specific cause of a reader’s response to it. Rather, a combination of factors effect the reader’s reaction: a language that is manipulated by the writer, a culture that is different both in time and locale, and a personal and differing lifetime of experience that the reader brings to the text. Because of appropriate articulation in the writing process and equally appropriate interpretation in the reading process, an individual’s response to a particular text is sometimes one of almost inexplicable intimacy.

In such rhetorically intimate encounters, Waller posits that a unique relationship develops between writer/reader/text. In a life-imitating-art comparison, he
suggests, and here I agree, that Sidney's sonnets demand intimacy with their readers. Like Astrophil's fiction to Stella which evoked "Pitie for lovers never knowne," Sidney's sonnets are poems which require an unusually active involvement from their readers, and which produce meanings only within the changing encounters between poem and readers. The poet offers himself to an audience of sympathetic listeners as a mirror less of his experiences than of theirs. Sidney's poems work upon their readers, suggesting, manipulating, but never compelling, meanings.

(EPSC 147-48)

Like Plato who required a willing interlocutor to probe the wellspring of knowledge, the poet similarly requires a willing reader to "complete" the composition of his text, to provide meaning. To understand why Astrophil fails to convince Stella to respond to his love for her, we might consider a contrasting relationship, one in which the lover successfully convinces his lady to respond in kind. Such a lover is Othello, the "noble Moor" who woos the "gentle Desdemona."

As Othello defends his method for winning the hand of Desdemona, he admits to using a method similar to that used by Astrophil: he tells a story. Othello's tale differs from Astrophil's in that his is explicitly biographical, recounting his heroic adventures on the battlefield. As author of his own story, however, he has the power to embellish the facts, to fashion them in order to achieve
his desired purpose, which is the same as Astrophil's fable to Stella. Like Astrophil, he is driven by eros or cupiditas; he wants to consummate his love for Desdemona. Where Astrophil fails, however, Othello succeeds.

In answering the Duke's charges against his winning of Desdemona's hand, Othello recounts the means by which he persuaded her of his love. Speaking to Brabantio, he says, perhaps with exaggerated modesty:

Rude am I in my speech,
And little blest with the soft phrase of peace.
For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith
Till now some nine moons wasted, they have used
Their dearest action in the tented field.
And little of this great world can I speak,
More than pertains to feats of broil and battle,
And therefore little shall I grace my cause
In speaking for myself. Yet, by your gracious patience,
I will a round unvarnished tale deliver
Of my whole course of love—what drugs, what charms,
What conjuration and what mighty magic—
For such proceeding I am charged withal—
I won his daughter.

(Othello I.iii.81-93)

Like Astrophil, Othello uses neither drugs, nor charms, nor conjuration, nor magic to win Desdemona; again like Astrophil, he uses only his words. So why does Othello succeed and Astrophil fail? Why does he persuade Desdemona "To fall in love with what she feared to look on!"—a "rude" Moor who is ignorant of the ways of polite society?

The answer lies in Desdemona herself, the willing interlocutor who listens to his story and then responds
positively to the power of his words. He tells Brabantio, "She'd come again, and with a greedy ear/ Devour up my discourse" (I.iii.149-50.). She thus becomes a reciprocal partner in the rhetorical exchange, incorporating the discourse into her inner being. Her initial response, for him to teach his story to one of his friends who loved her, was not the one that Othello wanted:

She thanked me,
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
I should but teach him how to tell my story
And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake.
She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have used.

(Othello I.iii.163-69)

Ultimately, though, she allows his words to seduce her, to bring her into the relationship he desires.

In this context, I do not use "seduce" in the pejorative sense. On the contrary, I suggest that Othello merely manipulates his words in much the way that Ross Chambers argues in Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction:

If such power can be called the power of seduction, it is because seduction is, by definition, a phenomenon of persuasion; it cannot rely on force or institutional authority ('power'), for it is, precisely, a means of achieving mastery in the absence of such means of control. It is the instrument available to the situationally weak against the situationally strong.

(212)

Textual seduction, as described by Chambers, parallels Warnock's rhetorical "dance" (cited in Chapter 2) in which
"the reader's resistance and the writer's enticements, and vice-versa are parts of the dance" ("RKB" 73). The partner who issues the invitation to the rhetorical dance is the writer; depending upon his literary expertise and his socio-political knowledge, he can be either the stronger or the weaker partner. In the Othello/Desdemona relationship, Othello is the weaker party, but he has a significant advantage: his words. Situationally weak because he is an outsider who is unskilled in Venetian romance, Othello employs words, and only words, to weave a tale of love in order to persuade Desdemona to accept his marriage proposal. Since his words are his own, he fashions them so as to elicit a particular emotional response from his listener Desdemona.

Proof of his rhetorical manipulation is that Desdemona believes his words and loves him for the valor portrayed therein. His text successfully elicits a reaction; communication is established between lover and beloved. Responding positively to the power of words, Desdemona willingly places herself in a position to be persuaded by them, something that Stella refuses to do. Thinking himself safely ensconced in the marriage-bed, Othello gloats to his friend about the success of his love-quest. During this brief interlude of confidence in Desdemona's fidelity, Othello credits the oral word with the honorable "seduction" of his wife. Such is never realized by
Astrophil. Because of his erotic frustrations, Sidney's poet-lover fails to extricate himself from his emotional attachment to Stella.

In *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions*, Ronald Levao addresses this dilemma:

> The only true release would be through actual seduction, but Astrophil returns repeatedly to the realization that his poetry is not persuading Stella. No matter how sweetly he utters forth the conceits of the mind, Astrophil's goal remains irrevocably distant. (171)

Astrophil's tactic is the same as Othello's, and his words are no less persuasive. The difference seems not to lie in the words of the poet-lover, but in the attitude of the perceptor herself, Stella. Levao correctly recognizes Stella's role when he says, "Perhaps the fault lies with the hearer" (*RMTF* 171). Because she chooses not to partner herself with Astrophil's implicitly persuasive words, Stella is unmoved by his erotic entreaties.

Stella is not, as A.C. Hamilton accurately notes in "Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* as a Sonnet Sequence," an "ideal reader." Because her response is not that which Astrophil desires, Hamilton rightly concludes that he, as poet-lover, chooses to modify his approach.

Frustrated as both poet and lover, he is forced to abandon his passive role. Paradoxically, the limited success of Astrophil's courtship precipitates a crisis for him both as poet and as lover. In his opening program, he had assumed that Stella would be an ideal reader who would take pleasure in reading
of his pain, and knowing his pain would pity him, and through love would offer him her favor. Unfortunately, she is not properly programmed: she turns out to be an increasingly perverse woman, balking at each step of his literary ladder.

("SASSS" 215)

I question Hamilton's use of "perverse" to describe Stella; the word inaccurately and harshly characterizes one who seems to be a respectable, married woman of the Renaissance court whose primary fault is the spurning of her would-be suitor. I do agree, however, with his assessment that her refusal "precipitates a crisis for him both as poet and lover." Crises, especially when viewed in retrospect, are not always bad. They can, as they do for Astrophil, incite personal and professional change, an idea that I will develop more fully later.

Although Stella may not be "perverse," she is an unwilling "reader" of Astrophil's words. She hears, she even "sees" (understands), but she does not respond in the way he would have her do, as my later discussion of the Eighth Song will suggest. Because her personal circumstances and objectives are in sharp contrast to those of Astrophil, their dialogic relationship disintegrates. Astrophil's poetry, his fiction, fails him in his personal time of need.

Waller addresses this poetic failure in his discussion of sixteenth-century poetry. He accurately notes that "poetry's ability to move its readers is not predictable or
automatic; man may not be moved at all, or may not translate vision into praxis" (EPSC 55). Stella’s ultimate refusal to be moved by Astrophil’s provocative narrative of "Lovers never knowne" and Desdemona’s gradual willingness to be wooed by Othello’s equally seductive story represent two opposing roles assumed by readers of texts: the reader who refuses to enter into reciprocal relationship with the author through the written word and the one who agreeably partners herself with the author and the text.

For author, text, and reader to consummate a relationship, the reader must, like Desdemona, be swept along by the seduction, by the persuasive wooing, of the word. Waller describes this activity as the rhetorical relationship between writer/text/reader, an activity which, if it is to succeed, requires active participation from the reader. He argues,

> When we read, we temporarily adopt a new ‘self,’ one suggested by the poem and our experience of reading it. The play between that flickering self, the self with which we started to read the poem, and the reconstituted self we have when we finish reading the poem is, it has been suggested, part of the essential value of reading poetry—perhaps even of reading in general. (EPSC 55)

Something tangible occurs when a reader willingly embraces the words of another. She becomes something that she was not before; her inner being is altered into a "reconstituted self" as she intellectually and emotionally assimilates the drama recounted by the writer.
Paul Ricoeur says this tangible something is understanding of the words in the text. Expressing Waller's explanation another way in The Conflict of Interpretations, Ricoeur says "to understand, for a finite being, is to be transported into another life" (CI 5). Ricoeur's "another life" and Waller's "reconstituted self" are hermeneutic renderings of the same idea. Any understanding that comes from a textual experience is the direct result of the reader partnering herself with the writer through his words; the process is like unto that faith relationship between the Christian and his God.

Just as Karl Barth argues that the Christian's rational decision to believe in God creates a dialogic event between himself and God, so the reader's willful act to partner herself with writer and text is a kind of good-faith gesture (DO 28). The result is a brief interlude of transcendence as the reader "temporarily adopts a new 'self'" in her perusal of the text. For at least a while, she encounters the "other" who penned the text (the absent presence of the author) and the "other" who speaks to her from the words on the printed page (the absent presence of the character or persona who is central to the text).

This temporary union comes about through rhetorical and literary factors working in unison, not the least of which is the persona. The persona does not have to be a character within the action (although he or she may be),
but his (or her) presence does dominate the text. As one of the early British writers to create a persona who is sustained throughout a text, Sidney successfully incorporates a relatively innovative literary technique in his sonnet sequence. Ferry recognizes that

Sidney is viewed as crucial in this development for his invention of Astrophil as the first persona in English poetry who controls 'with recognizable voice and attitudes' the whole sequence, as Petrarch's poet-lover shapes his poems to Laura.

(IV 14)

Although Ferry fails to acknowledge that Chaucer previously introduced a sustained narrator in his Canterbury Tales, she justifiably credits Sidney for presenting a text with a perceptibly singular voice operating within the narrative. Something which we take for granted, a solid presence emerging and a discernible voice speaking from a text, is that which most notably distinguishes Sidney's sonnet-sequence from the sonnets of his peers, Wyatt and Surrey.

Not incidentally because of its incipience and relative simplicity, the persona of Astrophil seems to be a logical subject for a study of the workings of the absent presence. Unencumbered by the stream-of-consciousness thought processes of more modern personae, Astrophil's musings of the heart and mind are rather straightforward, thus facilitating our analytical task. That is not to suggest that as both persona and character Astrophil is simple or that his actions are simplistic. Indeed, his wit
tends to disarm, even on occasion to confuse, the reader. The vacillations in the emotions that denote his character serve to represent a lover who is totally human, driven by the combined complexities of the intellectual and sexual desires of the personality.

These vacillations and sometimes confusing emotional gyrations may be explained through Bakhtin's idea of "architectonics," which he discusses in *Art and Answerability*. Although the term is rather fluid, subject to Bakhtin's own revisions in his various essays, it can lend some credence to the concept of the absent presences that operate within and through the relationships of author/text/reader. If we view architectonics as the aesthetic wholeness that comprises a text, then we might begin to see how that text comes into being. Bakhtin argues:

*Every word in narrative literature expresses a reaction to another reaction, the author's reaction to the reaction of the hero; that is every concept, image, and object lives on two planes, is rendered meaningful in two value-contexts—in the context of the hero and in that of the author.*

(*AA* xxxi-xxxii)

Astrophil's narrative may develop within the mind of the persona who is also hero (the central character), but it is Sidney who provides the energia that creates the thrust of the story. The witty contradictions and resulting confusions, according to Bakhtin's analysis, suggest the
interplay between author and hero, between Sidney and Astrophil. They allow us, as readers, to see an individual in process, an individual whose identity we can help to formulate. From the rhetorical perspective, Astrophil is a present possibility who is defined by the absences that surround him.

Specifically, he is crafted through the combined efforts of writer and reader, absences that reach from both sides of the text in order to fashion a meaningful whole. The poet, operating from his position within the rhetorical triangle, commands discernible presence. Fashioned through the poet's energia, this authorial presence, according to Kimbrough, comprises artistic integrity. The literary ethos of the writer becomes the ethos of the work, the basis of its delight, the force of its persuasion, and the means of its instruction. Because of the doctrine of imitation, the work is not the writer; the work belongs equally to the writer and the reader since it is the marriage of art and nature.

(SPS 55)

All three positions of written discourse (writer/text/reader) thus mutually engage to produce meaning. The rhetorical triangle is alluded to by Plato, articulated by Aristotle, and put into play through God's Word. And the reading of Sidney's Astrophil and Stella suggests that a text is also filtered through and subtly fashioned by the personal experiences of the individual who explores the text.
Sidney, the student of classical rhetoric, incorporates a myriad of factors to effect successful communication between writer and reader. For Sidney, the rupture between wit and will, the need for Invention and energia, the recognition of the Christian Logos, the application of the Platonic Idea, and the absence of the reader all fuse into the integrated whole which is the meaningful text. One rhetorical or literary entity cannot adequately be considered apart from the whole, because each is contingent upon the other. Ake Bergvall addresses this rhetorical issue in The "Enabling of Judgment."

The thought that the poetical text should be considered in isolation, like a well-wrought urn or like a centripetal galaxy of signifiers, would have been unthinkable to a Sidney, a Spenser or a Shakespeare. Equally foreign to them would have been the notion that their poetry was the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, the self-expression of the poet. Nor would they have understood the more extreme exponents of reception theory that claim interpretative omnipotence for the reader. The ontology of Elizabethan poetics, as far as it is rhetorically oriented, resides not in the sender, the receiver, or the message, but in the process of communication which they together represent.

(19)

The responsibility of the sender (the writer) is great. His success, however, is in great part determined by the response of the reader. It is through manipulating the language and establishing subtle parameters of interpretation that the writer can hope to "meet" the reader in that textual instant of shared understanding. A
persona, such as Sidney's Astrophil, is crucial to establishing such an aesthetic encounter.

As Wolfgang Iser assesses in The Act of Reading, "grasping" a text and appropriating meaning is neither automatic nor assured for the reader. He describes a process of communication, a process through which the reader might come to a greater understanding of self, world, and creator. The process is often unpredictable, as the reader fluctuates between comprehension and confusion. But in order to be ultimately productive through the encounter, the reader must subject herself to "a dialectic of protension and retention, conveying a future horizon yet to be occupied, along with a past (and continually fading) horizon already filled" (AR 112). The benefits, according to Iser, outweigh the frustrations because the text can eventually become a subtle tool of instruction or behavior modification for the reader herself. He suggests that every reading moment sends out stimuli into the memory, and what is recalled can activate the perspectives in such a way that they continually modify and so individualize one another. Our example shows that reading does not merely flow forward, but that recalled segments also have a retroactive effect, with the present transforming the past.

(AR 115)

The "stimuli" to which Iser refers come primarily through the perspectives of characters within the narrative.

Through the language, the actions, and the reactions of the different characters, the reader might glean what Iser
calls "configurative meaning" --not plenitude, but at least partial understanding of self, world, and creator (AR 112).

Astrophil is not Sidney’s only character in the sequence, but he is the one whom the reader personally encounters through the text. Sonnet 14 alludes to a nameless, apparently well-meaning, friend who questions Astrophil’s motives for pursuing Stella, but we readers are not privileged with his acquaintance. The only other character whom we "see" is, of course, Stella, but we must look at her through the eyes of Astrophil. Waller warns that

We should not forget how firmly Astrophil and Stella is encoded within a male-dominated discourse. Stella is, like other Petrarchan mistresses, reduced to a disconnected set of characteristics, acknowledged only as she is manipulated by or impinges on her lover’s consciousness. She is entirely the product of her poet-lover’s desires. Sidney’s sonnets provide a theatre of desire in which the man has all the active roles, and in which the woman is silent or merely iconic, most present when she refuses him or is absent.

(EPSC 146)

The operative statement in this passage is "most present when she refuses him or is absent." Since Stella, in the "real" arena of Sidney’s recreated world of poetry, refuses Astrophil’s various appeals, the poet-lover reaches into another world to find solace for his pain. He retreats into his aesthetic world in order to make meaning out of what appears to be a meaningless, non-existent relationship. He finds comfort in words, words that like a
two-edged sword have both the power to destroy and the power to heal. Recognizing that his words of persuasive endearment to Stella were the cause of his beleaguered state, he bemoans "unhappie word" because "to my selfe my selfe did give the blow" (Sonnet 33). Astrophil thus assumes full responsibility for his situation. In doing so, he ultimately will be able to reconcile himself to Stella's absence.

Although he does not succeed in changing the external conditions (Stella's refusal), he does, before the conclusion of the sequence, alter the internal struggle, allowing his "erected wit" to supersede his "infected will." This recognition, however, does not come easily. He has to endure Stella's disdain; he has to come to terms with her public rejection of him. Wishing to be granted the intimacy she gives her dog (the famous lap-dog sonnet 59), Astrophil slowly and painfully begins to comfort himself through her absence. He imagines a world in which absence becomes the catalyst whereby Stella welcomes his erotic advances. He thus begins to "rewrite" his story of hoped-for love:

But when the ruggedst step of Fortunes race
Makes me fall from her sight, then sweetly she
With words, wherein the Muses treasures be,
Shewes love and pitie to my absent case.
Now I wit-beaten long by hardest Fate,
So dull am, that I cannot looke into
The ground of this fierce Love and lovely hate:
Then some good body tell me how I do,
Whose presence, absence, absence presence is;
Blist in my curse, and cursed in my blisse.
(Sonnet 60)

The prospect is not perfect because he recognizes that absence is a curse. Conversely, though, he admits that his curse is also his bliss. Somehow, and he does not seem to be fully cognizant yet of how, Stella’s absence will effect something that is either positive or productive.

Of course, for the poet-lover that will become the text, the artistic recreation of that which was hoped-for. It is at this juncture in Sidney’s sonnet sequence that we see the blurring of the relationship between absent presence as that which inspires the text and absent presence as that which becomes a character in the narrative. Steiner succinctly explains this process. According to his analysis,

"The word ‘character’ does not mean the actual marker on the page. . . . But it is, very exactly, the quantum leap between the character as letter and character as presence, and as a presence often far richer, more exigent of exploring assent, far more lasting than our own, which makes the point."

(RP 212)

The character of Stella, then, becomes more than a six-letter name; she becomes a viable presence, one who can impact the poet-lover’s writing and subsequently command the reader’s attention.

Ultimately through his artistic endeavor as poet-lover, Astrophil comes to view his detoured relationship
with Stella as that which fuels his artistry: "Thou art my Wit, and thou my Vertue art" (#64). Addressing his absent presence, Stella, who is both audience and player in his text, Astrophil comments on the correlation between life (the actual) and art (the recreated). Whether truly experienced (a priori) or "experienced" in the imagination (a posteriori), the physical and spiritual arenas of humanity provide the breeding ground for artistic creativity. It is the "stuff" of life itself that comprises art.

Most critics of Sidney overlook what seem to be his deliberate associations between Stella/art/wit, and Stella/Virtue/art. Inclusion of the pronoun "my" suggests a sequential relationship within the two sets of nouns: Stella, through Astrophil’s wit, becomes the poet-lover’s art; and Stella, because of that art, becomes the poet-lover’s greatest virtue. This sonnet, along with Sonnet 33, seems to negate Kalstone’s argument that "Always the victim, Astrophil appears to be involved in perpetual conflict, perpetual motion. He moves, a witty commentator, among personified virtues and public demands" (SP:CI 150). Astrophil is in "perpetual conflict, perpetual motion," but he is not a victim, especially if we consider a critical line in Sonnet 33: "But to my selfe my selfe did give the blow." Astrophil does not share with his readers precisely how he gave the blow. However, we have to infer that he
takes responsibility for his actions, that he chooses to make himself vulnerable through pursuit of love for Stella. If Astrophil were fully victimized by Stella, he as poet-lover would have become ineffectual and powerless. He would not have been able to use Stella's absence to empower the written word. Astrophil may not have been able to persuade Stella in her present presence to succumb to his erotic overtures, but he is fully in control of Stella's absent presence. As poet-lover, as commander of the written word, he can use the detoured relationship to create a text that speaks the universal language of love in its various dimensions—lust, desire, excitement, deprivation, pain, loss, and possibly even emotional regeneration through the written word.

That regeneration does not come without a struggle, a death-in-life and life-in-death struggle that finds expression through the written word. Just as the emotional upheaval disrupts Astrophil's sense of well-being, so the rhetorical disruption frustrates the reader. Astrophil's personal struggle epitomizes the operation of the hermeneutic spiral, the struggle of the reader as she seeks to glean meaning from a text. The reader thinks she has given meaning and "life" to a passage, only to find that meaning "killed" in subsequent sonnets. But the "killing" of one idea is supplanted by the "life" of another—a process that has the potential for continuing ad infinitum.
Kalstone describes this roller-coaster process that unites persona and reader:

Astrophil's role is one of sustained alertness and questioning in exercises of varied sensibility. We never are allowed to rest with an attitude, a gesture; for the next sonnet may exactly contradict an expressed view or remind us that a particular experience is momentary or that a newly discovered truth leads only to further complexities. Our delight depends...firmly upon the persona the poet creates for us--that of questioning critic.

(SP:CI 131-32)

As a willing and an active participant in the rhetorical process, the reader likewise finds herself in the death-in-life and life-in-death struggles that are experienced by the persona. She translates his aesthetically created experiences into meaning for herself.

Centuries ahead of his time as rhetorical theorist and literary critic, Sidney alludes to that issue which Kalstone addresses: the frequently painful process of coming to knowledge. Through his persona Astrophil, Sidney explains how experience is translated into poetry. The poetic duplication always falls short of the actual drama because the printed words necessarily herald the "death" of the experience. Nevertheless, the experience demands utterance by the poet-lover:

Stella, the fulnesse of my thoughts of thee Cannot be staid within my panting breast, But they do swell and struggle forth of me, Till that in words thy figure be exprest. And yet as soone as they so formed be, According to my Lord Loves owne behest: With sad eyes I their weake proportion see,
To portrait that which in this world is best.  
So that I cannot chuse but write my mind,  
And cannot chuse but put out what I write,  
While these poore babes their death in birth do find.  
(Sonnet 50)

Because of the reductive quality of language (both written and spoken, according to Derrida), Astrophil laments that his words are only a "weake proportion" of Stella and of his love for her. He recognizes that a part of the experience of real feelings, a part of the vitality of real emotions, necessarily dies when that experience is "birthed" upon the printed page. Just as absence denotes cleavage between lover and his unrequited beloved, so the printed word creates cleavage between writer and reader of the text.

This cleavage, however, may not always operate negatively. If it is applied to the reader in her search for understanding self/world/creator, cleavage may be that which prompts a greater search for knowledge. As Ong, in *Interfaces of the Word*, argues:

> Alienation, cleavage, is not all bad. To understand other things and themselves, to grow, human beings need not only proximity but also distance, even from themselves. Out of alienation, and only out of alienation, certain greater unities can come.

*(IW 47)*

Ong suggests that the "greater" unity is selfhood, a sense of human consciousness that enables the individual to find value in self, even in a self that has suffered rejection.
The recognition of "otherness," of something that is not me brings greater understanding of who I am. It is that which will prompt Astrophil to exclaim: "That in my woes for thee thou art my joy,/ And in my joyes for thee my only annoy" (Sonnet 108). Again, we see a sequential relationship: thee/art/joy which is in antinomical relationship to joyes/thee/annoy. Stella, having finally become his art, is now his joy; and it is only because of his joy of that art that he continues to allow those annoying thoughts of her to intrude into his imagination. The crisis has yielded a greater knowledge of self.

The willful process is much like the one that William Butler Yeats employs to create the emotional impact for his poetry. Repeatedly, Yeats proposed to Maud Gonne, apparently realizing all the while that she would refuse. Those refusals created material for the poet-lover, material that Yeats creatively manipulated to enact the emotional drama for his Beloved poems. The poet-lover's emotional suffering thus becomes, in the words of Yeats, a choice: "The intellect of man is forced to choose/ Perfection of the life, or of the work" ("The Choice"). This principle seems to be that from which Astrophil finds a modicum of solace. He begins to see a light that is flickering, but a light that is nevertheless visible, at the end of his emotional tunnel of darkness. It is "That presence, which doth give darke hearts a living light"
(Sonnet 77). But the presence that will give light to his
dark heart, and to the similarly dark hearts of his readers
(what Plato calls his like-minded interlocutors), is the
absent presence of Stella. No longer just a "marker on the
page," Stella, through the artistic prowess of her poet-
lover, has made what Steiner calls that "quantum leap" (RP
212) from absence to artistic presence—a leap into the
absent presence of aesthetics. Because Astrophil submits,
albeit painfully and reticently, to the death pains of
love, he succeeds in birthing at least the hope for
artistic pleasure.

The emotional journey to that possibility for pleasure
is neither quick nor easy. Astrophil will vacillate
between hope and despair for the rest of the sequence. I
concur with Kalstone who says that he must participate in a
"ceremony of grief" (SP:CI 177), but I assess that grieving
process differently. Rather than creating a permanent
slough of despondency, the grieving frees him from the
shackles of the absent "other." Sonnet 69 suggests the
beginning of this process:

Gone is the winter of my miserie,
My spring appeares, o see what here doth grow.
For Stella hath with words where faith doth shine,
Of her high heart giv'n me the monarchie:
I, I, o I may say, that she is mine.

In an ironically positive way, Stella's words of refusal
have empowered the poet-lover. They have returned to him
the "monarchie" of his verbal talent, his poetic expression, where he can reconstruct the tale of love, even saying "that she is mine" if he so chooses. In the form of the absent presence, Stella becomes his to do with as he wills.

Such an analysis is one that Sidney himself might have embraced because he, too, envisioned poetry as an epistemological journey—both for the poet and for the reader of poetry. Asserting that the poet, as "right popular philosopher," is to "teach and delight" the reader, Sidney advocates a process that will lead to "the most high and excellent truth" (Defense 608, 611, 615). Since poetry, according to Sidney, leads to truth, the poetic experience between poet and reader becomes one of intimate mutuality. Potentially, poetry can address every aspect of being—self, world, creator. Since the common denominator for all three is love of knowledge, the poet becomes philosopher. As the poet-lover/philosopher attempts to probe his inner being, as he strives to analyze his physical surroundings, and as he seeks to understand the Other who masterminded all that is, he begins his aesthetic movement toward universal knowledge.

In this respect, poetry becomes a valid branch of learning, for it is a mode of growth. Through the practice of Art, Imitation, and Exercise, the poet’s wit is sharpened; and, as it is sharpened, it becomes a more effective tool for the discovery of the essential
relationships and qualities of nature which are hidden beneath the 'second nature' of everyday reality. Through this ever-building process, each succeeding imitation becomes 'better'—more engaging and revealing.

(Kimbrough, SPS 54-55)

Applying the principles set forth in the Defense, Kimbrough argues that the poet is divinely gifted with the "Art"; inherent in that divine gift is an "erected wit" that enables him to comprehend and translate experience for his readers. Through his diligence and hard work, through "Imitation" of other poets, he can hone that gift. But it is primarily through "Exercise," primarily through subjecting himself to emotional growth which comes through the joy and the pain of life itself, that he can complete the poetic process.

In the final section of the sonnet sequence (Sonnets 74-108), Astrophil plots his painful "Exercise." The journey is one of wild emotional swings that range from his tentative hope for a consummated relationship to a sudden exhilaration, which is countered by harsh disappointment. But because of feelings that cannot be killed by memory, Astrophil allows the final frustration to be tempered by love, a love that begins in cupiditas (#72) but ends in caritas (#107). The Second Song, continuing through Sonnets 73 and 74, suggests Sidney's borrowing from Ovid, but, as Mary Chan reminds us in "The Strife of Love in a Dream" and Sidney's Second Song in Astrophil and Stella,"
the two lovers reach dramatically different conclusions. Having stolen a kiss from the sleeping Stella (Sonnet 74), Astrophil is bolstered by the possibility that the desire of his heart is within his grasp. In a blazon that pays tribute to her sensuality, he recognizes "That presence, which doth give darke hearts a living light" (Sonnet 77). Even that unresponsive presence, which sleeps through his kiss, sparks an ember of hope. It will be that same presence, which he eventually translates into her absent presence, that will sustain him through her final refusal. Unlike Ovid's story of Priapus and Lotis, Astrophil's love is not foiled by the harsh braying of a donkey; his love begins a transformation of the self.

The fifth and eighth songs are crucial to the sonnet-sequence because they reveal the inadequacy of words to express the complex emotions of love. The fifth song is too long to quote in its entirety, but particular lines are necessary to explain the process that enables the poet-lover to move from total despair into artistic confidence.

While favour fed my hope, delight with hope was brought,
Thought waited on delight, and speech did follow thought,
Then grew my tongue and pen records unto thy glory:
I thought all words were lost, that were not spent of thee:
I thought each place was darke but where thy lights would be,
And all eares worse then deafe, that heard not out thy storie.

......
But now that hope is lost, unkindness kils
delight,
Yet thought and speech do live, though
metamorphosd quite.

I thinke now of thy faults, who late thought
of thy praise,
That speech falles now to blame, which did thy
honour raise,
The same key op'n can, which can locke up
a treasure.

(1-6, 13-14, 16-18)

In retrospect, Astrophil describes how he has moved up the
emotional ladder from hope to delight. Prodded by thoughts
of possibility, he formerly recorded Stella's "glory."
Realizing "now that hope is lost," his writing proceeds
differently.

Because his perspective necessarily has changed,
because he has no legitimate claim on Stella, he must
"metamorphose" his "thought and speech." That
metamorphosis, another Ovidian influence, is effected
through his art--through the recreation of the Astrophil
and Stella drama. Placing himself in the position of
power, he proclaims that "The same key op'n can, which can
locke up a treasure." The "key" that he holds is that
which was given to "the first light-giver" (Sidney, DP
606). It is the key that enables the poet-lover to probe
the inner workings of human emotions and then, through his
art, to share his findings with others who may likewise
seek to understand the complexities of life--and of love.
The eighth song, however, recognizes that the art of the written word yields incomplete understanding. Because it is only a duplication, only an artistic translation of the actual experience, it necessarily is incomplete. The poet-lover, then, must solicit the assistance of love in order to replicate presence. He must temper her absent presence with his love:

But when their tongues could not speake,
Love it selfe did silence breake;
Love did set his lips asunder,
Thus to speake in love and wonder.  
(11. 25-28)

When the discourse is controlled by love, not simply by ravenous lust, the seemingly impossible occurs: Stella lovingly responds! Speaking for the first time in the sequence, Stella admits that indeed she does love Astrophil. However, as the more sensible of the two, she recognizes that her marriage to another makes their union impossible. Therefore, she forever dashes his hopes for a relationship.

She further admonishes him to refrain from using terms of endearment for her in public; calling her "Deere" would cause her to blush, potentially revealing her feelings for him:

Therefore, Deere, this no more move,
Least though I leave not thy love,
Which too deep in me is framed,
I should blush when thou art named.  
(11. 97-100)
Stella thus permanently removes her physical presence from him; Astrophil honors her request and no longer refers to her as "Deere." In "Leaving him so passion rent," she exemplifies the power of words. Hers were so brutally incisive that they pierce even his artistic talent, necessitating a mending of the near-fatal wound. Astrophil admits "That therewith my song is broken" (#104). His song is not dead; it is simply in need of repair, in need of redirection. This redirection comes through his translating the actual presence of Stella into her absent presence which will inhabit his poetry.

That translation is not easy because he retains the pain from the rejection. In Sonnet 88, he commands: "Out traytour absence." He admonishes her absent presence to leave, to give him some relief, but it does not. And the reason that it does not leave is that he is in control of it and does not really want it to depart. Granted he is miserable, but Stella's absent presence helps to assuage that self-imposed misery. Through it, he manages to reclaim the former passion. Then incorporating that passion into his poetry, he artistically captures those emotions that continue to fuel his love: "That living thus in blackest winter night,/ I feele the flames of hottest sommer day" (Sonnet 89). He may be in the blackest night of rejection, but focusing on Stella's absent presence sparks the flames of his desire. Her absent presence,
which he perpetuates through his memory, thus becomes an anodyne to his injured being. The medicine, however, is bitter. It causes him to wonder "What inke is blacke inough to paint my wo?" (Sonnet 93) And before he finds the effective ink, before he rewrites his tale of love, he necessarily must experience the grief; he must undergo a difficult process. It is admittedly painful, but the artistic rendering of the experience serves to assuage his emotional hurt: "Only with paines my paines thus eased be,/ That all thy hurts in my harts wracke I reede;/ I cry thy sighs; my deere, thy teares I bleede" (Sonnet 93). Through artistic reversal, in which he imagines Stella sharing his pain and hurt, Astrophil finds comfort in retributive musings. Thus begins the process through which he "kills" the would-be experience with the real Stella and "births" the artistic experience with her absent presence. He must come to accept that "O absent presence Stella is not here" (Sonnet 106). This is the first step to healing, the first movement toward regeneration. Stella is not, and never again will be, with him in full presence.

After making this pivotal admission, Astrophil turns to that which can comfort him--his art. He makes a significant move to reclaim that which Stella almost managed to take from him. In Sonnet 107, he admits to the sovereign place which Stella retains in his heart, but he commands her to submit that sovereignty to him:
Stella since thou so right a Princesse art
Of all the powers which life bestowes on me,
That ere by them ought undertaken be,
They first resort unto that soveraigne part;
Sweete for a while give respite to my hart,
Which pants as though it still should leape
to thee:
And on my thoughts give thy Liefttenancy
To this great cause, which needs both use and art.
And as a Queene, who from her presence sends
Whom she imployes, dismisse from thee my wit,
Till it have wrought what thy owne will attends.

These are the last of Astrophil's words that are directed specifically to Stella, and the message is clear: he once again intends to control his "wit" and his "will."

Astrophil, the poet-lover, thus echoes the words of his maker Sidney. If he is not master of his "erected wit," he cannot hope to rise above his "infected will."

Astrophil's struggle for mastery continues. He pleads with Stella to "dismisse from thee my wit," but he recognizes that Stella, who is now an absent presence, intrudes with her "owne will." We must remember, however, that he now furnishes her with that will. As poet-lover, Astrophil controls Stella's absent presence. He is the one who allows her intrusion. At the conclusion of Sonnet 107, Astrophil is not fully prepared to forego presence; he is not yet ready to reconcile himself to Stella's absent presence. He has not yet committed himself to an artistic duplication of Stella.

The sequence ends before we witness Astrophil's final move toward the reclamation of all his poetic powers.
However, the sequence itself indisputably proves his success. Having dutifully followed the instructions of his Muse to "looke in Thy heart and write," the poet-lover ends the beginning of his ontological journey. When he removes his gaze from Stella and focuses on his skill as a poet, he begins the transition from lover to poet-lover. The concluding sonnet suggests that his hope for a relationship with Stella has ended, but it also affirms that the future for his poetic greatness is imminent.

Incorporating fire imagery, Astrophil describes the process whereby his sorrow is purified into something worthwhile. Like the mythological phoenix that consumed itself by fire, then rose from ashes into new life, Astrophil likewise submits his love for Stella to the purifying fire of art. His love for Stella will not be destroyed; it simply will assume a new life: the life of art. He thus "rejoices in his love" because

That experience and its expression in poetry are fused in the dramatic soliloquy: love is experienced in the act of giving it poetic form. The lover persuades us that he truly loves because the poet does, so that the fact of loving becomes 'real' through fiction.

(Hamilton, SPS 14, 85)

Love continues to be the force that drives the poet-lover. It is only because of the painful vacillations of that love that he has a story to tell. It is only from the humiliating experience of rejected love that he has the drama. This recognition is what compels him to exclaim in
the concluding lines: "That in my woes for thee thou art my joy,/ And in my joyes for thee my only annoy." Without the woes, he would not have the joy. Without the refusal, he would not have his art. Without the absence, he would not have the absent presence that creates and perpetuates his art. Because of love that was for the presence and because of love that is for the absent presences of his beloved and of his reader, the poet-lover creates his text.

In the introduction to his *Visions of Presence in Modern America*, Nathan A. Scott adeptly summarizes the poet’s universal quest for presence:

The poetic world is rooted in the concrete particularity of lived experience; and poetic art, in its deepest aspect, is a way of loving the concrete, the particular, the individual. But, of course, to love is to enter the dimension of what the French Catholic philosopher Gabriel Marcel called presence; it is to approach a given reality out of a sense of its having the character of a Thou. . . . The intensity of its love for the quiddities and haecceities of experience conditions the poetic imagination, in other words, to view whatever it contemplates as ignited by the capacity for exchange, for reciprocity: it has the dimension of presence.

(2-3)

In a labor of love for his readers, Sidney, who speaks through his persona Astrophil, textually examines the "thisness" and the "whatness" of some of the inherent truths of his universe. Although those truths may be complex and may be difficult for the finite mind of his reader to comprehend, the task is not impossible. As she commensurately offers herself to a reciprocally loving
exchange, which demands both her emotional and her intellectual submission, Sidney's reader may enter that "dimension of presence" which allows an interlude of understanding.

Following a similar discussion, Theodore Spencer says that part of Sidney's greatness is that he "challenges" his reader into presence, almost forcing the reader into a "new reality."

This reality, this depth and pungency, we recognize as belonging not only to Sidney's awareness, but--as happens with all great poetry--as creative of a new awareness in ourselves. The art, the exercise and imitation which Sidney so assiduously practised ... resulted, in the best of the sonnets in *Astrophil and Stella*, in poetry to which all lovers of honesty and directness must continually return. In this essential respect, it is Sidney ... who is the most central of English poets in the generation that was soon to know Shakespeare. ("PSPS" 58)

And as we turn to Shakespeare, I will argue that he takes up the artistic gauntlet thrown down by Sidney. In his version of a sonnet series, Shakespeare, like Sidney before him and Dickinson after him, probes absence, presence, and the determinable effects of an absent presence as manifest through readers who come to a "new awareness of ourselves." Dependent upon neither total agreement with the text nor explicit identification with the persona, this "new awareness" is the result of temporary partnering of the self, who is reader, with the writer and his words.
Chapter 5
The Absent Presence
in
Shakespeare’s Sonnets

Shakespeare’s sonnets provide further substantiation of the role of the persona in the literary triangle of reader/writer/persona that originates from the rhetorical triangle of reader/writer/text. Focusing on the persona of Will, I suggest that Shakespeare provides a different example of a textually present, but physically absent, presence that dominates the reading experience. Specifically, his poet-lover, who also is his persona, assumes a major, rather than a tentative, role within the struggle of locating presence-in-absence.

Borrowing the words of Mary E. Hazard, who writes in "Absent Presence and Present Absence: Cross-Couple Convention in Elizabethan Culture," Will is the "fictive author" whose tale we read. Will is not Shakespeare, just as Astrophil is not Sidney, even though partial correspondence between poet and poet-lover may be discerned. However, Will, a character fashioned and empowered by Shakespeare, becomes a powerful player whose presence dominates the text. As

the fictive author [he] is freed to enact the role of poet and to create the monumental presence of his poem. All the while, by a subtle
twist of the paradox of absent presence, the historical creator of each cycle hovers as the real author to be more or less identified with the fictive sonneteer as the maker of the monument. The ambiguity of the degree of identification between the poet and his persona defies resolution whether the trope enacts absent presence, present absence, or some chiasmic middle state between the two. Certain it is, though, that the [text] is an enduring fullness of presence.

("CCC" 4)

In disclosing his technique for translating absence into presence, Will who is the "fictive sonneteer" shares a close, albeit "ambiguous," kinship to his creator Shakespeare. The reader witnesses a fluctuating textual interplay between creator and persona, akin to that which exists between Sidney and Astrophil. Poet is not poet-lover, but they function together within a dynamic relationship that aesthetically acts upon the reader.

Joel Fineman's text Shakespeare's Perjured Eye offers relevance to this and other issues that will be raised in this chapter. Regarding the dynamic relationship between poet-lover and poet which incites a dynamism between text and reader, Fineman comments:

Poetry has an energy, an energeia, and an enargia, that animates poetic imitation. Poetry is not simply a verisimilar imitation of the real, nor is it a sermonizing rehearsal of the ideal; it is instead a lively and an enlivening representation of the real through the ideal. (SPE 91)

My study presumes the opposite: it argues for a representation of the ideal, that which is desirable,
through the real. But, like Fineman, I, too, recognize a force, an energy, that necessarily attends any hermeneutically successful reading of a poem. It is the poet who provides the energia, the Aristotelian term that suggests actualization or "verisimilar imitation," but he also must, according to Fineman, create enargia, a clarity or vividness that also is necessary to engage a reader successfully. The reader's level of textual comprehension is directly proportionate to the writer's rhetorical, grammatical, literary, and creative skills (energia combined with enargia). The two authorial "energies" (which comprise the various skills of the writer) determine, in great part, any meaning that is gleaned by the reader.

We saw evidence of these aesthetic functions in Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*. As Sidney incorporates both energia and enargia, he creates a text of multiple absent presences. On the rhetorical level Sidney, as author, is absent from the text when the reader enters into dialogue with him; conversely, the reader is likewise absent from the poet when he creates the text. On the literary level, as depicted in the drama of *Astrophil and Stella*, the poet-lover's source of inspiration, whom he deems to be Stella rather than God, is physically absent, but creatively evident, as he put words to paper. She, too (though not by death), removes herself from the writer's physical presence
before she can become a character in his drama. As a means of communicating this personal drama to his reader, the poet Sidney allows his persona Astrophil to become his own voice, both absent and assumed, in order to "speak" to the one on the opposite side of the text.

I have argued in the previous chapter that Sidney's poet-lover Astrophil has, by the end of the sonnet sequence, successfully, albeit tentatively, empowered his art. Through an emotionally painful and frequently retrogressive process, he finally manages to follow the mandate of his Muse to "looke in Thy heart and write." Astrophil ostensibly begins with his looking outside himself, specifically to Stella, for inspiration. When she physically (and permanently) removes herself from his presence, he necessarily has to look elsewhere in order to continue his poetic profession. Forced to do so because of the circumstances of a thwarted relationship, he looks into himself, to his "heart," the emotional and artistic cauldron of creativity that will enable him to craft her absent presence into a viable entity within his poetry.

At the conclusion of the sequence, the reader senses that the poet-lover, now as consummate artist but still somewhat reticent persona, has begun to transcend his actual situation with Stella. Reconciling himself to move beyond the personal failure, "using mine owne fiers might," he has tentatively resolved to control, even to restructure
if necessary, his emotional relationship with his beloved Stella. And he will do this through his words, the artist's most powerful weapon "that works in me [to] prevail" (#108). Recognizing himself as a player in the struggle between emotions and art, Astrophil hands over the personal relationship he desires with Stella and yields himself to the artistic power that resides within. He thus moves rather quietly into his poetic world without Stella, resigned to reclaim something worthwhile from the ashes of their love. And he will do this from his writer's perspective in the rhetorical triangle of writer/text/reader.

Although Shakespeare continues the sonnet tradition of Petrarch and Sidney, he significantly reformulates it for his own artistic purposes. Commenting on Shakespeare's variation of the convention, Fineman says

that Shakespeare's sonnets--both the sonnets to the young man and the sonnets to the dark lady--markedly distance themselves from the tradition of idealizing poetry and poetic idealization that they inherit and to which they regularly refer. Shakespeare's young man sonnets characteristically imply that the poetics of praise they explicitly employ is somehow old-fashioned and exhausted.

(See 187-88)

Noting especially Fineman's assessment that Shakespeare offers his sonnets as a refashioning of the tradition that was "exhausted" and obsolete, we can observe some distinctive differences between his persona and Astrophil.
Although idealization may be a part of the relationship between Will and his Fair Friend, it is not the whole of the relationship. Departing from tradition, Shakespeare quite graphically relates the side that conflicts with the ideal. A major complication is in the form of the Dark Lady who confuses not only Will but who also complicates his relationship with the Fair Friend.

In the middle of this conflict and confusion is Shakespeare's persona who, unlike Astrophil, exudes authority rather than resignation. Giving significantly greater weight to the poet-lover's artistic power than does Sidney, Shakespeare creates a persona who frequently asserts that power grandiloquently, evidenced most noticeably in the eternizing sonnets directed to Will's Fair Friend: "So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,/ So long lives this, and this gives life to thee" (#18). Shakespeare's poet-lover, with flamboyance and a pre-Romantic idealism, presents his art as a tangible means for defying "old time," the ravager of youth and beauty (#19). So long as the printed poem survives, Shakespeare's persona asserts that his beloved will remain forever young within the created text. Hazard describes this dynamism as "the presence of the book which is created from the pain of nothingness and which materializes the paradoxes of absence and presence" ("CCC" 5). Through the gift of aesthetic perpetuity, the poet reifies the paradox of present-though-
absent. That art (a poem) is the physical entity that the artist leaves to his readers as evidence of artistic immortality—both for his beloved and for himself.

Specifying that tendency to which Sidney alludes in the concluding sonnet of his sequence, Shakespeare’s Sonnet 19 compares the process to that of the "long-lived phoenix." Pitting the power of his pen against the ravaging, debilitating effects of time, the poet-lover writes:

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion’s paws,  
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood.  
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger’s jaws,  
And burn the long-lived phoenix in her blood.  
Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleet’st,  
And do whate’er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,  
To the wide world and all her fading sweets,  
But I forbid thee one most heinous crime,  
Oh, carve not with thy hours my love’s fair brow,  
Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen.  
Him in thy course untainted do allow  
For beauty’s pattern to succeeding men.  
Yet do thy worst, old time. Despite thy wrong,  
My love shall in my verse ever live young.

The poet-lover cannot halt the ravages of time in his corporeal world any more than the mythical phoenix could prevent his burning to ashes. However, the poet, like his mythical counterpart, has a means for combatting total annihilation of the mortal self. He has his words on the printed page.

Circumventing boundaries of time and place, the words of the poet are perpetually reborn in the minds of his
readers. Like the phoenix who repeatedly consumes itself in fire, then rises from smoldering ashes to new life, the words of the poet are consumed and put away by one reader only to be given life by another. The cycle is one of continual flux. Since flux connotes fluidity and vitality, the text of the poet becomes his aesthetic and literary means of countering mortality. The phoenix is, as Stephen Booth reminds us in his notes on Shakespeare's sonnets, "a symbol of immortality" (SS 162). Although the poet's overt premise may be to eternize his beloved, his fundamental purpose, according to Jacques Maritain, is, much like the mythical phoenix which eternizes itself, to beget "the offspring of his [own] soul and his [own] spirit" (87). Sidney may be credited for recognizing the poet as maker (Defense 615), but Shakespeare is one of the first British poets who daringly unleashes and unashamedly proclaims the creative power of the artist. Through his created matter, which is the poem, the poet additionally creates communication with his readers.

And it is through this aesthetic communication that Shakespeare, more specifically than Sidney, explores the role of the writer as creator. In the triangular relationships within the rhetorical situation joining text/reader/writer and in the literary exercise engaging reader/persona/creator, Shakespeare's persona commands a remarkably vivid presence. Using his persona Will who is
poet-lover, Shakespeare focuses on the stance of the writer/creator of a literary work as he manipulates his "voice" to elicit a response from his readers. As a result of this endeavor, the persona of Will becomes the primary "character."

Not a character in the traditional sense of one who is presented through direct exposition, he nevertheless is "a distinct psychological entity" (Weiser, MC 45). His story (if we can presume to call it that) catalogs his emotional responses to the changing relationships he experiences with two significant others in his life, his Fair Friend and his Dark Lady. Presumably created neither to expose a life that parallels that of the author nor to expound an esoteric theory of human emotions, Shakespeare’s persona plots the realistic struggle of one who is seeking the ideal but who is bombarded by the destructive tendencies attending everyman.

Cautioning readers in their perusal of Shakespeare’s Sonnets, C. L. Barber argues that we should:

read the poems not as tantalizing clues [that point to Shakespeare’s personal life] but as expressions of man’s experience. When we do so, we find that, though they do not tell a story, they do express a personality. They are gestures of love, concern, disappointment, anger or disgust, profoundly and candidly conveyed. ("ESS" 6)

Human emotions and the inherent conflicts that emanate from "man’s experience" provide the material for Shakespeare’s
collection of sonnets. The poet draws upon his social milieu in the structuring of his art. His persona may, in part, be self-reflexive, but we should be ever-mindful that the persona who speaks from the text is an aesthetic creation who approximates psychic reality—replete with its hope, its joy, its anger, its jealousy, and its frustration. Frequently paradoxical and illogical (at times even ludicrous), these psychological confusions are the elements which define human experience.

We also need to remember that a cultural practice of Renaissance experience was that of intimate non-sexual, male-to-male relationships. G. Wilson Knight takes up this discussion in The Mutual Flame where he asserts "that the terms 'friend' and 'lover' were in Elizabethan England interchangeable" (MF 24). Developing from the premise that Will's relationship with the Fair Friend is one of intense passion, but not necessarily one of homosexual passion, I will argue that the difficulties of Shakespeare's poet-lover are similar, in kind, to those emanating from traditional friend-to-friend relationships which are driven by love.

Like W. Thomas MacCary, I disagree with Joseph Pequigney's homosexual reading of the relationship between Will and his Fair Friend. In his review of Pequigney's book, MacCary calls into question Pequigney's
claims that Shakespeare claims that he had sexual relations with another man which were satisfying, gratifying, even purifying. This seems a gross misinterpretation. Whatever the Sonnets are . . . they are not a paean to the carnal pleasures of homosexual passion.

(229)

Will's passion for the Fair Friend is real; it is the catalyst for the creativity that allows him to become poet-lover. Certainly not all of Shakespeare's readers will be poet-lovers, as is Will. But presumably all of his readers do experience intense, even passionate, friend-to-friend relationships that bespeak the same kinds of problems as those vocalized by Will. These problems, what Barber refers to as "gestures of love, concern, disappointment, anger or disgust" ("ESS" 6), create a point of identity between reader and players in the text. Because Shakespeare's readers should be able to relate (at least at some rudimentary level) to these typically human "gestures" set forth by the writer, they should likewise be able to bridge the gap between text and reader as they witness the musings of his persona Will.

This chapter will attempt to show how the writer uses his very human persona to engage the reader. The ensuing relationship, made possible through the literary text, branches off from the original rhetorical triangle of text/writer/reader. This literary triangle of reader/persona/creator affirms the writer's skill as he strives intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally to
"speak" to his readers. Employing sound rhetorical, creative, and literary principles (energeia and enargia), he wields his art through a textual medium that will allow him to communicate with his readers. Through his aesthetic endeavor, which is his poetry, he thus presumes to forge rhetorical relationships with readers in perpetuity—or for as long as "this [poem] with thee remains" (#74).

The Shakespearean passages that I employ to support my premise will be from Stephen Booth's Shakespeare's Sonnets, and I will rely heavily on the editorial comments made by Booth in his definitive work on Shakespeare as sonneteer. I readily concede that misinterpretation is potentially inherent with any reading of a work which has the complexity and magnitude of these 154 sonnets.

Referring to the problematic nature of Shakespeare's sonnet-sequence, Robert Crosman says that it is "difficult to read" ("MLNA" 476), while Knight recognizes that the sequence raises one "difficult subject" after another (ME 34). Booth clearly expresses, and provides partial solution, for this rhetorical conundrum:

Is it not an editor's aim to make a modern reader's experience of the text as like as possible to that of the audience for which it was written? Whenever an editor modernizes a text, he risks distorting it; whenever 'the plain reader' looks at an unmodernized Renaissance text, he risks distorting it; since one of them must stick his neck out, it should be the one who is trained and paid to do it. No editor
is likely to succeed perfectly in accommodating a modern reader and a Renaissance text to one another, but that is no reason to do nothing. (SS 448)

As Booth warns, we must recognize from the start that we who are modern readers of a Renaissance text will not achieve plenitude; we will not even approximate the understanding achieved by Shakespeare’s contemporaries. However, we still might engage in some level of meaningful discourse.

We are once again reminded of Kenneth Burke’s *Grammar of Motives*, a text that emphasizes the reductive quality of language, especially a language such as our English which has significantly evolved through the centuries. Because the language of the British Renaissance is different, connotatively and idiomatically, from that which we know and use, the applications that I make necessarily will risk distortion and reduction. As much as possible, though, I will rely on the erudite comments of Booth to temper that distortion so that it does not blatantly disregard the nuances of Shakespeare’s language.

Inherent in my analysis is the assumption that Shakespeare’s sonnets are indeed a sequence, although some scholars dispute such a premise. One such critic is Hallett Smith whose *The Tension in the Lyre* argues otherwise. Commenting on some of the differences that he
feels separate Shakespeare from his British predecessors, Smith writes:

In other collections of Elizabethan sonnets, most of which can be called sequences with better justification than this one can, the beautiful person celebrated is a woman... First of all, the Fair Friend has one quality in common with the heroines of Elizabethan sonnet cycles addressed to women: he is beautiful. But unlike the ladies of the other sonneteers, he loves the poet. (TTL 15-16)

I concur with Smith here on every point but the first one in which he argues that Shakespeare's work should not really be referred to as a sonnet sequence. Although Shakespeare may have written his sonnets over a period of several years and although they may have been written exclusively for friends rather than for the court, they nevertheless fulfill the determining criterion for a sonnet sequence: they deal with a singular subject, specifically with the subject of love. The 154 sonnets plot the poet-lover's literary movement from love to "love" (lust) and back to love. Love, in its various contextual and relational meanings, is thus the aesthetic theme that unifies the whole.

Shakespeare deviates otherwise from the sonnet sequence convention. Unlike Petrarch's and Sidney's sequences, both of which focus on a singular, recognizably unattainable relationship between the poet-lover and his beloved, Shakespeare relates, as Smith argues (TTL 15-16),
two opposing relationships. One is the ideal relationship, which is realized, between Will his beloved Fair Friend; the other is the physical relationship, which is consummated, between Will and his Dark Lady. Departing from both Petrarch and Sidney, Shakespeare does not keep the relationships of his poet-lover in abeyance; Will interacts fully with both his beloved and his mistress. Smith sees these two disparate relationships as one of Shakespeare's weaknesses. Arguing that the Renaissance bard focuses on dual relationships which are staggered (and I paraphrase) between an unrelated opening and an irrelevant ending, Smith concludes that Shakespeare writes a collection of "lyric poems, love poems associated in a loose way with two traditions, the Petrarchan love sonnet and the epigram tradition" (TTL 22).

I respectfully disagree. Shakespeare does not, as Smith would have us believe, treat two separate subjects apart from an equally separate beginning and ending. The two relationships (Will and the Fair Friend/Will and the Dark Lady) are important in Shakespeare's collection, but they do not provide separate foci within the sequence. Instead, they are the poet-lover's personal examples that elucidate the focus, which is love. As a preamble to the virtues of love, the procreation sonnets accuse the friend of narcissism and then instruct him to think of someone other than himself. Sonnet 10 contains what Booth
describes as "the first point in the 1609 sequence where the speaker implies close personal friendship between himself and the young man he is addressing" (§§ 149). The poet, already concerned and loving, urges him to "Be, as thy presence is, gracious and kind" (#10). As the persona's love for his Fair Friend grows to maturity, the power of that love is progressively more evident.

Even the concluding Cupid sonnets, which are usually viewed apart from the first 152, describe the power of pure, virginal love. I respectfully acknowledge Booth's reminder that Sonnets 153 and 154 are versions of the epigram, an extended conceit. However, since Shakespeare's two epigrams continue the subject of love, I think we dare not dismiss them as inconsequential to the rest of the sequence.

Michelle Burnham is one of the few critics who shares my view of the concluding two sonnets. In "'Dark Lady and Fair Man': The Love Triangle in Shakespeare's Sonnets and Ulysses," she writes:

Sonnets 153 and 154, dismissed by many critics as poor imitations of a generic style, offer a distanced and traditional perspective on the love Shakespeare has presented so personally in the preceding poems. In both sonnets, the poet is seeking a cure for the passion he feels for his mistress in the mythical waters of a seething bath.

Burnham's essay, whose purpose is to show a correlation between Shakespeare's poet/Dark Lady/Fair Man triangle and
Joyce's Leopold Bloom/Molly Bloom/Blazes Boylan triangle in *Ulysses*, goes in an entirely different direction from the argument that I propose. However, our assessments conflate at the reading of Shakespeare's concluding sonnets. Love, which is described therein, has a regenerative quality that can quench the "heart-inflaming brand" of even the lusty Cupid, transforming his passion into "healthful" love. Though some (even most) critics discount Sonnets 153 and 154, I counter that these sonnets show that the cupiditas of Cupid is tamed by virginal caritas. By including the last two sonnets, Shakespeare brings love full circle.

Love in its manifold complexities, then, is the singular subject that links the various sonnets, thus suggesting the conclusion that cumulatively they can indeed be viewed as a sonnet sequence. The different segments within the work suggest that the persona recognizes that human experiences are frequently treacherous, subject to inescapable detours of lust. Quite matter-of-factly, Shakespeare, through his literary sequence, exposes various emotional junctures along the road of humanity. The journey that he describes begins in impassive instruction (the procreation sonnets 1-17), then moves into an ideal loving relationship (the Fair Friend sonnets 18-126), only to be sidetracked by unabashed lust (the Dark Lady sonnets 127-152), which is quelled by the purity of selfless love (the Cupid sonnets 153-54). Shakespeare seems careful to
avoid moral judgments and self-righteous comments, even in
the Dark Lady sonnets. Weiser significantly notes that
"the speaker does not attack inconstancy itself; that
blemish is as basic to mankind as time is to physical
nature" (MC 20). Neither judge nor accuser because he
would be one of those judged and accused, the speaker
simply shares his quest to understand this particular
avenue of the human pilgrimage.

Shakespeare's sonnets develop through the persona's
involvement with the various kinds of love; the partitive
sections delineate the vacillations of emotions as he
viscerally reacts to each kind. Unlike Sidney, whose
sequence highlights the effects of Stella's absent presence
on Astrophil, Shakespeare focuses on the absent presence of
the writer as he communicates with his reader. The absent
presences of the Fair Friend who inspires the lover as poet
and the Dark Lady who arouses the lover as man are clearly
evident as characters within the loosely woven narrative;
but they function primarily to elucidate the absent
presence of the poet-lover who is artist, verbally exposing
the many shades of what is referred to as "love."

The poet establishes the subject of his verse rather
clearly in Sonnet 76:

Oh know, sweet love, I always write of you,
And you and love are still my argument.
So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again what is already spent.
For as the sun is daily new and old,
So my love still telling what is told.
(11. 9-14)

This passage reveals most of Shakespeare’s referents to the word "love." The term of endearment "sweet love" seems to suggest a person, namely "you" who is his Fair Friend. He is an integral player in the subject of "love" which comprises Will’s "argument." As Booth rightly assesses, Will’s argument (or "topic") is "colored by the sexual senses" (§ 265). However, the narrator allows for additional ramifications of the topic of love.

Incorporating the metaphor of changing clothes, Shakespeare suggests that this is an age-old subject that changes while being ever the same, one that fluctuates between constancy and infidelity. His story likewise will contrast changes that separate ideal love (caritas) from common lust (epithumia). Most of humanity aspire to the first, but they frequently succumb to the latter. And even more frequently, they tend to confuse one with the other, referring to the disparate acts by the same verbal expression "love."

G.B. Harrison’s editorial punctuation, which differs slightly from Booth’s, provides a possible clue in Sonnet 151 that lends support to the contrasting meanings of the word "love." In this, the bawdiest of all the Dark Lady sonnets, he places quotation marks around the word "love": "No want of conscience hold it that I call/Her ‘love’ for
whose dear love I rise and fall." If we assume that Harrison correctly punctuates the Shakespearean text, love in this context is not love in its pure state. Booth supports such an assessment, commenting that "'rising and falling' is singularly appropriate to the poem's theme of involuntary lust; the point is that it is not a metaphor" (529). This kind of love, then, is not caritas; rather, it is eros combined with epithumia. It is unabashed and uncontrolled lust. This kind of love has no redeeming or enduring quality; it lasts only for the moment of passion.

What Shakespeare's persona seems to admit in this sonnet (#76) is that this temporal "love" battles the ideal love that is desired by Everyman. Will suggests that, like himself, each individual determines the outcome of the emotional war within. He can allow unbridled passion to destroy that which is good, or he can temper that passion and elevate the good. Shakespeare thus reflects his knowledge of both Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic teachings. His sonnet sequence reveals a bipartite division of the soul, man's inner being. That which is uncontrollably passionate is the irrational side that determines emotions and bodily drives—both which frequently (perhaps even usually) defy explanation. Opposite that confusion is the rational side that houses the theoretical analysis and the practical understanding—intellectual gifts presumably granted the poet. These analytic and perceptive skills
then enable him to translate and conceptualize that understanding into poetry.

Fineman prefers to link Shakespeare's classical influence to the Neo-Platonists rather than to Aristotle. Noting the difference in genders between the beloved and the "loved," he argues that Shakespeare reflects the Neo-Platonic tradition of the double Venus, with the young man taken to be the image of spiritual and intellectual desire as opposed to the dark lady's embodiment of the material corporeality of lust. This would give a proper philosophic context to the different genders, since for Renaissance Neo-Platonism, the love of man for woman is more vulgarly appetitive than that of man for man.

(SEE 57)

Shakespeare's persona does respond viscerally to a "double Venus," to both of his "loves." The Fair Friend who is his beloved represents, as Fineman argues, the "spiritual and intellectual desire" of the man who is poet, and the Dark Lady who is his mistress represents, as Fineman argues, the "material corporeality of lust" of that poet who is also man. Neither plenitude for the reader nor complete integration for the poet, the split states (love/lust, male/female, true/false) suggest brief, but powerful, points of identity between reader and writer.

Whether Freudian, Aristotelian, or Neo-Platonic, or a combination of numerous psychoanalytic theories, Shakespeare comments on the dual natures of humanity. Clearly Aristotelian, however, is the persona's rational
approach to both of his "loves." Like Aristotle, Shakespeare attempts to rationalize passion, even the passion that causes the Fair Friend to yield to the seduction of Will's mistress (Sonnet 42, which later will be discussed in greater detail.) Shakespeare departs rather significantly from the Petrarchan-Sidneian model in that he approaches love more rationally, much more realistically, perhaps even more matter-of-factly than do his predecessors in the sonnet tradition.

The sonnet-sequence tradition itself contributes to a widening of the gap between writer and reader because this literary convention is no longer in vogue. This gap may necessarily have widened through time, but it does not preclude a relationship between reader and writer. In his text that explores the mind of Shakespeare's persona, Weiser describes one means whereby Shakespeare bridges the gaps of time and distance that separate reader/writer and reader/persona. He argues that Shakespeare creates a persona of universal appeal, something that Sidney fails to do with his Astrophil:

Neither does [Shakespeare] quite achieve an autonomous, sharply defined character like Sidney's Astrophel. The Shakespearean . . . sonnets center on what occurs in the speaker's mind. He has neither a local habitation nor a name [other than the generic Will] and thus becomes an Everyman confronting the most primary sorts of human experience.
According to Weiser, then, because Will as a character within his own script is not clearly defined, he becomes a "poetic Everyman." Because we cannot create a personality profile for him, his experiences are offered as typical experiences shared by those who read his text. In their typicality, they assume a kind of actuality about the individual reader in her world.

Weiser recognizes this sense of credibility throughout Shakespeare's sonnet sequence. According to him, it "enacts a process of tangible experience. . . . The speaker is not writing about time and change as abstract ideas but primarily about his own response to those ideas" (MC 13). To varying degrees, then, Will's journey is one that is taken by all of humanity. The reader observes him viscerally reacting to two emotionally and physically influential people in his life, his beloved Fair Friend and his seductively enticing mistress. Although the circumstances may initially seem ludicrous, his responses to the disparate individuals within those situations are anything but far-fetched. Rather than nebulous, unbelievable reactions, his are plausible emotional quandaries.
In "Making Love Out of Nothing at All," Crosman borrows the French term "autofiction" to describe how Shakespeare's sonnets project something other than fiction. He argues that since they have the "feel of ad hoc, of the day-to-day repetitions, misdirections, and incompletions of 'real life' as opposed to fiction," they require a "generic term" ("autofiction") to better describe what they accomplish ("MLNA" 472). Shakespeare's "story," though not factual, narrates a view of reality since "we seem to be living it as our own" ("MLNA" 473). Will's confusions, temptations, and emotions, at least temporarily, become those of the reader as she relates to the text.

These multiple quandaries reflect life's paradox of one who desires the ideal but who is enticed by that which is less than ideal--the conflicting states that comprise human nature. Will describes this emotional paradox as one breathlessly--and willingly--running into the clutches of Hell:

Mad in pursuit, and in possession so,
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme,
A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe.
Before, a joy proposed, behind, a dream.
All this the world well knows, yet none knows well
To shun the Heaven that leads men to this
Hell.

(#129)

Separated from his beloved when in the arms of his mistress, the speaker admits here that his lust for her adversely impacts his relationship with his Fair Friend.
Lust, that imprudent affection which is counter-productive to love, spiritually alienates the poet-lover from the absent presence of his beloved. If his love for the beloved, both in his presence and through his absent presence, is that which inspires Will's creativity, then lust becomes that which impedes his art. Nevertheless, he periodically puts that mutually beneficient relationship behind him and succumbs to illicit passion.

This passage is reminiscent of the Pauline admission, "For that which I do I understand not; for what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I" (Romans 7:15). Unlike his predecessor Sidney who incorporates spiritual dogma into his poetic theory, Shakespeare does not overtly espouse Christian beliefs. His poetry, however, suggests a working knowledge of Scripture. Like the conundrum voiced by Paul, Shakespeare's persona admits to a weakness of the spirit, one that leads him "to this Hell," his carnality, which is his relationship with the Dark Lady. Periodically unable to quell his sexual appetite, he submits to reckless passion. Through the persona of Will, the reader thus witnesses the basic struggle of humanity: the ongoing battle between the antinomical life-giving sources of human nature--the spiritual and the physical which are manifest through ideal love (caritas) and common lust (a combination of greed, which is epithumia, and intense sexual drive, which is eros or cupiditas).
The final section which is addressed to the Dark Lady is the one that is the most often viewed as unbelievable, perhaps even preposterous, as it explores Will’s emotional confusion in his relationship with his mistress. Fineman explains part of the reader’s difficulty:

because the literary tradition of the sonnet as a whole and the sonnets to the young man in particular both regularly and regulatively assume that love and praise self-consciously entail each other, the sonnets addressed to the dark lady present themselves as something strange—as something more outspokenly peculiar, more explicitly unusual, than anything we might associate with the troubled tonalities sounded by the epideictic sonnets addressed to the young man.

Because the reader is thrust from a poetry of praise of the young man to a poetry of dispraise for the Dark Lady, she is understandably—at least initially—confused. Confusion can be abated if she keeps in mind that as in the Fair Friend section, the focus of the Dark Lady section, too, is on Will as he relates to his mistress and struggles with her control over him. As Smith argues, "The real subject is not the Dark Lady, but the poet’s uncontrollable feelings about her" (TTL 53). Shakespeare’s sequence certainly raises more than one "real subject" about the condition of human nature, but control, or the lack thereof, is indeed a central issue. Because of unabated lust for the Dark Lady and a seemingly insatiable greed to
fulfill that lust, the poet-lover perceives himself and the object of his affections differently in Sonnets 127-152.

In these sonnets, he plummets into the arms of the Dark Lady as if he is powerless to stop himself, yet knowing all the while the falsity of their relationship:

When my love swears that she is made of truth,  
I do believe her though I know she lies,  
That she might think me some untutored youth,  
Unlearned in the world’s false subtleties.

... . . . . . .
Therefore I lie with her and she with me,  
And in our faults by lies we flattered be. (#138)

Based solely on physical attraction and sexual satisfaction, this relationship is awash with lies--his to her, hers to him, and the two "lying" together.

Booth describes the rhetorical and syntactical means whereby Shakespeare reflects the confusion inherent in such a relationship:

The fact of impossible but undeniable fusion manifests itself in puns (e.g. the various and variously contradictory significances fused together in the word lie), in syntaxes that simultaneously indicate two distinct logical relationships among parts of sentences... , in the fact that every assertion in the poem is demonstrably true and also a lie... , and in the fact that every assertion in the poem proudly reports a satisfactory relationship (the tone is downright smug), and a desperate one... The poem as poem is like the relationship it describes; every quality or identity the poem has or presents is fused with its opposite. (SS 477)

In this assessment of Sonnet 138, Booth describes the genius of Shakespeare as sonneteer: he manipulates the
language so that it supports those emotional situations which he describes. Specifically in this sonnet, Shakespeare crafts his language so that it reflects the desperate condition of the poet-lover who struggles in his relationship with the Dark Lady. As he strives with the emotional tension emanating from the destructive relationship, he necessarily incorporates puns that reflect the resulting negativity, the personal confusion that he experiences.

Will’s relationship with the Dark Lady, which is based solely on lust, seems necessary to this sequence in order to typify the struggle between lust and love. Perpetuation and immortality are not significant themes in the Dark Lady section, as they were in the two previous sections; rather, the unifying theme is momentary pleasure, the "love" that is "Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight" (#129). The terms "enjoyed" and "despised" are polar opposites, terms which connote Will’s inherent struggle. Booth explains the warring dichotomy:

'To enjoy lust' is to exercise it, to take sexual possession of the object lusted for. Here one’s understanding of ‘Enjoyed’ is necessarily colored by the fact that ‘to enjoy’ was commonly used specifically to mean ‘to use sexually,’ ‘to take sexual possession of.’ The word thus says ‘made happy,’ ‘satisfied,’ and, by synesis, introduces the person ‘enjoyed’ as an extra inferential object of both ‘Enjoyed’ and ‘despised’ (once lust is satisfied, the person driven by it despised himself, the passion, and the person desired and seized).

(SS 444)
Fulfilled lust, as Booth implies, is frequently more destructive than unfulfilled lust. It has the potential for serious harm, especially to the poet-lover. When the poet-lover's rational thought-processes are overpowered by the sexual energy that dominates such a relationship, even his creativity suffers.

Laurence Lerner, in "Ovid and the Elizabethans," recognizes a strong Ovidian influence in the way that Shakespeare and other Elizabethan writers depict relationships controlled by lust:

> Sex, generation and death are clearly the areas of human metamorphosis, and these are the themes of the Elizabethan epyllion. A story of sexual love can include or (more probably) end with happy fulfilment; it is more likely to contain frustrated, sublimated or perverted sex. This need not mean that the story itself is perverted: it is the nature of narrative that fulfilment can be implied through the treatment of shortcomings and indirection.

(128)

If, as Lerner notes, Will's feelings for his Dark Lady cause him to be "frustrated," and if, as Booth suggests, Will comes to despise himself because of his lustful actions, he most probably will encounter difficulty in writing. The frustrations are evident in creative "shortcomings and indirection"; the result is that he weakens both his energeia and his enargia. To write, a poet must spend hours in solitude, hours in which he might share ideas, thoughts, and experiences with a future reader. Despising the self correlates to despising those
actions which define the self, which, for the poet-lover, is the creative process. And when the lustful entanglements compromise the creative process, the work itself is necessarily compromised.

Weiser comments on the way that poetic integrity (or the lack thereof) is manifest in the poem. He explains that the intermittent clumsy style and frequently uninspired diction in the Dark Lady section prove that the poet-lover's artistic powers indeed are stymied because of his relationship with the Dark Lady. Analyzing Sonnet 138 ("When my love swears that she is made of truth"), Weiser comments that "The results of this shift [from Fair Friend to Dark Lady] are felt in the unimaginative texture of the poem's language. Its diction is everywhere colloquial and threadbare, while figurative expressions have been entirely excluded" (MC 151).

I heartily agree that this sonnet exudes clumsiness as it continues: "I do believe her though I know she lies,/ That she might think me some untutored youth,/ Unlearned in the world's false subtleties." However, I do not think we dare go so far as to say that "figurative expressions have been entirely excluded" in the Dark Lady sonnets, to the point that "their speaker is no longer in control of his imaginative powers" (Weiser, MC 184). Indeed, Sonnet 130 ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun") abounds with figurative language. But I can agree that the texture and
the diction are highly altered in most of the Dark Lady sonnets. Might not the poet-lover purposefully offer this recognizable difference as the literary means to shore up his argument that ideal love (caritas) is beautiful, productive, and fertile while common lust (epithumia combined with eros or cupiditas) is deceitful, destructive, and barren? The intermittent cessation of his creative power might be, as Barber suggests, "the broken lines made by Eros" ("ESS" 26). Will's poetic lines that depict physical pleasure are offered in sharp contrast to the fluid "line" that describes "the better part of me" (Sonnet 74), which is the burst of poetic genius that results from his relationship with his Fair Friend.

Shakespeare is not the only British writer to explore the harsh realities of lust fulfilled. Chaucer certainly does in Troilus and Criseyde as does Milton in Paradise Lost. Especially Milton's text graphically depicts the extreme outcome of love gone awry--of love completely subsumed by lust. Milton's agenda, which was to "justify the ways of God to men" (I.26), is markedly different from that of Shakespeare in his sonnets. Avoiding theological solutions, Shakespeare develops his sonnets from the assumption that lust is an unavoidable expression of human nature. Will regularly encounters temptation--both from the Dark Lady who would lead him astray sexually and from
the Fair Friend whose actions with another could compromise him spiritually.

Sonnet 32 introduces a rival poet who vies for the patronage of Will's Fair Friend. This rival, and perhaps "better" poet, may be more skilled in the implementation of his art, but he lacks something that Will views as necessary to the artistic process: his artistic endeavors do not exemplify the love of poet for his beloved. Since this love is manifest in the words themselves, the reader will recognize and share in the loving process as she enters into the text. Will repeatedly contends that his poems to the Fair Friend will endure the test of time because they are a witness of love rather than a mere artistic exercise in what he refers to as poetic "style."

Shakespeare thus approaches the art of literary creation in a bold manner, suggesting that an aesthetics of love operates separately from theology and that the artist functions independently from his Creator. Continuing the practice of Chaucer and Wyatt who significantly rely on diction and metaphor to exhibit their poetic prowess, Shakespeare creates a persona who differs from that of Astrophil. Whereas the poet-lover in Astrophil and Stella begins to claim full control over his literary creation only at the conclusion of the sequence, Will asserts his power early in his work: "All in war with Time for love of you,/As he takes from you, I engraft you new" (#15). Booth
argues that Renaissance readers of Shakespeare's early text might have had difficulty discerning his use of "engraft" in this passage, since the word can mean both "writing verse and urging the young man to marry" (SS 158). However, as modern readers who have the advantage of reading Shakespeare's work backwards, we can perceive the meaning quite clearly in this couplet: the poet professes his literary ability to perpetuate the beauty and the youth of his beloved Fair Friend through his written words.

Although ambiguous meanings can be gleaned from many of Shakespeare's lines, as Anne Ferry argues in The "Inward" Language, I would counter that those passages in the sequence that relate to the power of the artist are the most straightforward, the most unambiguous of the collection. Through his persona Will, Shakespeare lauds the eternizing power of the artist. His premise is that the poet's talent with the written word can achieve what mortality cannot: a viable presence that speaks to a reader centuries after the literary "death" of the persona and the physical death of the writer. Most probably it is Sidney's allegiance to his Divine Maker that causes him to tiptoe tentatively in this area that Shakespeare boldly treads. Unlike Sidney's Astrophil, Shakespeare's poet-lover never yields submissively to his artistic ability. Even as Will claims and maintains a powerful presence within his poetic medium, however, a paradox is evident:
he does not manage to control his personal relationships with his Fair Friend, with his Dark Lady, or with the two of them linked together with him in what seems to be at least an emotional ménage à trois.

This is the tension that dominates the sequence as it points up the weakness and the vulnerability of the poet-lover while it simultaneously reflects the inadequacy of his language to express those human characteristics.

According to Waller:

> Shakespeare's sonnets see the nature of the self as intimately bound up with sexuality. But nowhere among earlier collections are the extremes of erotic revelation offered in such rawness and complexity or with such obsessive anguish over the glorious failure of language to constitute or reassure the vulnerable self. They are a unique imaginative proving-ground where the feelings about love and the language traditionally used to capture them intermingle with and contradict each other.

(EPSC 221)

The intermingling contradictions of self/other, Fair Friend/Dark Lady, love/lust, vulnerability/recklessness, poetic art/uninspired words pulsate throughout the sequence. These antinomical impulses dominate the text. As we explore these in relation to Shakespeare's poet-lover Will, we can begin to see the power that the writer of a text grants to his created voice.

Will's self-admonishing plaint, "O let me true in love but truly write" (Sonnet 21), may be, as Ferry says, a "deliberate echo of the opening of Astrophil and Stella"
(II 170), but Shakespeare filters the echo through his own perception of the poet-lover. The primary difference is that Astrophil has to be instructed by his Muse to "looke in thy heart and write" (#1), while Will seems to suggest that the power comes from himself. Because his Muse is either "sick" (#79), "tongue-tied" (#85), "resty" (#100), or "truant" (#101), Will is compelled to find inspiration elsewhere. Early in the Fair Friend section, he leads us to believe that his beloved assumes the role of Muse. In Sonnet 38 he instructs his friend: "Be thou the tenth Muse, ten times more in worth/ Than those old nine which rhymers invoke."

Later sonnets, however, shift the source of poetic power from the friend to the poet's own artistic genius as the two (poet-lover and beloved) are spiritually meshed together. The poet claims, "You still shall live—such virtue hath my pen" (#81). Booth sees this as a pivotal sonnet, one in which the speaker first realizes the significance of his role in relationship to his Fair Friend, recognizing and asserting his poetic ability as the means through which that relationship might be perpetuated.

Paradoxically by giving that love away, specifically by using his talent to write verse about his beloved, he increases the value of that love:

Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough thou know'st thy estimate.
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing,
My bonds in thee are all determinate.
For how do I hold thee but by thy granting?

Shakespeare's persona here hints that the artist's paradox is comparable to that which is experienced by the Christian: "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:39). As artist who "releases" his love to the printed page and thereby increasing the "worth" of that love, he necessarily must "lose" or give away that same love so that others may share in that which is too "dear" for one individual to hold selfishly to himself.

Much like Sidney's Astrophil, who presumes to couple love with his "erected wit" in order to glean understanding of self, world, and creator, Shakespeare's poet-lover also links love with an art that might be beneficial to his readers. As Shakespeare's persona perpetuates his relationship with his beloved through the poetic medium, he leaves a trace of common human experience: love that produces something worthwhile, which here is a work of art. He allows the love that is in his heart to produce the art that subsequently offers an understanding of the individual and his confusing world.

I disagree with Ferry who says that "Neither [Sidney nor Shakespeare] can truly name what is in the heart; he can only call it 'love,' which means everything and nothing" (IL 208). Shakespeare quite successfully defines
love. He plots and differentiates its various meanings, showing the positive and negative results of each: ideal love is productive and fosters creativity; pure lust is destructive and maligns creativity. Under the umbrella of love, Shakespeare relates a poet-lover who wields a power that is greater than that of one who simply adheres to the structure of a literary convention, which here is the sonnet sequence.

Drawing from his own literary palette, Shakespeare does not color within the prescribed lines of the sonnet tradition. Instead, he dares to explore unusual and, perhaps to early seventeenth-century readers, shocking possibilities. Specifically, he relates two relationships, one in which the beloved is his male friend and the other in which the "loved" is his mistress. He thus fashions a work of art that exemplifies universal truths about complex human relationships—relationships which can either soar in love or languish in lust. And in the midst of these truths about man in his frequently confusing emotional world, he recognizes and heralds the power of the poet—the power that compensates for personal disappointments and tangled relationships in the poet-lover's life.

In relating that life, Shakespeare significantly departs from earlier sonnet-sequences: Will's beloved does not stand aloof and removed as do Laura and Stella, the objects of Petrarch's and Astrophil's love. Instead,
Shakespeare depicts a reciprocally loving relationship; the Fair Friend is the beloved young patron willingly supporting Will, the older and wiser acclaimed artist. Their relationship suggests overtones of the pederastic convention of Greek society in which the primary goal was to effect reciprocity between a wise mentor and his willing interlocutor. Several sonnets early in the middle section affirm this reciprocity, which is mutuality of their love: "Thou gav' st me thine [love and perhaps money], not to give back again" (#22). "Then happy I that love and am beloved/ Where I may not remove, nor be removed" (#25). Especially Sonnet 25 contains a bit of bravado in its claim that the relationship will remain static in its bliss, because we know that he and his beloved part for a time.

The separation and the beloved's ensuing indiscretion cause their relationship to fluctuate with the passage of Time, but here in Sonnet 22 the poet-lover unequivocally establishes that his relationship with the young man is mutually beneficial to each of them. As such, their union is grounded in reciprocal love; it is one that will grow and mature in spite of the ravages of Time and the hurt of deception. This reciprocity, according to Barber, is "expressed with an unparalleled fullness and intensity. It is love by identification rather than sexual possession" ("ESS" 18). Because he is not above reproach, because he too cannot resist temptation, Will identifies with his Fair
Friend's infidelity. As he sees the similitude in their physical drives, he also recognizes their like-mindedness in spirit. Deeming their like-mindedness the more important of the two because it unites rather than separates, he refrains from judging his friend's indiscretions.

Differing with J.W. Lever who, in "The Poet in Absence," suggests that the sonnets of separation "show a slackening of tension" (77), I suggest that they reveal a heightening of tension. This heightening, caused by physical separation, enables emotional growth, which then allows transcendence--for the poet-lover and for his readers. By distancing himself from his beloved Fair Friend, he can more clearly assess their relationship. The result is that the poet-lover achieves a maturity not previously indicated. A new level of being, what Knight refers to as some point of "higher integration" (ME 28), is noted especially in the poet-lover's painful response to his knowledge of the sexual commingling of his "two loves."

Even after the Fair Friend succumbs to the seduction of Will's mistress, Will refuses to discard what he comes to know is a meaningful relationship with his friend. After the betrayal, we can envision his own words of an earlier sonnet echoing in his brain:

And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud.
Authorizing thy trespass with compare,
Myself corrupting salving thy amiss,
Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are;  
For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense--
Thy adverse party is thy advocate--
(#35)

In this complicated sonnet, the first to indicate a breach
in Will’s relationship with his Fair Friend, Will assumes
the role of advocate rather than of accuser. Although he
does not explain here the "sins" committed by the Fair
Friend, the reader senses that Will dismisses them as a
generally accepted imperfection of humanity--one that
certainly Will himself shares with his friend. This
imperfection is as common to humanity as the cankerworm is
to the fragrant rose. Just as the cankerworm "consumes the
bud from within" (Booth, SS 190), so the dalliance of lust
can erode love between individuals. The Dark Lady sonnets
later will affirm that this flaw, which leads to the
friend’s "sins," is epithumia, the unharnessed lust that
causes one reach out for that which he desires and does not
have--be it fame, financial gain, or a friend’s mistress.
Because Will is human, he is hurt by his friend’s
duplicitous actions.

In true Aristotelian fashion, Will seeks a logical
explanation, an acceptable and convincing means, to
overcome the betrayal. Specifically, he tries to
rationalize the Fair Friend’s sexual indiscretion with his
Dark Lady, depicting himself to be above the counter-
productive reaches of jealousy: "Loving offenders, thus I
will excuse ye: / Thou dost love her, because thou know'st I love her" (#42). At this point in the sequence, we are not convinced of his claim to be above jealousy; however, his statement becomes more credible when he returns from a three-year separation from his beloved. That time of absence from his beloved hones his artistic skill, as evidenced in the later sonnets to his Fair Friend.

Barber comments on the intervening "tortuous sonnets," the ones that refer to Will's being wronged by his beloved and his mistress:

Indeed, bitter as these sonnets are, they express a response to the humiliation life has brought which moves in the direction of art. Most men would bury the event in silence, or else turn injury into anger. Shakespeare turns injury into poetry. The very act of writing about the betrayal is a kind of acceptance of it. ("ESS" 23)

Having matured in his love, having reached a new level in both his love and in his art, Will manages to forgive the friend's sexual indiscretion and subsequently to allow that indiscretion to become a statement within his art. He then seeks "To give full growth to that [love] which still doth grow" (#115). These sonnets are generally viewed as the most successful in the series.

In them, he idealistically proclaims that neither Time, nor separation, nor betrayal can kill that love which is true. Those adverse forces may temporarily affect such a love, but they are powerless to quench it. What happens
to the poet-lover in the interim imposed by Time, separation, or betrayal is that his love is refined to a higher level of selflessness. This is not an irrational kind of selflessness that blinds Will to the truth about his beloved; rather, it is a painfully honest selflessness that allows him to see his beloved's imperfections while recognizing that they pale through the lens of love. He writes: "My love is strengthened, though more weak in seeming; I love not less, though less the show appear" (#102). Having reached a new plateau in his love for his friend, he can more critically assess their reciprocal love for the other.

By making himself vulnerable to love, and thus vulnerable to hurt, he grows as both poet and lover. The tension in this paradox of love is frequently that which fuels the greatest artistic productivity. Because of its value to the poetic process, the poet (such as Will) must be willing to experience love in all its confusing possibilities. The outcome of love, as with all human relationships is, as Waller assesses, "unpredictable and risky. . . . And yet without vulnerability and contingency, without the sense of being thrown into the world, . . . there can be no growth" (EPSC 229).

Weiser's terms "vulnerability and contingency" correlate to "novelty and contingency" in the argument made by Hall in Word and Spirit. Discussing the "historical
consciousness," which emanates from the psychic world-view, Hall writes that the:

future becomes present as that which has really not yet happened, as an awesome realm of possibility and contingency. The historical sense of future brings with it a sense of reality to novelty and contingency. In this consciousness, reality is no longer imagined to be complete and self-contained, closed and fixed, static and eternal. Now the world is pictured as essentially open, developing, unfolding, from its original creation to ever new creative possibilities.

(MS 31)

Separation from his beloved allows Will, the historically conscious poet, to recognize that his relationship with his beloved is not doomed by the indiscretion with the Dark Lady. Because he can perceive both the present and the past while simultaneously envisioning the future, he can assess that theirs is a relationship in flux. Though it may be "unpredictable and risky" (Weiser, MG 229), their relationship is worth salvaging because it ultimately is good and productive, opening up "to ever new creative possibilities" (Hall, MS 31). And it is through those "creative possibilities," through his poetry, that Will works to salvage his relationship with his Fair Friend.

This rescue process is not carried out while he looks through rose-colored glasses. On the contrary, he critically examines his relationship with his beloved. He then employs "the skills of the perfumer, the alchemist, [and] the flatterer" as the means whereby he will transform
actuality into art; afterward, he supplies "the colors of the dyer and the rhetorician," leaving his readers poetic evidence of a relationship that is good in spite of its precariousness (Ferry, IL 41). Continuing the image of "loathsome canker" first provided in Sonnet 35, Will compares the Fair Friend's betrayal to "a canker in the fragrant rose" (#95). And, like the perfumer who distills the "sweetest odors" (#54) from the petals of those corrupted roses that fall off the vine, the poet-lover uses his art to transform his imperfect beloved and his culpable mistress into something worthwhile--either a poetry of praise for that which is beautiful or a poetry of dispraise for that which is unattractive or cankered.

For the poet-lover, this distilling process is his art. As he yields both to love and to art in order to perpetuate his beloved, the poet-lover achieves another, perhaps an even more desired end: he likewise immortalizes himself. Barber comments on this process:

Loving by identifying with the person loved can have a special scope for Shakespeare which it does not have for people who are not poets, because he can realize his friend's beauty and value in words. To realize the relationship by turning it into poetry gives a fulfillment which actually is physical, in that the poem, as utterance, is a physical act. That the writing of a sonnet provides a kind of physical union with the friend explains at least in part, I think, the recurrent emphasis on the sonnets as rescuing the beloved from death. . . . But the sustaining reality in the theme of immortality is that the poet, in the act of writing the poem,
experiences a lover’s sense of triumphing over time by becoming one with great creating nature as embodied in another being.  
("ESS" 18-19)

Somewhat as perfume, which perpetuates the odor of the living physical rose, the printed poem immortalizes the relationship between the poet-lover and his beloved. Additionally, the relationship between poet-lover and his art is akin to the correspondence between a rose and its distilled perfume: the rose is a physical, concrete presence whose qualities are transformed into an absent, albeit intangible yet noticeably viable, presence of fragrant fumes.

It is through this distillation process, through a kind of metamorphosis of the corporeal self into the written word, that the artist textually confronts the reader and thus perpetuates the authorial self. R.S. White does not directly address Shakespeare’s Sonnets in his essay "Metamorphosis by Love in Elizabethan Romance, Romantic Comedy, and Shakespeare’s Early Comedies," but some of his conclusions apply to them as well. Crediting Shakespeare with patterning emotional flux after Ovid’s Metamorphosis, White assesses the role of love in Elizabethan writings:

love precipitates a transformation that is first and foremost internal, a change of feelings so drastic that it causes a noticeable alteration in conduct. The change may be reflected externally, either involuntarily in a change of shape or form (on the model of Ovid’s Metamorphosis), or
voluntarily, as when a lover disguises himself in order to place himself closer to his beloved. To the sufferer, the process may be sudden or gradual, conscious or unconscious, violent or unobtrusive, welcome or terrifying, morally acceptable or repulsive. Change caused by the emotional shock of love holds equally a threat and a hope. It shows that we are capable of growth by adapting to new emotional pressures, but the growth is at the expense of shedding an old identity, painfully acquiring a new dependence upon another person.

(15)

For Elizabethan writers, love is dynamic, effecting visible changes in the individual. White calls it a "magnetic and mysterious force" which, if it is caritas rather than cupiditas, can result in positive emotional growth for the lover, or poet-lover. Unfortunately, the positive will be sustained only temporarily.

Shakespeare goes on to say that when (not if) the two loving partners disappoint and betray the other, their relationship will endure because it is bound by mutual love:

That you were unkind befriends me now,
And for that sorrow which I then did feel
Needs must I under my transgression bow,
Unless my nerves were brass or hammered steel.
For if you were by my unkindness shaken,
As I by yours, y'have passed a hell of time,
And I, a tyrant, have no leisure taken
To weigh how once I suffered in your crime.
O that our night of woe might have remembr'ed
My deepest sense, how hard true sorrow hits,
And soon to you as you to me then tend'red
The humble salve which wounded bosoms fits!
But that your trespass now becomes a fee;
Mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransom me.

(#120)
This sonnet, which Booth describes as a "paradox of beneficial ill" (SS 404), incorporates a medical metaphor to describe the potentially rejuvenative benefits of a love which ultimately yields good. The sonnet tells of two who have each been wronged by the other. Fortunately, however, the "humble salve," which is the healing balm of selfless, reciprocal love, enables forgiveness to discount the trespasses. In Sonnet 154, he will call this same salve the "healthful remedy" that repairs even the most lustful heart--that of Cupid himself. Since the relationship between Will and his beloved is one of reciprocity, one that is grounded in love, Time may alter but it cannot destroy the substance of their feelings.

To convince his reader of the validity of his words, Shakespeare calls into play the Aristotelian principle of the poet (speaker) whose ethos (character) is an integral part of the rhetorical (artistic) process (Rhetoric 2.1. 2-3). Shakespeare's medium is art, rather than judicial deliberation or pure persuasion, but the writer's role is equivalently significant in aesthetic communication as in other forms of rhetoric. The artist's poetic "dialogue" with the reader reflects not only the emotional tension between the characters within the drama, but the text likewise says something notable about the poet himself.

Fineman comments on this connection between Shakespeare and Aristotle:
As early as Aristotle, however, it is recognized that the rhetorical magnification praise accords its object also rebounds back upon itself, drawing attention to itself and to its own rhetorical procedure, drawing attention, that is to say, to its own grandiloquent rhetoricity.

(See 5)

As Shakespeare's Will writes sonnets in praise of his male beloved and sonnets in dispraise of his female lover, the text necessarily "rebounds" back to the self who composes those sonnets. As Shakespeare's persona lauds the creative power of the artist, he thus magnifies the true legacy of the poet-lover, which is that "a man's [own] spirit can be preserved in poetry" (Barber, "ESS" 19). Through his words, he can distill and fashion for perpetuity that which he would have them know about himself, his beloved, his mistress, and their complex interwoven relationships. And the knowledge that he shares with his readers is that which is perceived, filtered, and then crafted through his creative powers that lend a quality of immortality to that which rises from the printed page.

In analyzing the concluding line of Sonnet 65 ("That in black ink my love may still shine bright"), Weiser argues that for the poet-lover, "belief in poetic immortality is an act of faith. The speaker has retained that faith despite" (Mc 71) the overwhelming disappointment that accompanies his relationship with his Fair Friend. Taking Weiser's faith-act analogy a step farther, I would add that "belief in poetic immortality is an act of faith"
for the beloved of whom the poet-lover writes and the
reader for (and to) whom the poet-lover writes. As the
reader encounters both poet-lover and beloved through the
printed word, she affirms that both continue to live, at
least for a time, through the intellectual and emotional
responses that are elicited by the persona who "speaks"
from the text.

Sonnet 116, perhaps the one most easily recognized and
the one most frequently quoted from the sequence, expresses
the levels of love, art, and perpetuity that Will gains
through his literary journey into love:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no, it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be
taken.
Love's not time's fool, though rosy lips and
cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come.
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out ev'n to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Booth suggests that this is one of the few Shakespearean
sonnets that we might take at face value (SS 389). Weiser
more specifically argues that Shakespeare's "use of
negative definitions [of love] constitute an experiential
test by which to recognize false changing love" (MC 79).
Capitalizing on Weiser's reference to "test," we can
extrapolate that the poet provides the litmus paper, his printed poem, whereby his readers might judge the quality of love his persona exhibits through each of his relationships.

As an additional benefit to the reader, she can then apply these same principles to her own experiences, allowing the writer of the aesthetic text to touch her life, which is her reality, in a personal, tangible way. In contemplating the art that reflects life, she simultaneously reinforces the relationship between text, writer, and self as reader. Perhaps not an overtly conscious act, the reader nevertheless affirms this productive dialogue with the writer whenever she picks up a text to read it. As Booth suggests, the lines that she reads may not even require explanation in order to effect a result (SS 389). Because words have an almost inexplicable ability (what Gorgias called "magic") to empower their "beholder" to interpret and apply those same words to her personal life, they establish a corporeal link between reader and writer.

An equally powerful link is the one between poet and his text, between poet and the words that he leaves to his readers. The poet's words become his textual legacy to the world; or, as Sidney would say, his poetry becomes his "epitaph." The concluding couplet of Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 ("If this be error and upon me proved,/ I never writ,
nor no man ever loved") affirms not only the relationship between the poet-lover and his beloved, but it also provides evidence of the love between them. Shakespeare thus echoes Sidney's imperative "that while you live, you live in love, and never get favor for lacking skill of a sonnet" with its inherent promise "and, when you die, your memory [will not] die from the earth for want of an epitaph" (Defense 624). Shakespeare's sonnet sequence provides evidence that his poet-lover follows Sidney's instruction to "live in love" so that he might use his skill with words to carve his epitaph, which is the poetry he leaves behind.

The chisel that the poet uses to carve such an epitaph is necessarily paradoxical; in order to assess the emotional fluctuations that threaten the rational equilibrium of humanity, he necessarily must expose humanity as it exists—the pure alongside the impure. While Shakespeare plots Will's emotional journey in this sequence, we see an individual who applies this test to his own life as he struggles between ideal and sexual realms of love. Evidence of this struggle is manifest through the conflicting, and more frequently ambiguous, ranges of Will's emotions in the sequence. Here in Sonnet 116, the vision of love is that of the ideal relationship.

And feelings (pathos) become the emotional barometer by which the reader might determine the force, the quality
of love within the relationships that Will describes. I cannot agree with Katharine M. Wilson's thesis in Shakespeare's Sugared Sonnets that Shakespeare presents his collection of poems as a parody of the sonnet sequence tradition. (How can we possibly view Sonnet 116, one often quoted in the exchange of marriage vows, as parody?) She argues that "he reduced the whole thing to the absurd" (SSS 82). Striving (I feel rather unsuccessfully) to support her own argument, Wilson says that "Shakespeare has taken the sonnet talk seriously, and by playing with it made it nonsense" (SSS 96). Granted, parody can be found, especially in many of the Dark Lady sonnets, but it does not dominate every sonnet as Wilson would have us believe. Neither does parody necessarily make that which is parodied "nonsense." Perhaps Wilson's emphasis on parody in Shakespeare's sonnets might better be accepted if we approach her thesis as one that ignores a problem in semantics.

In his analysis, one that we can use to refute Wilson's claim that the sonnets can be reduced to parody, Fineman protests that semantically "parody" is the wrong term to apply to many of Shakespeare's sonnets. Fineman offers an alternative expression to describe more accurately what Shakespeare does in Sonnets 127-52. He substitutes the phrase "a poetry of praise paradox" (SPE 86) to denote the Dark Lady sonnets which most seem to mock
the convention that they represent. Less pejorative than the term "parody," which can (though it does not always) connote something as degrading as ribald mockery, Fineman's terms more precisely suggest Shakespeare's possible motives for writing the Fair Friend and the Dark Lady segments within the sequence: to delineate the various levels of love. Can we possibly conclude, then, that even the Dark Lady sonnets are, as Wilson argues, "nonsense"? Some, such as Sonnet 130, quite obviously are sonnets of dispraise (far from "nonsense") or, as Fineman says, poems of "praise paradox."

In the famous blazon that begins "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" (#130), Shakespeare does indeed seem to mock the laudatory descriptions that previous sonneteers render of their beloveds, but Shakespeare makes a very serious statement in the Dark Lady sonnets, beginning with Sonnet 130. Viewing the Dark Lady sonnets cumulatively, the message seems unmistakably clear: lust is common to humanity. Because it inhibits true relationship and creative power, it would best be avoided. But the poet-lover does not follow what his own work seems to suggest. As a result, he pays the price of twenty-six Dark Lady sonnets that fail to expose a redeeming relationship. What he does is to implicate himself as one guilty of lying and deceit: "For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured eye,/ To swear against the truth so foul a
lie!" (#152) He thus identifies himself with that which the majority of the sonnets would have us believe he would prefer to avoid.

The terms he uses to describe the Dark Lady suggest that she is one whom a rational being ought to resist: she is "false" (#127), "Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust" (#129), and "tyrannous" (#131). Her sexuality and seduction "torture" (#133) him into a kind of "Hell" (#129). They give him "pain" (#141), but he plays along with her game of love, thus revealing the recognizable power of the sexual appetite over the rational part of the individual. The contrast is blatant: the love of the Fair Friend is virtue that empowers the poet, and "the moral blackness of the Dark Lady is promiscuity" (Smith, TTL 51) that inhibits the poet. The destructive force of his lust for the lady is thus pitted against the productive quality of his love for his Fair Friend. This conflict enables Shakespeare’s poet-lover to analyze those which are the strongest, the most powerful, of all human drives—love and its physical craving, lust.

If we were to dismiss all 154 of Shakespeare’s sonnets as an exercise in parody, which Wilson would have us do, I fear that we would radically reduce the greatness of Shakespeare’s talent. The questions that Will raises throughout the sequence are legitimate concerns of all rational creatures: How can I perpetuate myself and thus
combat the onslaught of Time? How do I maintain a loving relationship? How do I rise above lustful liaisons? How do I redeem myself and restore my productivity once I succumb to lust? Shakespeare may sometimes proffer solutions that initially seem ridiculously parodic, but his questions demand serious consideration.

Russell Fraser agrees, but, in "Shakespeare at Sonnets," he cautions readers not to expect to glean immediate solutions to any of life's problems:

Shakespeare's questions have answers, but readers who take thought won't speak them too quickly. ... His multilayered performances don't preclude meaning, though; and the sonnets--never mind how much trouble they give--aren't conundrums. But Shakespeare's meaning is comprehensive like the life his poems describe.

Meaning resides in Shakespeare's Sonnets, but only if the reader approaches them with the desire necessary to find that meaning. I would thus qualify Russell's assessment: meaning is potentially comprehensive for the reader. It comes to the reader directly proportionate to the manner in which she receives and processes those subjects that Shakespeare discusses--time, change, and procreation. As she, the willing reader, "lovingly" analyzes the results of positive love (caritas) and negative love (cupiditas) on the regenerative, redemptive, procreative, epitaphic aspects of life, she can hope to address similar situations in her own reality.
Shakespeare's sonnets do not suggest closure; the sequence does not assure readers that virginal love will forever assuage desires of lust. Rather, the four different sections highlight and magnify those which are spiritually and physically significant aspects of the human condition—the alternating states of love and lust. As Fineman observes, we witness the poet-lover in his ongoing struggle "between his ego and his ego ideal" (SPE 25). On an ascending scale reminiscent of Plato's upward movement to the Ideal, an ego must be versed in duty to community and social continuity (procreation section), must be instructed in pure love (Fair Friend section), must be warned against lust (Dark Lady section), and must be shown a better way (Cupid section). As the sonnets depict an ego struggling with his humanity, a struggle with which modern readers might identify, Shakespeare provides a litmus test. This litmus test allows the reader to assess the talent of the poet-lover as his struggle becomes his poetry; it also provides positive and negative guidelines to judge love, the greatest of human emotions.

We may tend to be as confused at the ending of the sonnet sequence as we were at the beginning, as we share in Will's conundrum of human nature. Because confusion is inherent in the conflict between opposing forces within the human condition, between the physical and the spiritual, between lust and love, between the concrete and the
abstract, between presence and absence, complete resolution is impossible. However, because confusion also provides, as Heraclitus might say, the tension that leads to understanding, we can be comforted by those brief moments of discernment that come as we journey with the poet along the textual highway of love. In the words of Heraclitus: "The counter-thrust brings together, and from tones at variance comes perfect attunement, and all things come to pass through conflict" (Fragments LXXV). For the interim allowed by the reading experience, the reader travels alongside the absent presence of the author—accepting, refuting, or ignoring the observations that he makes and the premises that he offers.

Along the way, the writer temporarily asks his reader to perceive through the "eyes" of his persona. As she responds affirmatively, they become passengers together in the literary vehicle, which is Shakespeare's poetry. Because of impassable gaps in language, in thought, and in perception, the reader cannot hope to achieve Heraclitean "perfect attunement" with all that the writer sets forth. Nevertheless, as the reader engages the various literary elements, one of which is the writer's persona, she will allow herself at least to approach rhetorical nexus with the writer. Together, through the operation of the persona, the writer and reader thus affirm the triangular relationship that emanates from the original rhetorical
triangle of text/writer/reader. The separate literary triangles (text/writer/empowerer, text/reader/character, writer/reader/persona) fully overlay and expand the original rhetorical triangle (text/writer/reader), which is the basis for all communication.

Like the personae of Sidney and Shakespeare, Dickinson's poet-lover offers a plenitude of meaningful communication to her willing, responsive, and responsible reader. As this nineteenth-century writer necessarily, and successfully, engages the triangular operations between writer/text/reader, she further experiments with absences in the communication process. The result is that she explodes the "circumference" of rhetorical and literary boundaries, carrying her reader along with her into the poetry of modernity.
Chapter 6

Emily Dickinson's Absent Presence
and
Some Concluding Remarks

Exploring the absent presence in Sidney's *Astrophil* and *Stella* and following it through Shakespeare's *Sonnets* might readily be acknowledged as a logical critical endeavor. Certain similarities pervade both writers and their works. Sidney and Shakespeare were near-contemporaries in the British Renaissance; each wrote in the sonnet-sequence tradition; each created and sustained a persona, a singular voice, who maintains a viable presence in the sequence; and each heralds the power of love. Sidney's *Astrophil*, toward the end of the sequence, begins to recognize that he can use his art to transform and redeem his unrequited love for the absent Stella. Their relationship may have failed, but his art ultimately will triumph as future readers affirm his experience through the written text. For Will, too, love is fundamental. It is that which overcomes disappointment in relationships and ensures perpetuity for both poet and beloved.

Although Sidney and Shakespeare elucidate the idea differently, each sequence admits to a powerful absent presence that motivates the writing and controls the development of the poetic program. And although
Shakespeare does not pen a critical treatise comparable to Sidney's *The Defense of Poetry*, he does manipulate the voice of his persona to interpolate some of his own views of poet and poetic process. Moving from the sonnet-sequence of Sidney to that of Shakespeare thus suggests a logical progression. However, the transition from Shakespeare and his *Sonnets* to Emily Dickinson and her poetry may seem to be an unjustifiable leap. As I continue to develop the idea of the absent presence in this chapter with selected poetry of Emily Dickinson, I will not call upon my reader to "willingly suspend disbelief" in order to accept my premise. Rather, I will provide evidence to show that the same absent presence that runs through the sonnet-sequences of Sidney and Shakespeare similarly pervades a large portion of Dickinson's poetry.

As with Astrophil and Will, Dickinson's poet-lover is dually impelled by love: love for her absent beloved provides a subject for the poetry, and love for communicating with her absent reader motivates the writing of that poetry. For Dickinson, even more than for Sidney and Shakespeare, love at various levels (poet-lover/beloved, poet-lover/reader, reader/poet, poet and reader/written word) is powerful. Love is that which allows transcendence by text; it is that which enables at least a temporary convergence between a reader and a writer.
who are separated by time and place. Love is that which fosters an absent presence out of an absence.

An obvious obstacle in including Dickinson and her poetry in a study such as this in which author and selected works are to be analyzed in one relatively brief chapter is that her corpus is so extensive. As it is compiled and edited by Thomas H. Johnson, Dickinson’s body of poetry is comprised of 1775 poems. Additionally, she leaves substantial correspondence to family, friends, and associates, affirming that she not only dutifully adhered to, but masterfully performed, the accepted social custom of maintaining epistolary communication with family and friends. Cumulatively, her poetry and correspondence point to a complex author who seriously and thoughtfully fashions her art, and just as seriously and thoughtfully composes her every word to others. Dickinson’s letters are important for any study of her poetry because they reveal insights into both her personal life and her professional concerns.

Perhaps even more significantly, her letters seem to be a kind of creative training ground for the poet-in-process. Developing the thesis that "poems had become letters to Dickinson and letters, poems," Paula Bennett, in her essay "Spectral Presence in Emily Dickinson’s Letters," questions Johnson’s reasons for editing Dickinson’s poetry separately from her letters. She suggests that, in doing
so, he did the poet (and her readers) a tremendous
disservice in "splitting the poems from the letters"
("SPEDL" 76, 77). I wholeheartedly agree. Because we
cannot easily view the letters alongside the poetry, our
task of interpreting the poetry and assessing the
methodology of the poet Dickinson is made more difficult.

Judith Farr convincingly develops the idea that
Dickinson's poetry and letters are the same art. Building
her argument on Dickinson's tendency to revise both poetry
and letters, Farr writes in The Passion of Emily
Dickinson: "Dickinson usually made drafts of her letters,
which she clearly regarded as artistic efforts, like the
poems" (199). Through this exercise in "Writing letters
that scan, enclosing poems in letters, composing poems that
are letters, revising and rerevising both, Dickinson did
not always sharply distinguish between the uses of her art"
(PED 16). If, for Dickinson, letters and poems are textual
outpourings of at least a similar art, any careful study of
Dickinson's poetry demands looking into her letters.
Hence, I will frequently refer to Johnson's Emily
Dickinson: Selected Letters.

We dare not take any of her letters at face value
because, as in her poetry, she frequently assumes poses,
creating a persona other than herself. An early writing to
T.W. Higginson reveals the assumed self that she wants her
preceptor and professional advisor to see:
I have a Brother and Sister—My Mother does not care for thought—and Father, too busy with Briefs—to notice what we do—He buys me many Books—but begs me not to read them—because he fears they joggle the Mind.

(25 April 1862)

No extant textual evidence supports the claim that Dickinson’s mother did not care for thought or that her father gave her books then implored her not to read them for fear of the intellectual damage they might cause. Instead of describing the actual relationship she had with each of her parents, she creates an alternative role for herself as daughter. Dickinson thus experiments with an assumed stance. Although she apparently aimed for plausibility, she gambles (and "gambols") on pity as a ploy that will subsequently elicit the desired emotive response from her reader Higginson. Providing a critical window through which we can observe the poet’s creative telos, Dickinson’s letters, at least in part, reveal the poet as she designs and redesigns the textual absent presences that she wants us, her readers, to see.

Poem 724 describes her thoughts on this ability to create personae. She compares it to the creation of life:

It’s easy to invent a Life--
God does it--every Day--
Creation--but the Gambol
Of His Authority--

Later lines in the poem comment on creative omnipotence, which allows God at will to "Proceed--inserting Here--a Sun/There--leaving out a Man--." The Renaissance play
between Sun and Son (of God), who is spiritually present though physically absent, suggests that Dickinson is capitalizing, albeit playfully in this poem, on the idea of absent presence. Extending the analogy to her personal role in poetic inventiveness, the poet concludes that she, the writer, like God, can also "invent a Life" of absent presence— even for herself in her letters. The image is that of the poet who, again like God, methodically, purposefully, willfully, and sometimes teasingly frames her text.

Like Bennett and Farr, Paul J. Ferlazzo emphasizes the critical importance of Dickinson's letters. He argues in *Emily Dickinson* that they are crucial to our understanding her role as a poet who controls her writing in order to control her audience:

> Letters were, indeed, a form of magic by which Emily Dickinson could control her friends, could keep them at a suitable distance and in a certain relationship to her. They were the power by which she gained emotional and intellectual support in return for the devotion she offered. (127-28)

The key words in this passage are "magic," "control," and "devotion." These three elements constitute reciprocity through the text: Dickinson devotedly (or lovingly) uses her "magic" (with language) to "control" (or guide) her readers in and through the textual exchange. The result can be a powerful, and potentially meaningful, experience
for the reader insofar as she responds in kind to the love, the power, and the "magic" of Dickinson.

"Magic" (synonymous with Dickinson's "spectral") will be a term that will surface periodically in the development of this chapter. At no time will it suggest a hocus-pocus, sleight-of-hand activity; neither will it refer to witchcraft or demonic activity. Rather, it will always indicate that virtually indescribable, hence "magical," quality of words which decidedly affects—emotionally, intellectually, even physically—the individual who reads or hears them. "Magic," as I apply it to Dickinson's poetry and her poetic program, is akin to the mysterious essence that the Greek sophist Gorgias pointed to in his defense of Helen: "Speech is a powerful lord that with the smallest and most invisible body accomplished almost godlike works" (*Encomium*, par. 8).

Richard Sewall, whose text is generally accepted as the standard in Dickinson biography, does not use the term "magic" in describing the power of Dickinson's words, but his comment draws a parallel that further links her to Gorgias. Specifically, what he recognizes as her materialistic view of language echoes the Gorgian concept of the materiality of logos that enters the body through the ear and works its power in the soul of the listener. As Sewall distinguishes Dickinson's view of language from the Romantic "notion of winged words, message-bearing
verses," he writes that she grants an "immediate, intimate power of the word, of the 'jostling' syllable or the malarial sentence" (LED 676). Sewall employs an interesting metaphor to describe the power of Dickinson's words: his "malarial sentence" suggests that words, like malaria, invade the body though external stimuli. If the stinging of an anopheles mosquito results in chills, fever, and sweating, the analogy is that the reading of the word has comparable physical manifestations.

Gary Lee Stonum specifically addresses the element of power in Dickinson's poetry. His essay, "Emily Dickinson's Calculated Sublime," suggests that Dickinson's sublimity is conditional sublimity, one that is calculated so as to emphasize power over "wildness and divine exaltation" ("EDCS" 102). In this passage, Stonum substitutes "wildness and divine exaltation" for sublimity; I could substitute "magic." If Stonum is correct, and I think that he is, Dickinson always sublimates "magic" in favor of power because it is the poet's power that creates textual presence. The "magic" can come if the artist's power is in the text, but "magic" alone does not guarantee power; it does not yield an absent presence. Stonum explains that "Power is a word Dickinson rarely fails to capitalize; it belongs with presence, circumference, and a few others as one of the central animating abstractions in her poetry" ("EDCS" 102). Reserving Dickinson's "circumference" for a
later discussion, I will focus here on the pairing of power and presence. If, as Sewall suggests in the previous passage, Dickinson does view the written word as corporeal substance, it is a substance of potential power and of discernible presence.

A part of my thesis is that this corporeality of the written word underscores Dickinson's writings—her poetry and her prose. For the nineteenth-century poet who focuses on the small, the tiny, comparing herself to the wren and the daisy, the even smaller word becomes her greatest ally; it becomes her power. First significantly exhibiting this potential for verbal expression through her correspondence, she found prose too limiting as a medium for her talent. She needed a tiny medium, poetry, that would allow her readers a widening of interpretations. The "magic" (which, for Dickinson, is manifest through her poetry) resides in her implicitly powerful words.

Through her poems, explicitly composed as works of art, and her letters, incidentally shaped as works of art, Dickinson finds poetry superior to prose in its ability to work a verbal "spell" over an audience. Because her letters scan like verse, because they lyrically and aesthetically speak to her reader, they are at least quasi-poetic. However, in heralding the affective quality of the poetic word, she was not content that "They shut me up in Prose" (#613). Her poetic genius demanded that she enlarge
both the scope of her writing and the sphere of her audience. Satisfied neither with the textual restrictions of prose nor the numerical limitations of personal acquaintances, she sought expression through poetic metaphor intended for people whom she did not know. Bennett argues that "Whether poetry or letters, her writing was her word made flesh, concealing and revealing its creator in the very act of revelation" ("BMCS" 95). By making incorporeal thought corporeal, by "concealing" her real self while "revealing" her assumed self through an absent presence, Dickinson sought to establish communication with her reader. Hers was an ambitious aim.

The first lines of #441 characterize her aggressive poetic aim: "This is my letter to the World/ That never wrote to Me." Her poetry, all 1775 individual poems, and her letters thus become her "letter to the World." I do not casually include Dickinson’s letters with her poems. Rather, I suggest that they are alternate means whereby she communicates with her audience, an intimate and personal reader. And successful communication is accomplished, one reader at a time, in great part, through the diverse assumed personae she creates. The power of the poet emanates from the words of her personae. As they "speak" from the printed text the words that she, the poet,
controls, they subtly manipulate, working their "magic" upon her audience.

Her work thus becomes a verbal body of possibility, one which she describes in Poem 657:

I dwell in Possibility--
A fairer House than Prose--
More numerous of Windows--
Superior--for Doors--

In that house of possibility, which is her poetry, an absent presence, especially that of the poet who is creator of the text, can be discerned by the reader who engages that text. Through a careful, and caring, manipulation of her words, the poet imparts a highly-charged absent presence, whose vitality dominates the reading experience. Jorge Luis Borges refers to the textual presence as "that living voice going on and on, and it's speaking to us" (10). Dynamic in its effect, the "voice" is reactivated each time a reader willingly partners herself with a Dickinson poem.

For the student of Dickinson seeking to understand how the idea of the absent presence functions in the writer's poetic and prose corpus, the task is formidable. The sheer volume of her work, without the complexities of her language of absence, can intimidate even the professional reader of Dickinson. Consequently, I have to establish parameters that will reduce my scope and limit my focus. Even that task is not easy. Unlike the literary corpus of
Sidney and Shakespeare, Dickinson’s corpus does not include a self-contained sequence of poems that can readily be separated from the rest of her work. She did not compose a sonnet-sequence or a separate poetic series that sustains one clearly defined voice; neither did she create a singular persona who is poet-lover throughout her poetry. Following the pattern established in her prose, Dickinson creates numerous personae who inhabit and speak from her poetry. Having mastered the ability to create convincing personae for herself in her letters, she multiplies that talent numerous times over in her poetry.

These multiple personalities range in scope from a Daisy (#106) to a Dollie (#156), from a "Wounded Deer" (#165) to a "Nobody" (#288), from a Housewife or "wife" (#154, #199) to a Poet (#448), from a Sparrow (#84) to a "Soul" (#303), from a Morning (#232) to a cadaver (#465)—just to name a few. She drew her personae from the world around her, from life as she experienced and observed it, but she avoided specifics that might limit the interpretation and narrow the understanding for her reader. Poem 1294 explains:

Of Life to own—
From Life to draw—
But never touch the reservoir—

As a poet, the only life that she had was her own—as daughter, sister, friend, lover, and poet. Necessarily, then, she draws from that life and from its ever-widening
sphere that radiates into the lives of those around her. However, and this is a significant aspect of the mystery that shrouds any study of Dickinson, she does not "touch the reservoir," which is her actual life. She does not write poems that are easily distinguished correlations to her personal experience. Rather, she employs her skills as poet to encapsulate personal experiences and auxiliary observations and translate them into understanding for her reader.

Using her powerful language, she "Distills amazing sense/ From ordinary Meanings--" (#448). That is, she takes the specifics of life and metaphorically distills them into general experiences. The final step in the process belongs to the reader on the opposite side of the text, as she, too, distills meaning. Utilizing the reverse technique of that implemented by the writer, the reader extracts meaning for her specific life from the general statement that is housed in the metaphorical language of poetry.

In contrast to her Renaissance predecessors, Dickinson may not have designed a sequence as such. However, physical evidence attests to the fact that she originally arranged certain poems into specific groupings, or fascicles. These fascicles were made from folded sheets of paper, each sheet yielding four sides for writing. She would assemble four to six pages together, punch holes into
the folded side, and string and tie ribbon through the holes. Apparently she rather painstakingly arranged forty fascicles in this manner; then she tucked them away in a drawer, where they lay in safekeeping until after her death. Unfortunately for Dickinson and even more unfortunately for readers of Dickinson, editors took the fascicles apart and rearranged at will the poetry that was purposely wrought and carefully grouped by this nineteenth-century poet who adamantly refused to have her work published during her lifetime. It is when we view these fascicles together that we can reach a somewhat remarkable conclusion: a large number of the fascicle poems, when read apparently as the poet originally intended them, assume sequence-like characteristics. These fascicles will be the primary source from which I will delineate the operation of Dickinson's absent presence.

The process remains complex. Although original manuscripts show the poems in their respective forty fascicles, they provide little commentary to readers who seek to understand Dickinson's reasons for her groupings of the poems. William Shurr's text The Marriage of Emily Dickinson: A Study of the Fascicles provides some insight into what the poet might have been about in the fascicles. Shurr rather thoroughly explores Dickinson's poetry from a belief that the fascicles yield a distinctive literary
unity. He argues that, much like a poetic sequence, they represent a unified whole:

When the poems are read as Dickinson grouped them, and when the groupings are read in their original order, what emerges is a remarkable unity. Most of the [fascicle] poems are generated by a single experience or complex of experiences. Each fascicle has a core of poems directly related to Dickinson’s love affair and, later, to her anomalous marriage. Other poems radiate from that center or relate to it in some discoverable way. And the fascicles as a whole show many of the characteristics of a suite or a sequence, like Shakespeare’s Sonnets.

(MED 125)

Viewing them in their original arrangement, Shurr assesses "that about 150 of the 814 fascicle poems are love poems addressed to a specific individual" (MED 7). Sidney includes 108 sonnets in his sequence and Shakespeare has 154 sonnets in his collection. Might we conclude (at least tentatively, until future research shows otherwise) that 150 of Dickinson’s poems suggest a comparatively substantial cluster of work detailing a poet-lover coming to terms with an absent beloved?

Shurr’s text adopts a biographical approach, something which I cannot fully advocate, but he does make what seems to be an important observation concerning Dickinson’s fascicles. He rather convincingly argues that we do not readily see the unifying thread that binds Dickinson’s fascicle poems because we seldom find, and even more seldom read, her poetry as she organized it to be read. When we do look at the fascicles together, we find, as Shurr
recognizes, that their unifying thread is love, a love that remains vital and alive in the absence of the beloved who is both the source and the focus of the love described.

George F. Whicher, another biographer of Dickinson, likewise cites love as the fulcrum of her work. Although Whicher may not specify the fascicles as those poems which focus primarily on love between poet-lover and absent beloved, his comments seem to be directed to that part of Dickinson’s work when he writes in *This was a Poet*: "Emily Dickinson was the only American poet of her century who treated the great lyric theme of love with entire candor and sincerity" (269). Dickinson is not the only American poet of her century who treats love. Walt Whitman certainly writes of love, but his tone of bravado and gusto is in sharp contrast to that which emerges from Dickinson’s poetry.

Like Whitman, she speaks candidly of love. And like him, she maintains that it is the most powerful of emotions. But her words of love come from a voice of quiet, convincing certainty. Dickinson succinctly describes the ramifications of love in an 1878 letter to Mrs. Samuel Bowles: "Love makes us ‘heavenly’ without our trying in the least." It is pervasive, encompassing every aspect of existence. It is, according to Farr, that which "allowed her to glimpse and record the relation between this world and the next. ... Love was increasingly her
subject, love as the essential element in all understanding" (PED 319, 321). Not only is love that which allows her to approach "circumference" (at least partial, or slanted, understanding of this world and the next), it also is that which enables meaningful relationships—personal and textual. And love is the force that motivates her persona who is poet-lover to fashion an absent presence from a physically absent beloved.

As in the sonnet sequences of Sidney and Shakespeare, a large grouping of poems in the fascicles reveals a singular persona whose voice emanates from the text. It is the voice of a female poet-lover writing to or about her absent beloved. The addressed "You," at least in "about 150 of the 814 fascicle poems" (Shurr, MED 7), is the persona's physically absent, yet vitally present, lover; he is her "Bright Absentee!" Though absent from her by both time and place, the beloved plays a significant role in her artistic endeavor, as evidenced in Poem #339:

I tend my flowers for thee—
Bright Absentee!
My Fuchsia's Coral Seams
Rip—while the Sower—dreams—

Geraniums—tint—and spot—
Low Daisies—dot—
My Cactus—splits her Beard
To show her throat—

Carnations—tip their spice—
And Bees—pick up—
A Hyacinth—I hid—
Puts out a Ruffled Head—
And odors fall
From flasks—so small—
You marvel how they held—
Globe Roses—break their satin flake—
Upon my Garden floor—
Yet—thou—not there—
I had as lief they bore
No Crimson—more—

Thy flower—be gay—
Her lord—away!
It ill becometh me—
I’ll dwell in Calyx—Gray—
How modestly—alway—
Thy Daisy—
Draped for thee!

What makes this poem so critical for my analysis is that it artistically, in highly erotic terms, describes the function of the persona’s absent beloved. The "flowers" that the poet-lover tends for her beloved are her life’s work, the words that she writes. The beloved is both the purpose and the power behind the words; he is the intent of and the inspiration for her words. Just as the rose cannot remain static in its fragile beauty, neither can the poet’s words remain cloistered in her mind. Like the rose that will "break" petals upon the "Garden floor" even when the master gardener is "not there," the poet-lover’s words must find expression upon the printed page even though her beloved is absent.

If we look at this poem ("I tend my flowers for thee--") in conjunction with Dickinson’s letters, we see that the references to flowers (fuchsia, geranium, cactus, carnations, hyacinth, and roses) clearly correlate to the
words of the poet-lover. In an 1853 letter to Henry V. Emmons, Dickinson writes:

Since receiving your beautiful writing I have often desired to thank you thro' a few of my flowers, and arranged the fairest for you a little while ago, but heard you were away--I have very few today, and they compare but slightly with the immortal blossoms you kindly gathered me.

This letter reveals a mutual correspondence between Dickinson and Emmons. His words are "immortal blossoms" for her; she reciprocates by sending him "a few of my flowers" artfully "arranged" so as to please him. The image is of the artist at work, creating and then refining an aesthetic text—a process of careful writing and revision.

In another 1854 letter to the same Henry V. Emmons, she again offers an arrangement of her words, apparently as an apology for some "little mishap" that occurred the evening before: "Will you please receive these blossoms—I would love to make two garlands for certain friends of mine, if the summer were here, and till she comes, perhaps one little cluster will express the wish to both." Then in a "Master" letter of 1858, she writes: "You ask me what my flowers said—they then were disobedient—I gave them messages." If her "flowers" were "disobedient," they possess a willfulness separate from the one who tends them. Especially Poem 494 describes this independence of words:
Going to Him! Happy letter!
Tell Him--
Tell Him the page I didn’t write--
Tell Him--I only said the Syntax--
And left the Verb and pronoun out--
Tell Him just how the fingers hurried--
Then--how they waded--slow-slow--
And then you wished you had eyes in your pages--
So you could see what moved them so--

This first stanza says much about Dickinson's attitude concerning writer, reader, and text. Personifying all three, she characterizes each aspect of the rhetorical triangle: the writer, or poet-lover, is "I"; the reader is "Him"; and the text is "You." In embodying the text, she assigns power to the word that she recognizes as separate from her power as poet. As a writer, her primary task is to create the essential verbal framework from which the reader might glean meaning. Thus, she claims to have "only said the Syntax--/And left the Verb and pronoun out." It is then necessary for the words in her syntactical arrangement to continue the work initiated by the writer. In her repetitive admonition to her created text to "Tell Him," she suggests that the word can speak to the reader of the text in a way that she, the writer, cannot.

Just as she creates a dialogue with the words that she writes, those same words subsequently create another dialogue with the reader of her text. In that later dialogue between text and reader, the words will in turn "say" something vital about the author and her creative process: "Tell Him just how the fingers hurried--/Then--
how they waded—slow—slow." In a very real way, the words reflect the sincerity, the struggle, and the love of the poet for both her work and her audience. Words, then, as Dickinson describes here, serve as intermediaries between writer and reader. They are created by the writer, but they act independently of their creator each time a reader willingly enters into dialogue with them.

If words can act apart from the author’s bidding, they are not static markers on a page. Rather, they are infused with a dynamic life of their own, a life that is evidenced when a reader visits a text and allows the words to produce meaning for her. The success of any textual dialogue is thus contingent upon the reader; her response to the words ultimately determines the outcome of the reading experience. Dickinson herself provides evidence of this rhetorical operation. In her first letter to Higginson, dated 15 April 1862, Dickinson seems anxious for his corroboration that her "Verse is alive." She wants his assurance that it "breathed" for him, that it spoke to him in a real and vital way. Her letters thus substantiate the assumption found in her poetry that words are living, dynamic entities which can affect a reader.

In another letter to Higginson, dated June 1869, Dickinson comments on this vibrant quality of the written word:
A Letter always feels to me like immortality because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend. Indebted in our talk to attitude and accent, there seems a spectral power in thought that walks alone.

According to Dickinson, inherent in a letter, and presumably in any text that is comprised of words, is a bit of immortality, what she calls a "spectral power in thought that walks alone." Once the words are written, they belong no longer exclusively to the person who penned them. Rather, they are a power unto themselves. While independent of their creator when acting upon their reader, they nevertheless maintain a vestige, a discernible presence, albeit absent, of the originator of the text.

Although the one who wrote the words may not be corporeal, may not be physically present to the one who reads the words, the writer nevertheless imparts a part of herself; her thoughts, her ideas, her experiences, and her emotions are imbedded in the written words. A kind of immortality for the author results. As the reader engages in the writer's printed words, the two who are absent from the other communicate in a very real way. Words thus exude a power, which may be "spectral" but clearly discernible to the one who willingly participates in the act of reading, to the one who, in the words of Walter Ong, does not "read whimsically or with no reference to the writer's world" (OL 162). The reader must partner herself with the writer, not in a "willing suspension of disbelief," but in a willing
assumption of credulity. Then, and only then, can the word work its "spell" with the reader.

Paul Ricoeur addresses this intellectually complex activity in *The Conflict of Interpretations*. He recognizes that numerous factors are implicated in any reading experience which leads to understanding. The language system, which is carefully and creatively employed by the writer, is certainly important, but it is only one of the elements in interpretation. The psychological profile of the reader, her past and present experiences, is a significant variable in any reading process. Because symbolic language is, by its very nature, subjectively interpretative, it allows for numerous personal applications. Such is the realm of hermeneutics. Ricoeur says that "there is no closed system of the universe of signs" (CI 65). To further extrapolate, there is no closed system of hermeneutics, no closed system of interpretations of a particular text.

Dickinson’s term for this open system of signs is "spectral," and she writes a simple little poem about this not-so-simple quality of words. Referring specifically in #1212 to the spoken word, she says:

A word is dead
When it is said,
Some say.

I say it just
Begins to live
That day.
Whether spoken or written, a word does not achieve its potential until it is received either by hearer or reader. Thus engaging the rhetorical triangle, the hearer (or the reader) completes the communication process when she listens to or picks up a text, which is comprised of words.

These words, as they continue the work of their "spectral" creator, assume a duality of power and process: as they produce understanding in the mind of the reader, they necessarily establish a relationship between reader and writer, a relationship that was forged by the writer. Near the conclusion of his discussion about the responsibility of the writer to visualize, and thus initiate, a rapport with a potential reader, Ong writes of that which I view as the implicit dualism in effective communication:

Human communication is never one-way. Always, it not only calls for response but is shaped in its very form and content by anticipated response. This is not to say that I am sure how the other will respond to what I say. But I have to be able to conjecture a possible range of responses at least in some vague way. I have to be somehow inside the mind of the other in advance in order to enter with my message, and he or she must be inside my mind. To formulate anything I must have another person or other persons already 'in mind.' This is the paradox of human communication. Communication is intersubjective.

(OL 176-77)

According to Ong's analysis, communication, by its very definition, is predicated on self and other: the writer seeks to impart some kind of "message" to a receiver, who
is either intended or imagined. As he outlines in another essay, "The Writer’s Audience is Always a Fiction," a writer may assume either a general or a specific audience, but that fictionalized audience determines, in great part, the process of communication. Although the vehicle for communication may be composed subjectively by the writer in the privacy of her personal thoughts, the power of that communication is intersubjective, mutually dependent upon both writer and reader.

Dickinson’s preceptor and correspondent Higginson was aware of this quality in Dickinson’s words. In a letter dated June 1869, he writes that her letters and verses have a "strange power" that creatively inhibit and personally affect him. Apparently her words were so remarkably powerful, so successfully manipulative, that his paled in comparison when he first attempted to reply to her correspondence. As a result, he found it "hard to write" and "long months pass[ed]" before he answered her correspondence. We get the impression, though, that her words haunt him in the interim; they force him "never [to] relax my interest" in her and her work. Higginson thus inadvertently describes the creative power that enables the poet to make her absence become dynamically present to the reader. That presence lingers, even manipulates, long after the reading process ends. Such is the "magical" power of Dickinson. Her work suggests, however, that the
power is latent until both writer and reader enter into a reciprocally loving relationship, which is achieved through participation in the created text.

The "strange power" to which Higginson refers is first activated when the poet pens her words, which she fuels by love. She and her love for her intended audience may initiate the rhetorical process, but only when her words are partnered with a reader does it reach completion. Poem 809 further explains this idea:

Unable are the Loved to die
For Love is Immortality,
Nay, it is Deity--

Unable they that love--to die
For Love reforms Vitality
Into Divinity.

Ostensibly referring to the immortalizing love between a lover and her beloved, these words also describe the love between poet and reader. If a reader communes with a writer, who is the "Loved" creator of a text, then that writer achieves a kind of immortality. The words of the poet retain a vitality that perpetuates the being of their creator. She may be physically absent from the text, but the voice of her persona maintains her intimately personal link with her future reader.

Her poetry and prose repeatedly point to this element that circumscribes the process of communication. That emotional requisite is love: love of writer for her reader, and love of reader for the message her writer can
offer through words. Only when each of these elements is
in play can the poet create a poetry that will contain
"superior instants" (#306) of insight for her reader.
 Numerous poems support the idea that love is the compelling
force behind Dickinson’s work.

A cryptic one that sums up her business of love is

#1438:

Behold this little Bane--
The Boon of all alive--
As common as it is unknown
The name of it is Love--

To lack of it is Woe--
To own of it is Wound--
Not elsewhere--if in Paradise
Its Tantamount be found--

Love is both "Bane" and "Boon," something that everyone
desires, even though pain and heartache frequently
accompany it. Although the "if in Paradise" may open a
slight window to doubt, I do not see that doubt as
contradicting Dickinson’s claims in #917 that love exists
after death ("Love--is anterior to Life--/Posterior--to
Death--"). Rather, doubt applies to the quality of that
love which continues beyond mortality.

Unlike love on earth that sometimes pains and wounds
both lover and beloved, love beyond the grave will be
intrinsically different. No longer eros, cupiditas, or
philia, all of which are subject to human selfishness and
its consequent injury, love after death will be agape,
perfect and selfless. An individual cannot attain love to
that extent while on earth, but she can approximate it through her relationship with her beloved. That emotion which exists between lover and beloved provides a brief glimpse into what lies beyond the grave:

We learned the Whole of Love—
The Alphabet—the Words—
A Chapter—then the mighty Book—
Then—Revelation closed—

But in Each Other's eyes
An Ignorance beheld—
Diviner than the Childhood's—
And each to each, a Child,

Attempted to expound
What Neither—understood—
Alas, that Wisdom is so large—
And Truth—so Manifold!

(568)

Apparently referring to a secular, rather than a spiritual love, the poet-lover admits to the impossibility of describing even this earthly scope of loving. Erotic love, like its spiritual counterpart, is so complex, so vast that it defies explanation. The best that one can do is to glimpse its power and begin to understand its ramifications.

For the poet-lover whose "business is to love," words are the means whereby she seeks to "expound" the "Wisdom" and "Truth" of that business. Dickinson's reference to her profession, the "business" of loving, echoes the Puritan idea of "calling," of one who is "called forth" by God to effect his work among mortals. Unfortunately, like those imperfect humans whom God selects for his work, her weapon
in the expository process likewise falls short of its goal.

Poem 581 comments on her dilemma:

I found the words to every thought
I ever had— but One—
And that— defies me—
As a Hand did try to chalk the Sun

This poem echoes the thought in #276:

Many a phrase has the English language—
I have heard but one—
Low as the laughter of the Cricket,
Loud, as the Thunder's Tongue—

Whether or not Shurr is correct when he argues that the phrase that Dickinson hears repetitively in her world is "I love you" (MED 66), it would seem that the thought that defies words, the concept that defies concrete explanation, is love. A poet who is master of words might only approximate the experience for her reader. Although she cannot find words that will plumb the mystery of love, she offers her poetry as a means to concretize that abstract experience for her reader.

Nathan A. Scott, Jr., has recently commented on what the poet-lover does in creating a poetic world for her reader. He writes in the introduction to his text Visions of Presence in Modern American Poetry:

The poetic world is rooted in the concrete particularity of lived experience; and poetic art, in its deepest aspect, is a way of loving the concrete, the particular, the individual. But, of course, to love is to enter the dimension of... presence.

(2)
The poetic world can be "rooted in the concrete particularity of lived experience" without touching the "reservoir" of actual experience, as Dickinson suggests in Poem 1294. That is, the poet can recreate a semblance of reality, a form of transcendence, through her artistic medium that allows the reader to share in the loving-in-absence experience of the personae. Though the textual recreation may be "magical" for the reader, the process of textually simulating presence, of creating an absent presence to which a reader might respond, is the result of conscious artistry.

In a letter to Dr. and Mrs. J.G. Holland, dated Summer 1862, Dickinson explains part of her effort which produces mystery and "magic" for the reader. Commenting on love, the motivating purpose, of her poetry, she writes: "My business is to love." She compares herself as poet to a bird whose business "is to sing," even when alone "on a little bush at the foot of the garden." Motivated by his very nature, he sings even when no one hears. Like the solitary bird, the poet is prompted by a force that is greater than she is. The solitude that necessarily accompanies this absence pervades especially her fascicle poetry.

In an earlier letter to Susan Gilbert, dated 1854, she writes about solitude as an integral part of her work:
I would paint a portrait which would bring the tears, had I canvass for it, and the scene should be--solitude, and the figures--solitude--and the lights and shades, each a solitude. I could fill a chamber with landscapes so lone, men should pause and weep there; then haste grateful home, for a loved one left.

Reminiscent again of one "called" for a specific task, she, like the solitary bird who sings when no one hears, not only writes in solitude, but she writes of solitude. Dickinson may have written in solitude, and she may have written of solitude, but hers is a self-imposed isolation which she personally manipulates to create her art.

This letter about solitude significantly reveals her methodology as poet. Quite specifically, it describes Dickinson's purpose in writing poetry: to demand involvement and elicit emotional response from her readers. So stipulated, she effects her self-described aim primarily through the numerous and pervasive absences that dominate her work. Not only does she write of an absent beloved, she relies upon absences--textual, grammatical, and referential--to demand involvement from her reader. Because of the nature of her business, she, too, must "sing" without an audience; she, too, must create without a reader in attendance. Conversely, the same is true for her reader. In our post-aural era in which communication no longer is a public event with a speaker and numerous listeners, public reading of texts is the exception; an
individual most often reads in the privacy of her own thoughts.

Noting the similarities in both the reading and writing processes, Ong addresses this cultural advancement in his text *Orality and Literacy*: "Writing and reading are solitary activities that throw the psyche back on itself" (OL 69). The inference is that as the writer and reader retreat into the communicative process, they enter into the abyss of self, which is the mind. Therein, through the printed text, both encounter the other. The psyche of the writer engages with that of the reader during the composition process, while the reader likewise moves into the mind of the writer during the interpretive process.

Ong particularly addresses the state of the reader in his earlier work, *The Presence of Word*. As he plots a kind of history of the development of language, he comments specifically that

> reading of any sort forces the individual into himself by confronting him with thought in isolation, alone. The book takes the reader out of the tribe. His thought still has minimal social guise: it is in a book, which comes from another. But the other is not there. The reader follows thought all alone.  

(PW 135)

Though physically "all alone" while engaging a printed text, the reader is not fully alone in thought. The thoughts that she mentally digests and intellectually assimilates are the thoughts encoded by another. The
determinations that the reader makes are indeed hers, but they are shaped in great part by the absent presence of the writer who initiated the thought process.

Underscoring this idea in her poetry, Dickinson comments on the present-in-absence relationship between writer and reader. Necessarily in physical solitude, the poet receives her inspiration:

The Soul’s Superior instants
Occur to Her— alone—
When friend— and Earth’s occasion
Have infinite withdrawn—

(#306)

The means to work her poetic "magic" comes to the poet when she is alone, after the "occasion" of the poem has passed, after the beloved has withdrawn. Like the bird alone in the garden, the poet writes in solitude with no one present to applaud her endeavors. And like the bird whose nature, or "gift" is to make music, the poet’s nature, or gift, is to write poetry.

And certainly Dickinson’s poetry is her attempt to make "music" for her readers. Surely not incidentally, her poems are patterned after traditional musical forms. In "The Poet and the Muse: Poetry as Art," Johnson reminds us that "Basically all her poems employ meters derived from English hymnology" (70). Just as seriously as a musician organizes tones to create a melodic tune to please a listener, Dickinson writes and rewrites her words to fashion a verbal text that will elicit an aesthetic
response in her reader. That response partially results from, as Joseph Allard writes in "Emily Dickinson: The Regulation of Belief," the poet's compelling "ability to forge poems that succeed in their attempt to capture a moment in the experience of one" (23) who is other to the reader. The role of the writer is crucial as she applies her artistic and linguistic skills to the process of making meaning in the text. Hers, however, is not the only significant role in the making and processing of meaning. Without a reader, without one who shares, and thus completes, the aesthetic experience, the writer and her words fall short of making music.

Dickinson describes this responsibility of the reader in poem #526:

To hear an Oriole sing  
May be a common thing-- 
Or only a divine.

It is not of the Bird  
Who sings the same, unheard,  
As unto Crowd--

The Fashion of the Ear  
Attireth that it hear  
In Dun, or fair--

So whether it be Rune,  
Or whether it be none  
Is of within.

The 'Tune is in the Tree--'  
The Skeptic--showeth me--  
'No Sir! In Thee!'

The poet, as "Oriole," makes the music, be it "common" or "divine." The interpretation of that music, however, does
not come with the song; it comes through the hearing of the song. The reader's receptive "Ear," which feeds the mind, is that which determines the quality of meaning; it is that which assesses the musical message as "Dun, or fair." In like manner of the bird whose tune wafts from the tree where he sings to the hearer apart from him, the message of the poet is not confined to the mind of its creator. It, too, makes its meaningful music only "In Thee," only in the mind of the absent reader who will be on the opposite side of the text.

Dickinson thus ascribes great power to her reader, whom she engages in an intimate person-to-person exchange. If, as her writings suggest, solitude and absence of the other are prerequisites for dialogue through the printed word, the successful reader shares equally with the writer in eliciting meaning from a text, but also of critical importance in this rhetorical grid is the persona of the poet-lover.

As previously mentioned, something which immediately distinguishes Dickinson's poet-lover from Astrophil and Will is that she is female. As in the sonnet sequences of her Renaissance predecessors, Dickinson's fascicles also maintain a singular focus—love between a female poet-lover and her absent beloved. Since she did not destroy her carefully wrought fascicles, she certainly envisioned a reader somewhere in some place at some future time who
would share these recorded experiences with her. As Shurr so persuasively argues, we tend to do Dickinson a tremendous disservice. When we do examine the fascicle poetry, which is placed intermittently throughout even the Johnson edition of Dickinson's poetry, we recognize that her persona as poet-lover is fairly well sustained. As she writes of her absent lover, we sense the strength of her feelings, the energy of her passion, and the power of her love. This strength, energy, and power are fused into a substantive poetry of absence.

We need to remember that, especially in Dickinson's poetry, absence does not congruently equate to loss. Loss connotes deprivation or depletion—of emotion, of conflict, or of love. A loss may have resulted in the absence, but the absence does not necessarily correspond to that loss. The poet-lover may have been deprived of the presence of her beloved, but she transforms his absence into the essential dynamic of the poetry. All of the emotion, the conflict, and the love that accompanied her relationship with him is captured in the words of her poetry.

And, as Suzanne Juhasz argues in The Undiscovered Continent, "Language, of course, turns out to be Dickinson's greatest power and best weapon" (6). Although Dickinson may not use the term "weapon" to describe the power of words, she writes several poems that correlate to that image of linguistic aggression. "There is a
word/Which bears a sword" (#8) describes an armed word in repeated battle where "It hurls its barbed syllables/And is mute again." The implication is that words are "mute," or powerless in their inactive state. During the reading process, however, they resume their aggressive stance, inciting the reader to hermeneutic "victory."

The two poems that most clearly depict words as weapons are "My Life had stood--a Loaded Gun--" (#754) and "She dealt her pretty words like Blades--" (#479). "My Life" reflects back upon the life of poetic genius, a life which, like a loaded gun, discharges its powerful ammunition. That ammunition, for the poet, is her language, her words that have "the power to kill" or noticeably affect her reader. Conversely, the words themselves assume a kind of immortality because they are "Without--the power to die--." As long as the words appear on the printed page, they are not dead. They continue to live apart from their creator.

Poem #479 graphically addresses this autonomy of the written word:

She dealt her pretty words like Blades--
How glittering they shone--
And every One unbared a Nerve
Or wantoned with a Bone--

She never deemed--she hurt--
That--is not Steel's Affair--
A vulgar grimace in the Flesh--
How ill the Creatures bear--
Radically separating language from the one who uses it to write the poem, Dickinson describes the poet as one who functions separately from the words. Weapon-like, the sharp-edged words can awaken a "Nerve" and can cut to the "Bone" of the one who reads them. Ideas may come into the reader's mind through the words of the writer, but this poem suggests that they assume textual autonomy, acting apart from the writer. Dickinson's image thus suggests that ideas indeed have a "spectral" power, a power that works beyond the physical reach of the poet.

Does such an image negate my premise that the absent presence of the poet is a dominant factor in the rhetorical triangle? Not at all. The words, as Dickinson writes in #479, are hers initially. She is the skillful master who makes them "pretty." She is the one who makes them "glitter" in style and syntax and "shine" with ideas and meaning. Like indestructible "Steel," the poet's absent presence emerges from the words which she writes.

A return to Juhasz and her discussion of Dickinson yields an explanation for the poet's metaphor of words as weapons: words are to quicken thought. Incisive, sometimes even painful, words effect results when all rhetorical elements are successfully implemented: a loving and responsible writer, a syntactically and aesthetically correct text, and a loving and responsive reader. When these conflate through a reading experience, the
consequence is tangible—evidenced frequently in feelings. Though nebulous, feelings nevertheless signify a discernible awareness of something having happened: emotions tapped, thoughts engaged, or ideas shared.

Dickinson accomplishes each of these as she embodies a language of absence. For her, feelings are an integral part of both the writing and the reading of a text. Juhasz deduces that feelings, for Dickinson, are paramount: "Not to feel is pointless; it is not to be alive and, therefore, it is death. Thus Dickinson courts all feelings and finds value therein" (UC 173). Juhasz goes on to say that especially the feeling of pain is important because of "its vitality and its pedagogical potential" and "is worthy of pursuit, even though it admittedly hurts" (UC 173). Again, I stress that pain is not tantamount to unhappiness. Dickinsonian pain heightens awareness; it sharpens perception; it awakens insight. As Juhasz argues, her language of absence, although it may herald pain for both writer and reader, is a crucial part of the poet's strategy.

I would counter that Dickinson does not limit her experimentation with feelings to pain. She draws on the reservoir of all emotions: disappointment/ecstasy, sorrow/joy, loss/gain, despair/anticipation, and doubt/confidence. And through each of these antinomian constructs, Dickinson departs significantly from the
writings of her Renaissance predecessors as she not only relies on, but implements, what can be for her reader, painful textual absences and ambiguous references. These purposeful absences, as I will discuss later, are Dickinson's means whereby she seeks to engage her reader fully as a rhetorical partner.

Certainly other startling differences separate Dickinson's poet-lover from those of Sidney and Shakespeare. Admittedly, her persona is female while theirs are male, but the differences in gender, as I interpret the majority of her poems, are not relevant to the operations of the dominant absent presence. I recognize that some critics, such as Martha Nell Smith in Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson, argue that we misread Dickinson's work if we ignore what she identifies as the lesbian overtones in the text. But I would counter that her canon (and consequently her audience) suffers if it is forced into Smith's equation: poet (Emily Dickinson) + beloved (Susan Gilbert Dickinson) = poetry. In her rereading of Dickinson, Smith strives to superimpose her theory of the poet's personal life onto the poetry, a potential quagmire for critical analysis. The primary error in Smith's assessment is her assumption that Dickinson's poetry is narrowly autobiographical, representing a verbal reflection of Smith's own, and personally particular, interpretation of Dickinson's life.
Farr reminds us that Dickinson's expressions of love for her sister-in-law conform to accepted social customs of Victorian New England. Dispelling the notion that they were "'carnal' lovers," she recognizes the tradition of romantic friendship and love among nineteenth-century women.

There was, indeed a cult of fond sentimentality among Victorian girls. By including encomiums to cheeks, hair, and bosoms, it [the tradition] acquired an ambiguous eroticism.

(PEP 101)

A problem for modern readers of Dickinson is that we tend to assess overt verbal eroticism between two women (such as that found in Dickinson's letters) as physical in nature. Products of a society with social mores different from those of the Victorian era, our hermeneutic mandate is to refrain from imposing judgmental twentieth-century interpretations on nineteenth-century customs.

However, I recognize that part of Dickinson's genius is that a critic can hermeneutically construe one, or some, of her texts as lesbian in nature. Since all of Dickinson's texts resonate with absences, both male and female, they can subsequently allow crossings of the lines of gender--heterosexual, lesbian, or other. Because of her treatment of absences, a variety of readers can (and do) respond in radically different ways to her poetry. In making such a statement, however, I do not accept Smith's homosexually biographical basis for Dickinson's poetry.
Conversely, neither am I convinced of Shurr's argument that many of the fascicle poems depict Dickinson's "anomalous marriage" (MED 14) to the Reverend Charles Wadsworth. Especially when Shurr explains Wadsworth's seemingly abrupt departure to San Francisco, the credibility of his thesis breaks down. Devoting several pages to his hypothetical assumption, Shurr argues that, in order to avoid certain scandal, Wadsworth left his pastoral post in Philadelphia after Dickinson told him that she was pregnant with his child. Shurr further deduces that this fetus was aborted, perhaps with the assistance of Susan Gilbert Dickinson (Shurr, MED 177). Although much of Shurr's book is informative and entertaining, I cannot help but balk at his reliance on conjecture, sometimes reaching unsubstantiated supposition, which he offers as a means of understanding Dickinson's poetry.

Although I cannot accept Shurr's theory of an "anomalous marriage" to Wadsworth, I agree that the preponderance of evidence points to a heterosexual relationship emerging from the text. This determination does not preclude the validity of other interpretations. Quite the contrary, I recognize that those like Smith who interpret Dickinson's work as homosexually biased, perhaps inadvertently, offer an accolade to the poet and her work. The multiple interpretations of gender and of relationship between poet-lover and beloved attest to a poet and a
poetry that can speak meaningfully to both the heterosexual and the homosexual reader.

Regardless of personal bias, any reader can successfully find meaning, and certainly pure pleasure, from Dickinson's poems, all containing purposeful absences, presumably to titillate and involve the reader. Some, like #211, even pulsate with eroticism. Borrowing from nature, Dickinson describes the consummation of love between persona and her beloved as heterosexual, between a bee (male symbol) who penetrates a flower (female symbol):

Come slowly--Eden!
Lips unused to Thee--
Bashful--sip thy Jessamines--
As the fainting Bee--

Reaching late his flower,
Round her chamber hums--
Counts his nectars--
Enter--and is lost in Balms.

Unmistakably seductive, this poem describes prolonged pleasure in the sexual act, moving from foreplay ("Come slowly--Eden!") to anticipation of ecstasy ("As the fainting Bee--") to loss of individuality for the female as the male enters her and releases part of himself ("Enters--and is lost in Balms"). This idea of loss, with an implied reduction of self, is something that distinguishes Dickinson's poet-lover from Astrophil and Will. For the purpose of this study, then, which is to plot and analyze an absent presence that fuels the artist's creativity while it empowers the writing process, I will refer to
Dickinson’s relationship of poet-lover and beloved as one between an assumed female persona and her male beloved.

Dickinson’s view of love, as described in #190, is highly idealized: "He was weak, and I was strong—then—/So He let me lead him in—." Especially for a nineteenth-century single female, this heterosexual perspective may be considered radical as it allows for the reversal of roles in sexual dominance and emotional control. But it is a view that plays itself out in much of her poetry. Dickinson’s tendency to minimize the self in order to maximize the power of her persona pervades especially her fascicle poetry. Jane Donahue Eberwein, in Strategies of Limitation, advises the reader of Dickinson’s ploy:

Dickinson’s readers must be alert to her tendency to exploit whatever limitations she encountered—often to intensify those limitations in order to exploit them more. . . . To be tiny was not necessarily to be negligible, or lacking in vital power.

(SL 10)

To be tiny, to seem insignificant, and to function in absence inversely represent Dickinson’s strengths. The lack often enables what the poet refers to as "circumference"—the bursting through of all limitations, be they life into death, mortality into immortality, presence into absence, eros into agape, or male into female as described in #190.
Much has been written about Dickinson's idea of "circumference." Critics who undertake an explanation of this complex Dickinsonian term agree only that it suggests manifold meanings. In her text devoted to an understanding of Dickinson's eccentric use of the word, Eberwein concludes that "Circumference, for Emily Dickinson, is death—the transitional point between the familiar circuit world and either immortality or nothingness" (SL 164-65). According to Eberwein, the "familiar circuit world" is the "circuit of personal space," the knowable world of "consciousness, identity, the senses and matter," while circumference is "whatever might be outside" the boundary of finitude (SL 161).

Kher, on the other hand, argues that "Circumference is Dickinson's metaphor for resurrection. Circumference, which is the earth's outer limit, offers her a simultaneous experience of life and death or life in death" (LA 124). Eberwein and Kher link circumference to that which occurs after death. Eberwein says Dickinson recognizes two options: immortality or nothingness. Kher, quite specifically, says circumference is resurrection into another state of being.

I prefer the explanation of Judith Farr. Farr takes up the discussion of "circumference" in two separate chapters of The Passion of Emily Dickinson. Initially, she states that the unique term is "one of [Dickinson's]
metaphors for poetry" (PED 29). Later, Farr expounds more fully, linking "circumference" to love. Analyzing "circumference" as a reference to "artistic inspiration," Farr concludes that "'circumference' generally means either poetry itself or the significance of all that exists, on earth and in heaven" (PED 319). "Circumference" (the poetic program) thus becomes the means through which Dickinson and her reader might begin to approach understanding of all that seems to defy understanding. 

Laura Briggen develops a similar argument. In "Emily Dickinson's Circumference: Figuring a Blind Spot in the Romantic Tradition," Gribben says that the poet's perceptive ability, the talent that defines her as a professional poet, "provides her with a much needed foothold" (3). She concludes that "circumference," for Dickinson, thus becomes "the domain of all that is and can be known or experienced. It is enriched from within by emotions, experience, language, and poetry, and it is limited from without by death, eternity, and the sublime—all that is unknowable" ("EDC" 17). Lovingly molding that which is present (emotions, experience, language) into poetry, the poet comments on that which is absent, but that which can be aesthetically actualized through words (death, eternity, and the sublime). 

It is this struggling for presence in the midst of absence that fuels virtually all of Dickinson's poetry.
And at the heart of the struggle is the poet-lover who claims and then textually recreates presence from her absent lover. As she endeavors to glean understanding from and add meaning to her sphere of life, she empowers her reader to share the experience with her and, subsequently, to translate that meaning into her personal life.

Like Astrophil and Will before her, Dickinson's persona undertakes a metaphorical journey, but hers is toward circumference:

Each Life Converges to some Centre—
Expressed—or still—
Exists in every Human Nature
A Goal—

Embodied scarcely to itself—it may be—
Too fair
For Credibility's presumption
To mar—

Adored with caution—as a Brittle Heaven—
To reach
Were hopeless, as the Rainbow's Raiment
To touch—

Yet persevered toward—sure—for the Distance—
How high—
Unto the Saints' slow diligence—
The Sky—

Ungained—it may be—by a Life's low Venture—
But then—
Eternity enable the endeavoring
Again.

(#680)

This poem suggests that human existence is in a continuous movement toward the raising of consciousness, what Eberwein calls "a process of stripping away extraneous details to reveal the essential elements of her life metaphor--the
pilgrimage from limitation to circumference" (SL 47). This consciousness is of self in relation to world and Other, but it also includes a heightened awareness of the totality of being—life/death, mortality/immortality, and impermanence/permanence.

Although we observe Dickinson’s poet-lover in a journey, her movement toward knowledge differs significantly from those found in the texts of the Greek philosophers (Plato and Aristotle), the Biblical writers (especially the New Testament), and the Renaissance writers (Sidney and Shakespeare) mentioned in previous chapters. Whereas each of them, or their personae, sought to understand themselves in the realm of self, world, and creator, Dickinson’s writing suggests an alternative pilgrimage. She does not overtly question and seek to understand the existence of an omnipotent Creator.

Spiritual tenets from Dickinson’s strict nineteenth-century Puritan upbringing can be found in her poetry. Frequently affirming these traditional beliefs, she compares the role of her poet-lover to that of the suffering saint—but one without a savior. Her persona prays to God to relieve her of her "Misery" in love, but her anguished pleas go unanswered. Prayer, a seemingly irrevocable aspect of Dickinson’s heritage and upbringing, suggests part of the poet’s homage to the one whom she recognizes as the Creator and sustainer of life. Her
persona prays to God, but He neither acknowledges nor acts upon her pleas. He is disinterested and uncaring (#376). Ultimately, she comes to realize that the power resides within herself as poet to redeem herself from the misery that is hers.

As maker of meaning, she manipulates words to raise herself, and consequently her readers, from the abyss of misery:

I reckon—when I count at all—
First--Poets--Then the Sun--
Then Summer--Then the Heaven of God--
And then--the List is done--

But, looking back--the First so seems
To Comprehend the Whole--
The Others look a needless Show--
So I write--Poets--All--

(#569)

God and his heaven are a part of her existence, but they rank fourth in a list of importance in her realm of reality. That which is all important is the poet.

Like Sidney, Dickinson ranks the poet highest in her hierarchy: she is above the sun, the summer, and the heaven of God. From atop her perch, she therefore, "dealt her pretty words like Blades--" (#479) as the means to begin "To Comprehend the Whole" of life. Words are her only weapon (Juhasz, UC 6). Through them, she gains access to understanding, which, in turn, empowers her to control that life which has been given her.
And Dickinson's world basically is limited to that which she can, and for the most part does, control. Primarily reclusive in her adult years, she personally interacts with her immediate family and only a few friends. She creates, however, an extended network of association, corresponding with friends, old and new. And it is primarily through this correspondence that we witness her efforts to control that world, to present herself to her correspondents as she wants them to see her. Thus, she creates her own version of reality for her readers.

One encounters that "reality" through the subconscious, the inner self. World and creator are relevant only insofar as they impinge upon this journey of self in search of its central being. Dickinson poetically details a quest that plunges the conscious individual into the abyss of the sublimated self to flounder for some modicum of truth that might emerge from the deep. Poem 642 describes this modernist quest that demands self-alienation as a means of discovering truth:

```plaintext
Me from Myself—to banish--
Had I Art--
Impregnable my Fortress
Unto All Heart--

But since Myself--assault Me--
How have I peace
Except by subjugating
Consciousness?

And since We're mutual Monarch
How this be
```
Except by Abdication--
Me--of Me?

The poet suggests that by a repetitive banishing of the conscious self, by regularly retreating into the inner self, an individual might achieve some monarchy of that self ("Heart" and "Consciousness"), some validation that she influences the exterior and controls the interior spheres of her own existence. "Abdication," as Dickinson uses it here, is a conscious handing over of the mind to that unconscious, almost subliminal, state of being.

And Dickinson's poetry records that psychic journey for her reader. The movement is necessarily erratic, vacillating between the various antinomies that define existence: life/death, mortality/immortality, joy/despair, self/other, and presence/absence. But the act of writing (and the consequent act of reading), as Ong argues, allows at least partial understanding of this complex human experience:

The highly interiorized stages of consciousness in which the individual is not so immersed unconsciously in communal structures are stages which, it appears, consciousness would never reach without writing. The interaction between the orality that all human beings are born into and the technology of writing, which no one is born into, touches the depths of the psyche. Ontogenetically and phylogenetically, it is the oral word that first illuminates consciousness with articulate language, that first divides subject and predicate and then relates them to one another, and that ties human beings to one another in society. Writing introduces division and alienation, but a higher unity as well. It intensifies the sense of self and fosters more
conscious interaction between persons. Writing is consciousness-raising. (QL 178-79)

Paradoxically, writing, which is produced from the "highly interiorized stages of consciousness" (the subjugated conscious), is "consciousness-raising." It becomes intimately confrontational, forcing the reader likewise to retreat into herself, the mind of her being where she communicates with the writer. Although it may create "alienation" (disagreement), the text fosters "interaction" each time a reader partners herself with it.

A poet like Dickinson who seems to understand this literary complexity can manipulate the language to increase the reader's capacity to understand. By leaving "the Verb and pronoun out" (#494) and incorporating numerous other absences, she forces her reader into active participation in the poetic process. Then by going into her own abyss, the recesses of her subjugated conscious, the reader fills in the blanks with her own interpretation, thus elevating her own consciousness and propelling her into an outward-reaching, ever-widening circular path from which she can come to greater knowledge of the self that transcends self. That transcendent state allows one, at least temporarily, to experience "otherness"--of "other" and of "Other." It is this ontological movement which Dickinson calls "Circumference."
I realize that the terms "outward-reaching" and "ever-widening" seem to contradict the idea of circumference, which suggests a confining outer perimeter, but I counter that these terms reflect the inherently paradoxical nature of Dickinson's quest. As Elisa New has put it:

The quest is becoming distinctly oxymoronic, for the poet who would spread wide her narrow hands to apprehend God, must search for the limit—which is God—by finding first her own limit, knowing both limits, insofar as they are genuine, to be unknown, unrecognizable.

("DWDG" 12)

Spreading "wide" her "narrow" hands to "apprehend" an unapprehendable God, in order to "know" that which is "unknown" typify the frequent confusion and certain complexity that attends any study of Dickinson's poetry. Unlike Whitman who, claiming to be the center of his universe, opens wide his arms to embrace all of humanity throughout all time, Dickinson, placing herself on the periphery, embraces the self to the self in an attempt to move outside the boundaries of consciousness. Where we, her readers, may tend to be confused, she simply invokes "circumference" to signify her musings of being in the here-and-now and beyond. The term is used repeatedly in both her letters and her poetry.

In a July 1862 letter to Higginson, she writes, "My Business is Circumference." This letter does not contradict her claim that "My business is to love." On the contrary, each supports the other. The two letters were
composed about the same time, and in each Dickinson seeks to explain her professional integrity to Higginson. Although Dickinson may have posed, may have exaggerated, and may have lied in some of her correspondence to her preceptor, she seems sincere in both of these letters. Her business, indeed, seems to have been "Circumference." She contends, however, that "Circumference" can be approached only through love.

Dickinson's poetry time and again attests to the poet-lover attempting to burst through the multifarious boundaries that inhibit understanding, that confound wisdom and truth both for herself and for her potential reader. As she strives to achieve some semblance of affirmation for who she is and what she is about in a world that offers little plenitude, she creates a poetry of absence that conversely is mind-boggling in its potential for plenitude for her reader. A quintessential Dickinson poem (#816) describes this process:

A Death blow is a Life blow to Some
Who till they died, did not alive become--
Who had they lived, had died but when
They died, Vitality begun.

Resounding with the strain of present-though-absent, this short poem affirms that which occurs between poet and reader. The Dickinsonian idea of life as death and death as life refers both to the death of the writer who comes to life when her words are read by the reader and death of the
printed words which are renewed in that "Undiscovered
Continent" (#832) which is the mind of the reader.

Ong comments on this paradox inherent in a written
text:

> The paradox lies in the fact that the deadness of
> the text, its removal from the living human
> lifeworld, its rigid visual fixity, assures its
> endurance and its potential for being resurrected
> into limitless living contexts by a potentially
> infinite number of living readers.
> (OL 81)

Although a reader may not be conscious of her part in the
resurrection of words, she nevertheless experiences it each
time she gleans meaning from a text. She becomes
"affected" by both text and writer of text. Especially for
the reader of Dickinson, this is true. As she engages with
the poet and her poet-lover in the printed text, she
actively participates in the highly affective quality of
that carefully wrought work.

In a letter to his wife, dated 16 August 1870,
Higginson quotes from an interview that he had with
Dickinson at her home in Amherst that attests to this, in
Dickinson's words, "aftermath" of the reading experience.
In that interview, Dickinson describes her criteria for
determining good writing, what she refers to as "poetry":

> If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body
> so cold no fire ever can warm me I know that is
> poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my
> head were taken off, I know that is poetry.
> These are the only way I know it. Is there any
> other way.
Good writing, then, is writing that is affective; it is writing that can be judged in great part by the emotional effects that it produces in its reader. For Dickinson, feelings are paramount; they become the means by which one might determine the value of a work of poetry. Her "critical" determination for good poetry is thus contrary to the argument set forth by W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley in "The Affective Fallacy." Whereas they argue that the (at least somewhat) objective critic is to differentiate "between the poem and its results (what it is and what it does)" ("AF" 21), Dickinson refuses to separate the poem from its effects.

Without denying the affective quality of poetry, Wimsatt and Beardsley maintain that emotions are not the business of the critic, while Dickinson concludes that emotions are the business of the intimate reader, her only critic. We have to remember that Dickinson sets forth a highly subjective agenda: a sensitive poet presumably writing for an equally sensitive and implicitly personal audience. She writes intimately, suggesting a one-to-one correspondence between herself and a familiar other. The only "critic" that she envisions is her willing and emotionally responsive reader.

If a poem, or indeed any printed text, succeeds in creating an affective response which results in a reciprocal relationship between writer and reader, the
reader clearly stands to benefit from the reading process. In Poem 919, Dickinson describes what seems to be an overriding purpose in her poetry, to relieve her reader from a similar pain of absence from which her poet-lover suffers:

If I can stop one Heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain
If I can ease one Life the Aching
Or cool one Pain

Her poetry, then, becomes a poetic prescription that will enable her readers to work through absence, to distill absence into positive presence. Essential in that formula for circumference, for understanding, is emotional pain. If "A Wounded Deer--leaps highest" (#165), Dickinson suggests that the poet-lover, who is the assumed persona, likewise must be emotionally wounded in order to relate the means whereby a textually productive absent presence can be achieved from absence.

Unlike Borges, I differentiate between the poet and the poet-lover; the poet-lover, not necessarily Dickinson, the poet, "needs misfortune" ("BDDE" 10), usually in the form of the absent beloved, in order to reproduce textual presence. After full, and fulfilling, presence with her beloved, the poet-lover must necessarily plumb the depths of absence so that she might write the whole of the story. If the experience is aesthetically translated, the poet-
lover’s journey from presence into absence may culminate in an absent presence that inhabits the text.

In *This was a Poet*, Whicher quite convincingly compares the journey of Dickinson’s poet-lover to that of Dante’s protagonist in *Vita Nuova*:

> The individuality of her contribution lies in the fact that these poems are not merely reiterated expressions of passionate longing and regret, but successive moments in the intricate progress of a soul through the deepest of human experiences. They record with minute veracity the subtle changes in a woman’s nature as she becomes conscious of her heart’s unalterable commitment, passes through self-sustained illusion and painful disillusionment to an agony of frustration, and emerges at last impregnably fortified on a new plane of being. Not many poets have traced the stages of a like psychic journey to the very edge of doom and back. But somewhat the same pattern of spiritual growth through deprivation we may recognize in the grave symbolic pageant of Dante’s *Vita Nuova*. (269-70)

If Dickinson’s fascicles outline the poet-lover’s psychic journey into the treacherous experience of love, then we might more readily view them, as Shurr would have us do, as a poetic sequence that is comparable to Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* and Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*. But more than either of theirs, hers is an experience ambivalently triumphant in its return from doom. Without the painful experience, she would not have had the knowledge; without the deprivation, she would not have had the emotional growth; without the loss, she would not have had the poetic gain; without the absence of her beloved, she would not have had his absent
presence to inhabit her poetry. Utilizing her skills as poet, she redeems each of these negative elements. As she transforms the negative into positive emotional resources, the poet invites her reader to share the textual experiences of her persona.

In order to achieve desired participation from her reader, Dickinson must convincingly, as from personal experience, write about the movement from absence into a paradoxical fullness of absent presence. Without drawing from the "reservoir" of her own life, she is to create a convincing life-like experience, or a multitude of experiences. The role of the poet is crucial:

> The Poets light but Lamps--
> Themselves--go out--
> The Wicks they stimulate--
> If vital Light
>
> Inhere as do the Suns--
> Each Age a Lens
> Disseminating their
> Circumference--
>
> (#883)

The key elements in this poem (Poets, Lamps, and Wicks), correspond to the rhetorical triangle of writer, text, and reader. The suggestion is that the poet merely "stimulates" circumference, that paradoxically ever-widening movement toward understanding.

For her readers, who are the "Wicks" that enable the light, she simply provides the poetic text, the "Lamps" to light the way toward understanding. Determining that
Dickinson employs synecdoche and metonymy in this passage, Laura Gribben broadens my analogy:

‘Lamps’ have wicks (synecdoche) that produce ‘Light’—as do ‘Suns’ (metonymy). . . . Though poets light lamps, or create poems, the light, vitality, and meaning of their poems are determined by each individual age. ("EDC" 5)

The wicks (the readers) are part of the whole of poetry (the lamps). The readers, through vicarious experience, are the ones who determine the "light" of understanding.

The real incendiary power, Dickinson seems to indicate, results from the dynamic action that occurs between the reader and the words that continue to disseminate knowledge long after the poet puts those words to paper. She describes this action in Poem 1261: "A Word dropped careless on a Page/May stimulate an eye/When folded in perpetual seam." A reader may find understanding about herself from a word or phrase that the writer "dropped" carelessly, without much serious thought, on the page. The suggestion is that inspiration for the reader comes arbitrarily, at different times and places, long after the writer completes her task of empowering the word.

Indeed, one can hardly read a Dickinson poem without sensing this power and responding viscerally to the words therein. From "Wild Nights—Wild Nights!" (#249) to "He fumbles at your Soul/As Players at the Keys" (#315) to "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—" (#465) to "There is a
pain—so utter—/It swallows substance up—" (#599), the willing reader simply cannot read impassively. She wants to know the source of the wild nights; she wants to learn who fumbles with her soul; she wants to understand how the deceased can hear a buzzing fly; and she wants to comprehend a pain that can overpower substance. Perhaps this is one reason that some critics pursue the biographical explanation: it "answers" some of the unanswerable questions of Dickinson’s poetry. Possibly one reason that she does not provide irrefutable answers that suggest singular interpretations is that hers would then be a poetry of closure. And if hers were a poetry of closure, it would inhibit total immersion of her reader. But since her poetry denies closure, it demands full participation from her reader. Since hers is a poetry that allows one absence to give way to other absences, it opens the floodgate to hermeneutic possibilities. Certainly this is effected by creative design, and not merely by authorial accident. Also certainly by design is Dickinson’s experimentation with language, especially with absences therein.

Unlike the sequences of Sidney and Shakespeare, something pervasive immediately complicates the reader’s understanding of the experience of Dickinson’s persona. Not only does she write of the absence of her beloved, but essentially all of her poetic language suggests absence.
Indeed, hers is a poetry of absences. As David Porter writes in *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom*, absence is the primary condition of her art. The absence was the sacred poverty out of which her verbal imagination leaped. The poverty made the poetry possible, even justified it. For she heaped words in the void as her kind of consolation. What power was left to her lay in her restless art.

(D:MI 160)

Like Astrophil and Will before her, Dickinson’s persona, who is poet-lover, reformulates absence of her beloved into presence through her poetry. But more than either of them, she embraces absence as a means of achieving presence, as the medium for approaching circumference. Earlier in his text, Porter aptly recognizes, "There is absence at every level: morpheme, word, phrase, poem, text, corpus, and the life as its matrix" (D:MI 5). As Dickinson herself admits in Poem 494, she not only "left the Verb and pronoun out," but she also omitted references to particulars that would allow definitive readings of her work.

These absences necessarily invoke her reader, compelling her to become involved in the Dickinson text. The reader’s responsibility in the process is tantamount to that of the writer; she must submit herself to an intimate interchange with the text in order to reach some meaningful determination of that which is omitted or altered. Indeed, Dickinson’s aversion to standard punctuation (suggested by her signature dash), her lack of specific reference
(confounded by their numerous possibilities), and her avoidance of plenitude (evidenced by conflicting elements) dominate much of her poetry; and all demand the reader's close scrutiny and intellectual engagement. Any number of Dickinson's poems reveal these absences, these aversions to standard linguistic practices, and these seemingly blatant contradictions to fact that pervade her work.

However, one poem in particular emphasizes these absences, aversions, and antinomies as it comments on her poetic reasoning for incorporating opposites to entice her readers:

'Tis Opposites--entice--
Deformed Men--ponder Grace--
Bright fires--the blanketless--
The Lost--Day's face--

The Blind--esteem it be
Enough Estate--to see--
The Captive--strangles new--
For deeming--Beggars--play--

To lack--enamor Thee--
Tho' the Divinity--
Be only--
Me--

(#355)

This poem startles the reader with its cataloging of opposites that "entice" (and are enticed by) the other: grace/deformed men, bright fires/blanketless, Day/the lost, sight/the blind, Thee/Me. Establishing a causal relationship, the persona posits that lack, or absence, yearns for, even demands, that which it does not have: the deformed yearn for a grace that will make them whole; the
blanketless desire fires to keep them warm; the lost await the dawn of day to show them the way; the blind pray for sight; and the Me, who is poet-lover, yearns for Thee, who is the absent beloved. Specifically, that which is without seeks presence of the other.

Another short poem describes how presence is achieved from absence:

To fill a Gap
Insert the Thing that caused it--
Block it up
With Other--and 'twill yawn the more--
You cannot solder an Abyss
With Air.

(#546)

Dickinson argues that one cannot fill a gap, an absence, with a substitute; if one tries, the gap simply widens as it yearns for that which caused the fissure. The only hope for filling the chasm is to "Insert the Thing that caused it." Since it is impossible to fill a void with something that is physically not there, one must transmute that which was formerly present into its absent presence. As the poet undertakes this metaphorical transformation through her words, she can retain those properties of the beloved that provide comfort, security, and love to her.

A poem, which is really an analogue to the absent presence, explains what happens:

I see thee better--in the Dark--
I do not need a Light--
The Love of Thee--a Prism be--
Excelling Violet--
I see thee better for the Years
That hunch themselves between--
(#611)

Here the poet-lover claims that through the intervening years of separation from her beloved, she sees him "better--in the Dark." She sees him better in his absent presence than she did in physical presence. She can make this claim because she has successfully, through her continued love for him, redefined his presence in her poetry. Like a prism that refracts multi-colored shades from a single light, her love can refract various constructs of his absent presence through her poetry. His parting, his absence, is that which stimulates his absent presence.

Poem #1714 explains:

By a departing light
We see acuter, quite,
Than by a wick that stays.
There's something in the flight
That clarifies the sight
And decks the rays.

Parting is the pain that quickens; it is the catalyst that makes the feelings for the departed one more acute. The pain, then, "clarifies the [poetic] sight" and "decks" (adorns or enhances) the absence into an absent presence. And that absent presence can become whatever the poet needs him to become in a particular moment, as expressed in her many poems to the beloved.
Shurr refers to this process as "presence-through-absence":

Though absent, he is a permanent resident in her mental universe.

These two themes—Dickinson’s sense of her status now as a professional poet (to match the professional status of her beloved), and her realization of the beloved’s presence-through-absence—merge at times to a new realization: that is precisely his presence-through-absence and the experiences they have shared which furnish the best subject matter and motivation for her as a professional poet.

(MED 85)

Although Shurr’s term "presence-through-absence" may be phrased differently from my term "absent presence," he and I refer to similar states of textual being. The absences of life, whether experienced by the author or created for her persona, provide the drama for the poetry. Those absences comprise the "stuff of life" that force personal growth upon the individual. The poet "takes the stuff of life, molds it, and projects it as art" (Kimbrough 52). Without the antinomies of life/death, mortal/immortal, finite/infinite, certitude/illusion, and absence/presence, existence would be stagnant. Poetry, which necessarily is drawn from that life, then, too would be lifeless and inert, unable to draw a potential reader into participation. But because Dickinson was so fully aware of the absences that inhabit life, she was able to incorporate them especially into her fascicles, which focus on "that after Horror" (#286), with its accompanying "great pain"
Because these emotions are, to varying degrees, shared by all, her work "invites the reader to dive into his or her own abyss in order to find the existential truth concretely yet perpetually" (Kher, LA 44).

Dickinson does not guarantee that her readers will glean immediate understanding. Quite the contrary, she forewarns of certain difficulty because she tells the truth "slant":

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant--
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight

The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind--

(#1129)

If "Circuit" is that personal, mortal space which determines the individual, and if "Circumference" represents, as Eberwein writes, the "boundary itself between the circuit of personal space and whatever might be outside" (SL 161), then poem 1129 speaks of the processing and accessing of "Truth" on this finite side of "Circumference." The implication here is that blatant truth is too powerful for the reader to grasp; indeed, it may "blind" in its intensity. The task of the poet, then, is to slant the truth in an artistic (metaphoric, metonymic, and synecdochic) way so that the reader be "dazzled" into truth, so that she might gradually discern some kernel of truth about the nature of human existence; she then can apply that distilled truth to her own life.
This ability is that which most distinguishes a great poet from a mediocre one. Through the slanted truth, the poet achieves a double aim: to stop her reader's "Heart from breaking" (#919) and to ensure perpetuity for herself.

For Dickinson, a truth that might stop a "Heart from breaking" is variously described: it is "Bald, and Cold" (#281); it is equivalent to Beauty (#449); it is "stirless" (#780); it is "as old as God" (#836); it is "slant" (#1129); it is "good Health" (#1453); and, ultimately, it "outlasts the Sun" (#1455). The combined images suggest the pervasive goodness of truth: although it may be cold and harsh, hence painful, it is implicitly beautiful because it frees one from harmful intellectual conceptions and hurtful emotional relationships. Dickinson thus reformulates the biblical promise "the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32) into a rhetorical gamble: if a reader is willing to chance the temporarily uncomfortable recognition of truth, which is the reading of it through the aesthetically rendered words of the poet, she chances to gain far greater perceptual knowledge.

What results for the writer who disseminates these poetic bits of slanted truth is perpetuity. Through transforming absence into an absent presence in her poetry, Dickinson gambled her talent and indeed gained immortality through her words as they effect meaning for her readers:
She staked her Feathers—Gained an Arc--
Debated--Rose again--
This time--beyond the estimate
Of Envy, or of Men--

And now, among Circumference--
Her steady Boat be seen--
At home--among the Billows--As
The Bough where she was born--
(#798)

In death, finally having achieved ultimate "Circumference," she offers her poetry to her readers as the aesthetic means whereby they might approach their own "Circumference."

Through her poetry that remains and houses her absent presence, she continues to speak across the centuries to those who willingly enter into dialogue with her.

Dickinson and her poetry of absence provide a fitting conclusion to this critical exploration of rhetorical and literary absent presences that come into play in the reading of a text. Her work, in many ways, typifies the struggle of the poet who seeks to overcome différence, when the resultant effect is that writing tends to multiply différence. To quote Mills-Courts as she explains this Derridean paradox, "Instead of gathering, différence institutes 'dissemination'; instead of permitting arrival, it produces a 'detour, a delay'; instead of granting appropriation, it generates 'dispossession'" (PE 11-12).

Through this study of selected works of Plato, Aristotle, New Testament writers, Sidney, Shakespeare and Dickinson, I have sought to show that "dissemination,"
"detour," "delay," and "dispossession" do not preclude meaning. Meaning may be deferred, and it may be abridged. But it can be, and is, effected whenever a willing, a responsible, and a responsive reader partners herself with the absent presence of a writer whose text represents an equally willing, responsible, and responsive effort. Ideal plenitude between writer/reader/text may be impossible, but very real communication can be achieved as multiple rhetorical (writer/reader) and literary (personae and characters) absent presences are engaged in the process of reading.
Notes

Chapter 2

1. Note the masculine reference to person, who ultimately represents the assumed reader. This reference will change in subsequent chapters. During the process of writing, I automatically, and rather naturally, responded according to the audience presumed by each of the writers. Since the original readers of Plato, Aristotle, and the New Testament, were a predominantly male audience, the masculine pronoun seemed most relevant. Conversely, since Astrophil's sonnets were directed to Stella, reference to a female reader appeared to be more appropriate, especially when I considered that Sidney's sonnets would have been read to gatherings of the court, gatherings which certainly would have included women.

When I began writing the chapters on Shakespeare and Dickinson, I again used the feminine pronoun "she" in referring to the reader of the text. In a subsequent reading of what I had written, I was admittedly puzzled by what I had done. In fact, this reference to reader as female became something of a paradox to me, especially since I argue that the beloveds, to whom both Shakespeare and Dickinson direct their poetry, are male.

After analyzing why I assumed a female reader, I reached a rather startling conclusion. Much like Gorgias suggests in his Encomium and Ross Chambers further develops in Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction, I realized that I, as reader of my own text, was analyzing the word/reader (logos/listener) relationship similarly. The word, as male "seducer," was successfully eliciting a response from me, the female reader.

Mine is not a unique reaction. Indeed, current reader-response criticism envisions the audience as female. Jacques Lacan (Feminine Sexuality, Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, eds., trans. J. Rose, Norton Pub., Co., New York, 1982) and a number of studies made by Sigmund Freud support such a premise.

I ask that you recognize these shifts in person, not as erratic shifts, but as controlled determinations of the writer of the text.

sophist’s "rhetorical works and their psychological implications" (100), Segal develops his essay from the premise that Gorgias’s views reflect those of his society. As such, "The Helen in particular is based largely upon an analysis of human actions in terms of emotional causality" (104).

Segal’s essay is well worth the reading because it situates Gorgias’s discussion of eros in the milieu that produced it.

3. Mark Wigley (The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida’s Haunt, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1993) develops his thesis from an interesting, but nontraditional, premise: "to translate deconstruction in architectural discourse" (1). As he identifies Derrida with Heidegger’s view of "Being" (Sein), he recognizes that "Metaphysics is the identification of the ground as ‘supporting presence’ for whatever stands like an edifice" (8).

In noting the correlation between discourse and a physical edifice, a building, Wigley overlooks a seemingly obvious link to Aristotle’s triangular view of discourse: logos/ethos/pathos. For the builder, triangular support is essential; it makes the edifice rigid, preventing its collapse.

The triadic structure in discourse likewise is that which maintains the dynamism of the word; it is that which forestalls the collapse of written communication.


Chapter 3

1. In his forward to Essentials of Bible History (The Ronald Press Co., New York, 1947), Elmer W.K. Mould establishes the Bible as "the most important book in the English language" (v-vi).

Although some may question his claim, few can objectively ignore the impact that the Bible made on both the spiritual and the literary worlds: its content permanently impacted humanity in the ways that it perceived and expressed "otherness."

2. In his introduction to The Bible as History, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1968, William Barclay espouses three
views of history: the "circular and repetitive," the "haphazard" and purposeless, and the "purposeful" and Christian (11-13).

Seeking "to present Bible history within the setting of contemporary world events" (17), Barclay joins other writers in a textual effort that points to "God's revelation in history" (18).

Though written from a decidedly Christian perspective, the book is valuable to my study in that it quite successfully objectifies the Christ, placing him in the context of history.

Chapter 4

1. Paula H. Payne, "The Poet Orator's Praise: Epideictic Discourse in Sidney's Astrophil and Stella" (The Sidney Newsletter, 9, 1988, pp. 11-21), argues that Sidney fashions Astrophil's "unspoken monologue out of three distinct and different types of Aristotelian discourse: forensic, epideictic, and deliberative rhetoric" (11). Focusing on epideictic oratory (praise or blame), Payne provides specific evidence that many, if not all, of Sidney's sonnets fit the mode of Aristotelian discourse.


3. Eva Schaper (Prelude to Aesthetics, George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., London, 1968) develops the thesis that Plato and Aristotle originated aesthetics, the "living debate of issues concerning the concepts involved in speaking about the arts and the appreciation and creation of art works" (11). Crediting Aristotle with inaugurating "aesthetics as a theoretical study" (13), she contends that the "presence" (134) of these philosophers invades and shapes any critical enterprise.

4. Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century (edited by Charles Martindale, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 1988) is an informative collection of essays that traces some of Ovid's influences on Western literature. Sidney's rendering of Astrophil's plight from poetic despair to artistic hope at least faintly echoes the Metamorphoses.
Chapter 5


I cannot be as generous as Michael Field (Shakespeare Quarterly, 38, 1987, 375-77) who reviews Pequigney's book:

> It ought to be clear that Such Is My Love is a major reinterpretation of Shakespeare's sonnets. While the tone of certainty, the attack on the major traditions of criticism of the sonnets, the stress on very explicit erotic references in the poems, and the effort to show that the received order is demonstrably correct may annoy some readers, annoyance will have to yield to respect. For even if not all of his claims prove valid, Pequigney is so rigorous and sensible in substantiating them that no casual dismissal is possible.

(377)

I do not casually dismiss Pequigney's reading. I simply suggest that he fails to factor in the Elizabethan view of male-to-male relationships which allowed for overt expressions of love.

Chapter 6

1. Mary Arensberg's "Introduction: The American Sublime" (The American Sublime, State University of New York Press, New York, 1986) carefully defines sublimity. Beginning with Longinus, whose text On Great Writing initiates the idea, she says that the "Longinian sublime is essentially rhetorical and identified as the reader's response to great
utterance." In such an analysis, Arensberg comments that "the moment of sublimity is always a language scene which produces an uncanny metaphorical effect" (3).

After delineating five Longinian "rhetorical and psychological structures which inform the problematic of the sublime, ancient or modern" (3), Arensberg suggests that the American sublime bridges the ancient sublime through "the Kantian drama of the imagination," where the sublime is subdivided into "mathematical" and "dynamical" (4, 5). Providing a cursory overview of the essays in the text, Arensberg says that Emerson, Whitman, Dickinson, Marianne Moore, Adrieenne Rich, and Elizabeth Bishop draw on "various models of the sublime" to create their own distinctly American version of sublimity.

2. Jorge Luis Borges's interview at Dickinson College (Borges the Poet, University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, 1986) was conducted in the Socratic method. Professor James Hughes, the interviewer, served as interlocutor to "Socrates," Luis Borges. At the conclusion of the interview, members of the audience were given an opportunity to question the guest speaker (8).

The interview is thus representative of metarhetoric. As Borges and his interlocutor discuss the poetic rhetoric of Dickinson, they subsequently call attention to their own language as rhetoric.

3. The thesis put forth by Helen Regueiro Elam ("Dickinson and the Haunting of the Self," 83-99, The American Sublime, Ed. Mary Arensberg, State University of New York Press, New York, 1986) is that this lingering and powerful authorial presence results from the writer's "abysmal experience of self-loss" (83). As "Dickinson's poems uncover this abyss within the self" (96), her reader shares in the struggle "which poetry tries to heal and which it reveals" (84).

4. Peter Gay (The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud, Vol 1, Education of the Senses, Oxford University Press, New York, 1984) ambitiously seeks, through several volumes, to give "symphonic treatment" to "the bourgeois experience" (3). Proceeding from a historical perspective, his first volume is an "inquiry with bourgeois sexuality and with its mature form, love" (4).

Like Farr, he concludes that modern readers have grossly inaccurate conceptions of Victorian relationships, both male to female, and female to female. Although he recognizes that he may "complicate" our preconceived notions, Gay aims to "correct those tenacious misconceptions that have dogged our reading of Victorian culture" (3).
Gay's text is highly informative and deserves at least a referential glance in any study of Emily Dickinson. His carefully compiled index is especially helpful in locating specific passages that comment on particular misconceptions of the Victorian era.

5. Judith Farr (The Passion of Emily Dickinson, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1992) builds an argument that Samuel Bowles, rather than Charles Wadsworth, is the referent for Dickinson's "Master." For the most part, she ignores Wadsworth as an integral player in the creative life of Dickinson, the poet. Farr suggests that not one but two "beloveds" emerge from the fascicles. One is female (Sue Gilbert Dickinson), and the other is male (Samuel Bowles). The poet-lover's feelings toward the first are innocent in their affection; her feelings toward the second are passionate in their admiration (182-83).

6. In her book Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation (The University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1985), Jane Donahue Eberwein provides a thorough discussion of Dickinson's differentiation between "Circuit" and "Circumference." Arguing that Dickinson's quest was implicitly religious, Eberwein assesses that "Circuit" and "Circumference" are a part of the poet's willful strategies which she incorporates to express the
dilemma of human limitation ... with powerlessness paired with omnipotence, finitude with infinity, mortality with immortality, deprivation with plenitude, misery with blessedness, man with God.

(73)

"Circuit" and "Circumference" are the antinomical states of existence, the conscious (the finite) and the unconscious (the potentially infinite).

The "business" of the poet allows those who are not poets to venture into that abyss of "Circumference." Through her aesthetic slanting of "Truth," the poet offers a momentary glimpse into that which might lie beyond mortality.

7. In "Tropes of Presence, Tropes of Absence," a chapter in The Language(s) of Poetry: Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins (The University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1993), James Olney analyzes the absent presence somewhat differently from the way that I approach it in this study. Like Olney, I recognize the metaphorical
significance of the term, but I apply that metaphor as an ontological construct. As such, the term "absent presence" metaphorically describes various rhetorical and literary states of being—writer to reader, reader to writer, writer to personae, and reader to personae. These separate entities, working in unison, determine the outcome of any reading experience.


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Born in Nacogdoches, Texas (1949), Maggie Burnaman Martin received her B.A. in English from Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas (1969), and her M.A. in English from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana (1971). While teaching at Louisiana College, Pineville, Louisiana, she returned to LSU in the Fall of 1990 to begin advanced studies. Although her educational background is predominantly generalist, it yields concentrations in poetry and rhetoric. Her interest in rhetoric, coupled with computer-based instruction, an integral part of the Louisiana College English Department, led to her researching the problems of computers in the classroom. Those findings are compiled in "Computers in the Classroom: Finding a Fluid Strategy for a 'Fluid Text.'" Mrs. Martin presented that paper to the LACC/LCTE Conference in October, 1992. It was subsequently published in Louisiana Association for College Composition (1994).
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Title of Dissertation: The Transcendental Element in the Absent Presence

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination: April 4, 1995