

HERMENEUTICS  
AND  
LITERATURE

# PHAINOMENA

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## PHAINOMENA

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# POETIC (DIS)CLOSURES

## IN CONVERSATION WITH MAŁGORZATA HOŁDA'S HERMENEUTIC READING OF LITERATURE

Andrzej WIERCIŃSKI

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What is more important in life than learning to listen to and speak with one another? Sharing life is the greatest gift (*Gabe*) of being invited into a conversation with the Other. *Con-versatio* becomes the ultimate task (*Aufgabe*): to be a responsible human being in the world with the Other (*Mitsein*). Heidegger prompts us to live responsibility (which is not the same as exercising responsibility) without paternalizing, moralizing, and imposing moral and social rules on ourselves and others.<sup>1</sup> We are called (*vocatio*) to be in the world responsibly. The primordial meaning of responsibility (*ursprüngliche Verantwortung*) guides us to the inviting call to answer somebody/something that addresses us (*Ver-Antwortung*). To respond, we must hear the voice of Being. It is the language as the house of Being (*das Haus des Seins*) that speaks

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1 Cf. Heidegger 1977b, 287. The metaphoricity of poetry calls for particular attention to the path of thinking (cf. Heidegger, "The Thinker as Poet," in: Heidegger 1971, 1–14).

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(*die Sprache spricht*).<sup>2</sup> Human life is a permanent exercise in attuning oneself to this voice. To recognize that understanding is the way of being: a human being in the world is, as Ricoeur would say, a *via longa* of the discernment that we are historical, lingual, finite, and temporal human beings in the productive tension between αἰών, χρόνος, and καιρός.<sup>3</sup> Living this tension helps us grasp the indispensability of being attuned to the present moment, which is congenially elaborated by St. Paul, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger as an instant, *Augenblick*: neither a vague notion of this age (αὐτῷ οὔτε ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι) nor the age to come (οὔτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι [αἰῶνι], Mt 12: 32).<sup>4</sup> We recognize that we dwell in the lingual space, and are called to care (*cura, Sorge*) for this dwelling in the concentration of attention.<sup>5</sup> Heidegger privileges thinkers and poets (*die Denkenden und die Dichtenden*) in Being's self-revealing and self-manifesting.<sup>6</sup> With this privilege comes an immense responsibility to be constantly vigilant, attentive, and alert to the revelatory power of Being. It is precisely the attentiveness of thinkers and poets which brings Being's self-disclosure to shine (φαινέσθαι).<sup>7</sup> As the witnesses to a powerful interplay of

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2 "It is language which speaks, not the human being." (Heidegger 1997, 161.) In "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger proclaims language as the *house of Being*, and calls a human being "the shepherd of Being," responsible for all-that-exists (cf. Heidegger 1967, 162, 172). See also, e.g., Vattimo 2019, 36–37.

3 "The Greeks, who had a name for every concept, imagined three different deities to denote time: kronos is the time that passes, the time that measures daily activities and the phases of life; aion is infinite time, eternity, while kairos is the right, opportune time, suitable for carrying out an action or achieving a goal: it is the time that takes the form of an opportunity that, if not taken, is lost forever." (Bordoni 2019, 110.) See also Wierciński 2018, 52–62.

4 Cf. McNeill 1999. See also Ward 2016.

5 Cf. Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in: Heidegger 1971, 143–159, especially 144.

6 The truth of Being is the self-concealing/self-revealing Event, in which beings are disclosed. Cf. Hodge 2015 (especially chapter: "Heidegger's Later Philosophy," 15–27).

7 This hermeneutic insight is based on Heidegger's understanding of the formal meaning of phenomenology as letting "that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (Heidegger 1962, 58). Cf.: "Gods are dangerous when they manifest themselves clearly" (χαλεποί δὲ θεοὶ φαίνεσθαι ἐναργεῖς, Iliad 20.131). See Henrichs 2013 (especially chapter: "What is a Greek God?," 19–40). Gadamer views ἀλήθεια as the *event* of revelation: "In einem ursprünglicheren Sinne 'geschieht' Unverborgenheit, und dieses Geschehen ist etwas, was überhaupt

ἀλήθεια, of concealment and unconcealment (*Verbergung/Entbergung*), they bring the revelation of Being into language and preserve it in language.<sup>8</sup>

Witnessing to Being's self-disclosure is an indefatigable and delightful, but also frightening and worrisome (*fascinosum et tremendum*) exercise of the imagination. In the public realm, the free play of imagination finds its concretization in a conversation. A hermeneutician is particularly captivated by the work of art and the creative productivity of such an engagement. The imaginative process concerns questioning and facing the matters worthy of being addressed (*fragwürdig*).<sup>9</sup> It is the ability to explore productive questions through a human encounter and, thus, promote a culture of questioning.<sup>10</sup> Gadamer problematizes the question regarding the productive scholar and the production of something new. For him, "it is imagination [*Phantasie*] that is the decisive function of the scholar. Imagination here naturally has a hermeneutic function and serves the sense for what is questionable." (Gadamer 2008, 12.)

The question to be addressed in this conversation concerns "the decisive function of the scholar." Is Małgorzata Holda a scholar who, with her dignity (*Würde*) and ingenuity, can identify, recognize, and appreciate that which is primarily questionable (*das ursprünglich Fragwürdige*)? Is she a thinker and a poet (*Denker und Dichter*) who can responsibly care for Being (*Wächter der Behausung des Seins*)?<sup>11</sup> Can she offer us anything new? Is imagination

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erst möglich macht, daß Seiendes unverborgten ist und richtig erkannt wird. Die Verborgtheit, die solcher ursprünglichen Unverborgtheit entspricht, ist nicht Irrtum, sondern gehört ursprünglich zum Sein selbst." (Gadamer 1987a, 259.)

8 Gadamer maintains that language happens in the *in-between* of concealment and unconcealment (*im Zueinandergehören von Verbergung und Entbergung*). For Gadamer, "language is not just one of man's possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a *world* at all. [...] Language has no independent life apart from the world that comes to language within it." (Gadamer 2000, 443.) Cf. Brassler 1997; Boeder 1997.

9 For Heidegger, questioning is not the interrogation in a general sense, but an ability to think between what is questionable (*das Fragliche*) and what is worthy of being questioned (*das Fragwürdige*). See Heidegger 1966, 44–46.

10 Cf. Weber and Wolf 2016, 74–82.

11 "Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins. In ihrer Behausung wohnt der Mensch. Die Denkenden und Dichtenden sind die Wächter dieser Behausung. Ihr Wachen ist das Vollbringen der Offenbarkeit des Seins, insofern sie diese durch ihr Sagen zur Sprache bringen und in der Sprache aufbewahren. [...] Das Denken handelt, indem es denkt.

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(*Phantasie*) her way of being a scholar who finds fulfillment in being *l'homme capable comme agissant et souffrant*?<sup>12</sup>

Małgorzata Hołda holds a Ph.D. in British literature from Nicolaus Copernicus University (2006). In her doctoral thesis, *Between Liberal Humanism and Postmodernist Fun: The Fiction of Malcolm Bradbury*, she positions Bradbury's fiction between the liberal humanist's and postmodernist's approach to literary art. Her reading of Bradbury's fiction allows her to unearth aspects that can be seen as evocative of postmodern writing: discontinuity, disruption of language, incongruity, plurality, and unfixed subjectivity. Bradbury's novel way of understanding the writer's genuine right not just to present and represent but celebrate life and entertain brings Dr. Hołda to a philosophically profound inquiry into the (in)comprehensibility of self-understanding's transparency as thematized in Ricoeur's work on narrative identity.<sup>13</sup> Human life can prove intelligible once the story of the life in question has been told. It is the narrative of one's life that constructs one's identity. Human responsiveness to others causes the narrative of one's life to become a coherent unity.<sup>14</sup>

510 Małgorzata Hołda's dissertation in Philosophy at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, *Paul Ricoeur's Concept of Subjectivity and the Postmodern Death of the Subject*,<sup>15</sup> clearly demonstrates that she is ready to face an array of remarkably complex challenges and offer valuable insights on the hermeneutics of the self. Her research into the postmodern philosophy of Jean Baudrillard, Jean Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Fredric Jameson, and especially Michel Foucault's "technologies of the self" discloses the vicissitudes of the postmodern construction of the self. The efficacy of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics in recuperating the human "self" in the age of the

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Dieses Handeln ist vermutlich das einfachste und zugleich das höchste, weil es den Bezug des Seins zum Menschen angeht. Alles Wirken aber beruht im Sein und geht auf das Seiende aus. Das Denken dagegen läßt sich vom Sein in den Anspruch nehmen, um die Wahrheit des Seins zu sagen. Das Denken vollbringt dieses Lassen. Denken ist l'engagement par l'Être pour l'Être." (Heidegger 1967, 313.)

12 Cf. Wierciński 2013, 18–33.

13 Cf. Hołda 2016, 225–247.

14 For an explication of Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity as a coherent unity, see Hołda 2017, 71–88.

15 Cf. Hołda 2018.

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“death of the subject,” particularly the dialectics of *idem* and *ipse* identity, allows for the identification of the self as it changes over a span of time.<sup>16</sup> Ricoeur upholds human subjectivity by deploying an extensive theory of interpretation that relies upon the analysis of discourse, metaphor, and symbol. Such an art of interpretation speaks for a clear belonging together (*Zusammengehörigkeit*) of theory and practice.<sup>17</sup>

In her other published work, Hołda addresses an impressive number of topics pertaining to the relationship between contemporary philosophy and literary theory. She contributes substantially to Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia, Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self, the polyphony of human speech, the dialectic of question and answer, and language’s essential dialogic contextuality. Interrogating the topic of narrative identity, Hołda extends the scope of her research on the relevance of narrative in the formation of selfhood and the role of narrative in the understanding of human existence by drawing on a broad spectrum of theoretical standpoints, which indicate the resurgence of narrative and narrativization in literary studies, contemporary philosophy, and historiography: Linda Hutcheon, Jean François Lyotard, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Hayden White.<sup>18</sup>

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In the sequence of articles engaging the fictional works of Malcolm Bradbury, David Lodge, Kazuo Ishiguro, Rose Tremain, Graham Swift, Angela

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16 Ricoeur develops his dialectic of *idem* and *ipse* identity that accounts for both the changeability and sameness of the self in time. Cf. Ricoeur 1991a, 425–438; 1991b, 73–81. See also, e.g., Hołda 218, 122–124.

17 Gadamer developed his hermeneutics as practical philosophy through the philosophical practice of interpretation. Initially, it was the interpretation of texts, and subsequently, the totality of human experience. To understand means to interpret: “Heidegger’s temporal analytics of Dasein has, I think, shown convincingly that understanding is not just one of the various possible behaviors of the subject but the mode of being of Dasein itself. It is in this sense that the term ‘hermeneutics’ has been used here. It denotes the basic being-in-motion of Dasein that constitutes its finitude and historicity, and hence embraces the whole of its experience of the world. Not caprice, or even an elaboration of a single aspect, but the nature of the thing itself makes the movement of understanding comprehensive and universal.” (Gadamer 2000, xxvii.)

18 Cf. Hołda 2006b, 89–100; 2019, 6–26; 2016a, 225–247; 2017c, 37–49; 2010, 123–130; 2005b, 61–71.

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Carter, Beryl Bainbridge, and Ian McEwan,<sup>19</sup> Hołda discusses a host of topics featuring in British postmodern fiction. She enriches her already substantial interrogation of human subjectivity by exploring how postmodern writers evoke socially constituted selfhood and pursue the culturally determined models of femininity and masculinity. Discussing the intricacies of the representations of gender in postmodern fiction, she extensively draws on the critical feminist perspectives of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, and Rosi Braidotti. These articles also address the question of the violation of ethical values and the transgression of humanity pervasive in the postmodern culture. Hołda skillfully examines not only the versatility of themes but also the form of postmodern fiction and, more specifically, the elements of self-reflexivity, metafiction, and pastiche.<sup>20</sup>

512 Researching various understandings of *mimesis* in postmodernity, she focuses on the ways in which postmodern writers use fabulation, surrealism, and expressionism, acknowledging, at the same time, the impact of modern fiction's experiment on the development of the artistic forms of expression in postmodern fiction.<sup>21</sup> Exploring the themes of temporality, desire, mourning, and epiphany in her analyses of the modern works of Woolf, Eliot, Joyce, and Kipling, she touches upon the fundamental question of the rejection or continuity of the modern in the (post)modern.<sup>22</sup> Tracing the roots of the postmodern destabilization of the referential function of language in the classic works of modernism, she advocates for *the hermeneutics of continuity* rather than the *hermeneutics of rupture*.<sup>23</sup> Speaking of continuation and rapture, it is essential not to be mistaken by the simple opposition of the notion of continuation and rapture, but to think change and permanence in time hermeneutically.<sup>24</sup> Here,

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19 Cf. Hołda 2007, 143–148; 2006a, 135–143.

20 Cf. Hołda 2015, 41–52; 2008a, 128–138; 2005a, 125–133.

21 Cf. Hołda 2008b, 39–48.

22 Cf. Hołda 2016c, 157–168.

23 In the theological debate, Benedict XVI calls for a “hermeneutics of continuity” rather than a “hermeneutics of rupture.” Cf. Millare 2020.

24 For Ricoeur, the self is mediated by the dialectic of analysis and reflection (explanation and understanding). The other dialectic is the dialectic between *ipse* and *idem* as two forms of identity corresponding to a different permanence/change in time. “The dialectic of the same and the other crowns the first two dialectics.” (Ricoeur 1992, 18.)

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further deepening of the Heideggerian destruction (*Destruktion, Zerstörung, Abbau*) and the Derridean deconstruction is instrumental.<sup>25</sup>

Hołda's double allegiance to literature and philosophy and her intense attunement to their interweaving paths transpire in her apposite exploration of the topics that profoundly permeate literary and philosophical discourse alike: being-in-the-word, the unique unrepeatability of the self, and the situatedness of human experience. Her examination of the dialectic of familiarity and strangeness<sup>26</sup> and her insights into the hermeneutic ethics of forgiveness exemplify her creative contribution to the hermeneutics of the self and the ontological understanding of our being-in-the-world, which is always being-with. Situating her reflection in the horizon of Heidegger's philosophy of facticity, she probes the understanding of human existence as being-toward-death (*Sein zum Tode*) and the complex nature of mourning.<sup>27</sup> Following her commitment to delve deeply into Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics and Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics, she is also interested in the less known thinkers, such as the late Pamela Sue Anderson, an excellent reader of Ricoeur through Kant.<sup>28</sup> Brooding on the legacy of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the capable subject (*l'homme capable*) in Anderson, she elaborates on her inimitable way of theorizing feminine capability.

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The main title of Małgorzata Hołda's new book, *On Beauty and Being: Hans-Georg Gadamer's and Virginia Woolf's Hermeneutics of the Beautiful* (Hołda 2021), indicates that the author attempts to think Beauty and Being. The hermeneutics of the beautiful will be discussed with reference to Hans-Georg Gadamer and Virginia Woolf. *On Beauty and Being* is envisioned as a song of praise, a hymn on τὸ καλὸν and τὰ οὐσία. What happens then when

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25 For Heidegger, the task of philosophy is the destruction of the history of metaphysics: "We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—the ways which have guided us ever since." (Heidegger 1962, 44.) Heidegger uses various terms to describe destruction, dismantling, unbuilding (*Destruktion, Zerstörung*), and deconstruction (*Abbau*). Cf. Heidegger 1956, 73.

26 Cf. Hołda 2016b, 13–28.

27 Cf. Hołda 2017b, 151–166.

28 Cf. Hołda 2020, 7–24.

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the hymn on τὸ καλὸν is sung? What could this enchantment possibly mean? Plato gives us a fabulous hint in *Symposium*:

αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν ἰδεῖν εἰλικρινές, καθαρὸν, ἄμεικτον, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀνάπλεων σαρκῶν τε ἀνθρωπίνων καὶ χρωμάτων καὶ ἄλλης πολλῆς φλυαρίας θνητῆς, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ τὸ θεῖον καλὸν δύναιτο μονοειδὲς κατιδεῖν;

But tell me, what would happen if one of you had the fortune to look upon essential Beauty entire, pure, and unalloyed; not infected with the flesh and color of humanity, and ever so much more of mortal trash? What if he could behold the divine Beauty itself, in its unique form? (*Symposium* 211e; Plato 1991, 207.)

514 The Platonic Beauty, in its ethical and transcendent dimension, is never totally separated from the beautiful figures like Helen or Aphrodite or beautiful paintings of ὁ παῖς καλός, an inscription frequently found on Attic vases and graffiti, mainly during the Classical period from 550 to 450 BC. This “looking upon” and “behold the divine beauty itself” are the source of happiness and sorrow since we are not yet there to enjoy it fully. We are on the way (*Unterwegssein*) to Beauty, “infected with the flesh and color of humanity.” The experience of Beauty can be encountered in the disorder of reality, as Gadamer reminds us, “with all its imperfections, evils, errors, extremes, and fateful confusions” (Gadamer 1987b, 15). Beauty has its clear ontological purpose: it bridges the chasm between the ideal and the real.

Philosophical reflection on Being, revolutionized by Heidegger’s critiques of the forgetfulness or oblivion of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*), centers around the distinction between Being (*das Sein*) and a being (*das Seiende*). This is apparently the primary source of the forgetfulness of Being, the forgetfulness of the ontological difference (*ontologische Differenz*).<sup>29</sup> The translation of the Greek ὑπαρξις as *existentia* and οὐσία as *essentia*, while reserving ὑπόστασις for *subsistentia* has created substantial tension in understanding Being (ὑπαρξις

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29 Cf. Hee-Cheon 2002.

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versus οὐσία) in its being Being (*das Sein in seinem Seiendsein*).<sup>30</sup> Since Dasein is always in relation to Being, it understands itself explicitly in its being-there of Being. As Heidegger clarifies: “Man remains referred to Being, and he is only this. This ‘only’ does not mean a limitation but rather an excess. A belonging to Being prevails within man, a belonging which listens to Being because it is appropriated to Being.”<sup>31</sup> We distinctly experience here the longing for the primordial belonging together in this relationship. And one of the constitutive elements of this bond is Dasein’s listening attunement to Being.<sup>32</sup>

It might be an interesting question to ask why *On Beauty and Being* rather than *On Being and Beauty*, or simply *On Being*, or *On Beauty*. It could be a matter of *ars poetica*, a hermeneutic ear, or a hermeneutic eye. But it could also be a matter of metaphysics when we think of an axiom: “*Ens, verum, bonum et pulchrum convertuntur in unum.*” (Thomas Aquinas 1953, 1.1.)

Hołda’s *Habilitationschrift* reveals that the hermeneutic reading of literature engages deeper and more versatile insights into what we commonly understand as literary and philosophical texts. Treating them as pertinently influencing one another, she sets herself with a task to trace their intersecting pathways, focusing on Gadamer’s philosophical thought and Woolf’s fictional creations. Indicating the limitless possibilities, which arise from the deployment of such a perspective, her work brings to the fore the inexhaustibility of understanding and the richness of the hermeneutic approach to philosophizing as well as to conceiving and interpreting literary texts, and, thus, overarching, and welcoming that which is marginal and underappreciated. Rather than viewing Woolf’s fiction as a *belles lettres* stage for the dramatization of Gadamer’s philosophical ideas, by situating her insights on philosophical and literary works in a singular work of criticism, Hołda focuses on the two authors’ common idiom and the centrality of the hermeneutic thought, in which their discourses partake. A hermeneutic reading of literature provides a very close examination of the subject whose vulnerability is a constitutive trait of consciousness and who is bound to and blessed by the bodily experience.

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30 Cf. Davis, Kendall, and O’Collins 2004 (especially on οὐσία and ὑπόστασις in the Cappadocian Fathers).

31 Heidegger, “The Principle of Identity,” in: Donkel 2001, 19.

32 Cf. Aguilar Rivero 2004. See also Contreras 2013, 63–65.

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Placing side by side those two apparently separate strands of writing, she leads us on a pathway that resists the instant and surface associations with what each of the two modes of thinking purports to offer. And thus, questioning the oft-claimed distinctions, she successfully unsettles the preconceived ideas of what literature and philosophy encompass, inspiring us to approach them in a more open and challenging fashion. Hermeneutic reading of literature is not about deciphering philosophical aspects or ideas in literary texts. It is not a deliberation on philosophy in literature, philosophy of literature, or philosophy and literature, but a response to what I call “the imperative to think the incommensurable.”<sup>33</sup> I love the poetry of Fernando Pessoa, but unfortunately, when he says about himself that he is not a philosopher with literary interest but “a poet interested in philosophy” (Pessoa & Co. 1988, 9), our ways part. What makes us thinkers is that we think Being and Beauty in their primordially and share our thinking with others. The *modi* of thinking and the *modi* of expression are the subjects in themselves.

516 Hermeneutic reading of literature follows the logic of conversation with the text in its *Wirkungsgeschichte*. According to Gadamer, the conversation partners are being led by the conversation rather than leading it.<sup>34</sup> There is the matter (*die Sache*), which finds its way of articulation in “convincing illumination of truth and harmony, which compels the admission: ‘This is true.’” (Gadamer 1987b, 15.) The hermeneutic conversation as the mode of being in the world and the way we experience the beautiful in art becomes the way we approach the work of art in its enticing Beauty, “which shines forth most clearly and draws us to itself, as the very visibility of the ideal” (ibid., 15). What is so essential in this hermeneutic interpretation of art is that the

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33 “For understanding the relationship between philosophy and theology, the two need to be perceived as equal yet different. Looking at the much-troubled relationship between those two disciplines, at a long history of despicable falls, but also strange and successful recoveries, we can hope for hermeneutic insight in the age of the return of the religious. Hermeneutics calls us not only to negotiate the space between the disciplines but also to re-think the reasonability of translating the unique discourse of one discipline into the language of the other. It shows us that the confinement of language to one theoretical idiom can stifle the quest for that which cannot be fully articulated.” (Wierciński 2010, 317.)

34 Cf. Gadamer 2000, 383. See also Gadamer 2001, 56.

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work of art captivates us, takes us into its own possession, and presents us with the unapologetic ethical appeal to radical personal responsibility, which is powerfully expressed by Rilke's verse from the poem "Archaic Torso of Apollo": "You must change your life. *Du mußt Dein Leben ändern.*" (Rilke 2022.)<sup>35</sup> There is nobody who can give an answer for us (*re-spondeo*). Therefore, any interpretation of an artwork happens in this horizon of radical responsibility. It underscores the hermeneutic claim to universality (*Universalitätsanspruch der Hermeneutik*), which expresses that *anything* can be understood, and: "Being that can be understood is language. *Das Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache.*" (Gadamer 2000, 470.)<sup>36</sup>

Philosophy and Literature, Philosophy as Literature, Literature in Philosophy, Literature as Philosophy—all those areas of academic research testify to the multifaceted approaches to the intimate but also problematic liaisons between literature and philosophy. Instead of simply deciphering philosophical themes and ideas in literature, Hořda's book leads us to acknowledge the incommensurability of Philosophy and Literature. This division is not to be overcome but thought through, faced, and lived.

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Sensitizing her readers not to follow the artificially constructed and clear-cut differentiation between philosophy and literature, Hořda's book potently demonstrates that they belong together while participating in the Beauty of the unpredictability of language as an *event*. Her close readings of Woolf's three major novels: *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *The Waves*, draw our attention to the novelist's firm belief in the power of language to enact Being. At the same time, she argues that, being intensely aware of language's potential to perform, Woolf not only knows the ways in which the flow of discourse gets deconstructed by the unavoidable gaps and fissures, but makes those

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35 See also Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," in: Gadamer 2007, 131.

36 "What is essential is the speculative unity of language, which expresses the difference between the Being of a being and its self-manifestation. The ontological significance concerns not the verbal expression of a being, but the self-presencing of Being in a being, which cannot happen without a concretization in the word itself. The word is not just a mere instrumental tool to allow Being to show itself in beings. The word is a word by participation in the revelation of Being. When something is said, when Being discloses itself in a being, the word becomes part of the truth of Being, ἀλήθεια, and thus disappears (*aufgeht*) into what is said." (Wiercinski 2019b, 60.)

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meaningful crevices and pregnant silences into part of her modernist stylistics. Embarking on a journey to hermeneutically investigate Woolf's fictions, Hołda reveals how those narratives, riven with ambiguities, equivocations, as well as syntactical inconsistencies, participate in the hermeneutic interplay of the said and the unsaid (*das Gesagte und das Ungesagte*),<sup>37</sup> and how Woolf's writing concords in manifold ways with Gadamer's gloss on language and his explication of the concealment/unconcealment of Being (*Verborgenheit/Unverborgenheit*) as enacted through language.<sup>38</sup>

Highlighting the import of the recognition of language's metaphoricity as constitutive of the literary and philosophical discourse alike, *On Beauty and Being* focuses on aesthetic queries and unfolds the intimate connections between language, Being, and Beauty (understood here in terms of the beauty of artistic creation, nature, human beings, and objects). It is the Aristotelian notion of ποιήσις, elaborated later by Heidegger and Gadamer, which stands at the very center of Gadamer's and Woolf's aesthetics.<sup>39</sup> They both show that

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37 "What is said is poor, what is unsaid is filled with richness. *Das Gesagte ist das Dürftige, das Ungesagte erfüllt mit Reichtum.*" (Heidegger 1991, 249.)

38 As the eventing of Revelation, ἀλήθεια goes beyond un-concealment (*Unverborgenheit*) or dis-closure (*Entbergung*). "In einem ursprünglicheren Sinne 'geschieht' Unverborgenheit, und dieses Geschehen ist etwas, was überhaupt erst möglich macht, daß Seiendes unverborgen ist und richtig erkannt wird. Die Verborgenheit, die solcher ursprünglichen Unverborgenheit entspricht, ist nicht Irrtum, sondern gehört ursprünglich zum Sein selbst. Die Natur, die sich zu verbergen liebt (Heraklit) ist dadurch nicht nur hinsichtlich ihrer Erkennbarkeit charakterisiert, sondern ihrem Sein nach. Sie ist nicht nur das Aufgehen ins Lichte, sondern ebenso sehr das Sichbergen ins Dunkle, die Entfaltung der Blüte der Sonne zu ebenso wie das Sichverwurzeln in der Erdtiefe." (Gadamer 1987a, 259.)

39 "This delight in everydayness is the reason for interrupting χρόνος and letting ourselves be overwhelmed by the καιρός of vision, which contains an inaugurating character and is, as such, oriented toward action. Thus, it forms and transforms our expectations and decisions and makes us aware of 'the between' of χρόνος and καιρός from the experience of acting and the dynamic tension between πράξις and ποιήσις. Fundamentally, our relational mode of being in the world (*in-der-Welt-sein*) is characterized by a kairological manner of 'doings' (πράξις) and a chronological manner of 'making' (ποιήσις). Understanding that there is the right time for everything inspires us to think about life in all its dimensions and to face everything that happens in our life. The temporary nature of human endeavors requires a realistic approach to life: To learn to see things as they are in their complexity, variability, ambiguity, and precious beauty." (Wierciński 2019b, 290–291.)

in the making of poetry (ποίησις) and our reading of it, something emerges. For Gadamer and Woolf alike, poetic language is the space in which Being discloses itself to us. Sensitizing us to the power of the poetic word to enact Being, Woolf's lyrical narratives and Gadamer's interrogation of poetry show that in Being's meaningful disclosures, understanding occurs as an *event*:

Poetry is the unique space in which we can experience Beauty as a gateway to Being. In the poetic word Being reveals itself to us. After Heidegger, Gadamer argues that the poetic word embraces the whole of the human experience. In a similar vein, Woolf's lyrical narratives disclose that it is the poetic word that can hold the entirety of an experience of being a human being. (Hołda 2021, 204.)

The focus on the hermeneutics of the beautiful opens the possibility of reaching out for the uniquely rich regions pervasive in the intellectual paths of the two authors. Gadamer commences his hermeneutic inquiry in his ground-breaking work *Truth and Method* with recourse to art and the notion of the beautiful, viewing aesthetic encounter as the model of hermeneutic interrogation. Woolf satiates her artistic vision with aesthetic questions, bringing the issue of Beauty to the center of her literary enterprise. Hołda capably discusses the multifarious aspects of the hermeneutics of the beautiful while touching upon a vast range of topics that pertain to it, also the less obvious ones. At the heart of her work lies the question of Beauty and Truth as belonging together. This Platonic view of Beauty is explored alongside an array of other crucial themes: melancholy beauty, the circularity of time, and the universal patterns of the beautiful shown against the backdrop of the exterior (the clock time) and the interior time (relating to human inward experience). The enactment of the beautiful in Woolf's literary art goes arm in arm with her reflection on subjectivity and intersubjectivity:

The problem of intersubjectivity that *The Waves* tackles is entwined with the scheme of listening and responding. For Heidegger, the crux of poetry is the interplay of those two faculties. Using the German word *Zugehörigkeit*, which could be translated as “belonging in listening,”

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he asserts that listening is a response to Being's call. In the response, the call first resounds like an echo [...] The poetic world of *The Waves* operates in accord with the paradigm of listening and responding. As the six differing voices constitute an individuated poetic lyrical "I" each time they are "given a voice," the images which are created through them comprise a response to the listening to Being, which discloses itself in its manifold ways. (Hořda 2021, 235.)

Elaborating on those issues, Hořda's book offers an important extension of her exploration of the hermeneutics of the self in *Paul Ricoeur's Concept of Subjectivity and the Postmodern Claim of the Death of the Subject*.

520 In the tripartite composition of *On Beauty and Being*, Hořda renders respectively Woolf's fictional embodiments of Beauty in her three major novels and the significant aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics of the beautiful. She navigates her interrogation by bridging questions that pertain to the Gadamerian understanding of Beauty and Being with a detailed textual exegesis of Woolf's narratives, indicating the novelist's hermeneutic understanding of Beauty. In the mirror-like fashion, in separate sections, she juxtaposes Woolf's embodiments of the beautiful with analogous claims regarding Being and the beautiful in Gadamer's writing. The simultaneous interpretations of Gadamer and Woolf in the book's main parts are rounded up with a more detailed rendition of the affinities between the two authors in the "Intersections." The book's meticulous analyses of Woolf's fiction show the novelist not only as evoking Beauty, but as meditating on Being and Beauty. Woolf interprets the beautiful in the liveliness of daily human experience and the gloriousness of love, which transcends the temporality of human experience. With the backdrop of human finitude, vividly portrayed via the images of war, loss, and decline, love is captured in Woolf's fictional imaginings in its capacity to intensify our sense that Being and Beauty are close to one another.

One of the central topics tackled by Hořda in her meditation (*Besinnung*) on Beauty and Being, which she locates within a broader philosophical context, is her reflection on the ontology and phenomenology of time. The issue of time emerges here in relation to the notion of authenticity in Heidegger (*Eigentlichkeit*), which is close to the idea of responsibility, and which can

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be understood as one's unique response (*re-spondeo*) and an unrepeatable engagement with the world.

Drawing on Heidegger, Hořda interprets Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* as reflecting on the possibility of living an authentic life when one genuinely faces the inevitability of death (*Sein zum Tode*). Woolf sees each moment of the passage of time as the dramatization of Being. The intensity of living a life saturates the transience of human experiences. It reveals that human existence both happens in time and escapes the limitedness of being in time, of a life constrained by finitude:

Even though modern writers mourn the fragmentation of human existence and view this state of being as an irrevocable loss, like Eliot, Woolf sees the Beauty of time in the portentousness of its unredeemable passage. To arrest time is impossible, yet the grandeur of time lies exactly in its passing. The way, however, in which we perceive time as passing is related to a response of an individual, in which the provisionality and contingency of human existence as permeated with time play the most significant role. (Hořda 2021, 186.)

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Pursuing the interconnection between Beauty and Being, Gadamer engages the question of time in relation to art and elucidates the captivating force of aesthetic experience, which happens in the time of lingering in front of an artwork. According to him, human response to Beauty involves a phenomenology of a lived experience. Beauty presents itself to us, captivates us, and entangles us in a conversation.

It is the *presencing* or *eventing* of art that Gadamer sees as the core of the aesthetic experience. Gadamer's *Erfahrungsästhetik* places an accent on the dialogical element in our perception of art rather than on an individual sensation (*Erlebnis*). Contemplating the beautiful, we enter a relationship that is of profound significance. This dialogical model of aesthetic experience focuses on the *being of art* and our *being-as-addressed-by-art*, wherein art puts a claim (*Anspruch*) on us and precipitates a response that acknowledges the *happening* of art on the ontological and phenomenological level. Instead of a passive, atemporal life of art, Gadamer speaks of art that is actualized in an intimate

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dialogue with its recipient (*der Angesprochene*): “In the entirety of its uniqueness and importance, an aesthetic encounter is an event (*Ereignis*). Crucially, Gadamer contends that an experience of the beautiful is transformational—an aesthetic experience involves *metanoia*—the recipient undergoes a decisive change.” (Hořda 2021, 22.) This can be illustrated by recourse to Iris Murdoch (a great admirer of Woolf), whose double allegiance to literary creation and philosophizing incarnates the intermingling character of the two disciplines. In the climax of her famous novel, *The Bell*, Dora, its female protagonist, enters a moment of revelation while contemplating Thomas Gainsborough’s portrait of his daughters in the British Museum. Addressed by art, Dora undergoes a profound change. Her life project is undermined, and she must construct it anew.

522 Throughout her book, Hořda maintains that Gadamer and Woolf use similar premises in addressing Beauty and Being with clarity and passion. Focusing on the captivating power of the beautiful and its inspiring vision, the two intellectuals see the force of the momentary illumination as lying both in the ontological and the aesthetic. Woolf’s deep delving into the aesthetic aspect of the revelatory “moment of being” and Gadamer’s philosophy of tarrying in front of an artwork, which engenders a seminal change in the onlooker, borrows from Heidegger’s notion of *Augenblick*.<sup>40</sup> In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger congenially depicts what is happening in the moment of the vision (*Augenblick*):

What is important is only whether the contemporary Dasein, in keeping with its existential possibility, is original enough still to see on its own the world that is always already unveiled with its existence, to bring it to words, and thereby to make it expressly visible for others. (Heidegger 1988, 171.)

Revalidating Heidegger’s *Augenblick*, Gadamer and Woolf highlight the ecstatic forgetfulness, which occurs as the result of a distinct kind of absorption encountered in aesthetic experience, embracing, at the same time,

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40 Cf. Gawoll 1994; Santos-Vieira 2013.

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its transformational character. Hołda's inspirational tracing of the affinities between Woolf's "moment of being," the visionary moment, which evokes the experience of the eternal as disrupting the flow of the present time, and a similar idea deployed by other authors, Joyce, Conrad, Hopkins, Thoreau, T. S. Eliot, and Duns Scotus, testifies to her employment of a broader literary and philosophical perspective, which fittingly emphasizes the book's interdisciplinary character.

Hołda's reflection on Heidegger's legacy in Woolf and Gadamer engages an important discussion of both the mystical and the secular aspects of the visionary moment, the breaking into time, which is coterminous with the moment of a substantial change, *μετάνοια*. This seems to be of great significance, especially in the context of the growing scholarship on Woolf's secular mysticism.<sup>41</sup> The specificity of the Christian experience of time, having its root in St. Paul's teaching, which was later reformulated by Heidegger, encounters in Woolf's philosophical thinking and her hermeneutic approach to human temporality an interesting realization.<sup>42</sup> Her fictions dramatize the experience of the tension between finitude and infinity. Hołda emphasizes that Gadamer's and Woolf's view of aesthetic experience rests on the human capacity to succumb to Beauty's enticing power and undergo a decisive change (*Kehre*).<sup>43</sup>

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Woolf's ingenious descriptions of the beauty of nature, the dinner party, or a journey to the Lighthouse disclose her understanding of the importance of placing her heroes and future readers in an intermedial space of experience. Thus, art becomes *Erfahrungsästhetik*, since the reception of the work of art is an *event*, and the visual aspects are not delimited to merely playing an ornamental role. They essentially contribute to the new tangibility of an affective dimension of acting and creating meaning.

Gadamer's and Woolf's reconfigured inheritance of Heidegger's *Augenblick* encourages us to interrogate their conceptualizations of Beauty more inclusively and profoundly. Beauty is not just a superfluous adornment

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41 For more on Woolf's secular mysticism, see Knight 2007.

42 Cf. O'Rourke 2020; Delahaye 2013; McGrath and Wierciński 2010.

43 Cf. Nassirin 2021; Hemming 1998.

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added to human existence, but it is rather so overwhelming that it arrests us in time, radiates, and speaks forth. The radicality of transformation that is occasioned when we contemplate Beauty reveals its intervening nature and expresses its co-belongingness with Being. *On Beauty and Being* persuasively demonstrates Hołda's knowledge of Gadamer's and Woolf's revalidation of the Platonic philosophy of Beauty. The intimate liaison between Beauty and Truth animates both the philosophical thought of Gadamer, which draws on Plato's distinction of Beauty's self-evidence, radiance, and proportionality, and the literary imagination of Woolf. The wide range of meanings that the Greek term for Beauty encompasses is, as *On Beauty and Being* shows, present both in Gadamer's hermeneutic aesthetics and Woolf's fiction, most prominently in her novel *To the Lighthouse*:

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Woolf's evocation of the beautiful in *To the Lighthouse*, when juxtaposed with Gadamer's ontology of Beauty, foregrounds her understanding of Beauty as a mode of being in her suggestive and vibrant explorations of the moment of being. Her dexterity in capturing the Beauty of the moment manifests itself in the evocations of the unity of *kalon* and *aletheia*. Woolf's embodiments of those notions meaningfully coalesce with Gadamer's reaffirmation of Plato's ideal of Beauty. (Hołda 2021, 31.)

One of the most appealing parts of Hołda's meditation is her engagement with Beauty in the repeatable: Gadamer's concentration on the beautiful as epitomized in ritual and play<sup>44</sup> and Woolf's evocations of the universal patterns of repetitions in nature and human existence.<sup>45</sup> Hołda's insights

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44 In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer devotes the chapter "Play as the clue to ontological explanation" (Gadamer 2000, 102–130) to showing that play and language are genuine experiences of the subject. "Seriousness is not merely something that calls us away from play; rather, seriousness in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play. Someone who doesn't take the game seriously is a spoilsport." (Ibid., 103.) Cf. Williams 2018.

45 Woolf embodies in her lyrical narratives the universal patterns of repetitions of day and night, the up-and-down and the back-and-forth movement of the sea waves, the cyclic time and the changes of the seasons of the year, and the ebbs and flows of human existence.

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contribute to the scholarship on Gadamer's ontology of play as a model of aesthetic experience, as well as highlight the importance of Woolf's unflagging interest in the rites of repetition, in which Beauty inheres, inviting us to a more profound understanding of it.

The reading of Gadamer and Woolf discloses that the great works of art are always in conversation with one another. Their reciprocal interrogation makes a claim on their readers (*Anspruchnahme*) and invites them to participate in this conversation. *On Beauty and Being* escapes any facile classifications or overhasty assertions of the final shape of the issues that it tackles. Instead of following the standard pattern of literary criticism as created in the shadow of philosophical inquiries and reflecting on philosophical ideas as instantiated in works of fiction, Hołda manifests her understanding of the hermeneutic investigation by employing the *to-and-fro* movement, shifting from the philosophical to the literary, and allowing to make her insights transpire in the openness to the mutual influence of and conversation between philosophical and literary texts. Considering the versatility of the themes and motifs that *On Beauty and Being* explores through its aptly applied hermeneutic approach to literature and aesthetics, one could pose a question about the relevance of Hołda's hermeneutic reading of literature in the light of the growing number of inter- and cross-disciplinary studies in the humanities. Undoubtedly, Hołda's book returns us to Heidegger's fundamental question of how it is possible for us to pose this most pressing and riveting query: "What it means to be?"<sup>46</sup> Rather than focusing, in her reflection, merely on an explication of theoretical stands, Hołda invites us to recognize our individuated ways of posing this ontological question and responding to it while apprehending its profound, existential implications. Prompting us, the readers, to see the issue of Beauty as inhering in the question about Being, we are called to respond to Beauty creatively.

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46 Essential part of Heidegger's understanding of what it means to be concerns his analysis of technology. For the ancient Greeks, the "making" of something was perceived as "helping something to come into being." Heidegger's rereading of the ancient Tradition inspires him to interpret modern technology as rather a "forcing into being." Cf. Heidegger 1977a.

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McGregor's experiment in translating literary source material into a three-act ballet (2015) is one of the examples of an inspiring way of reading Woolf.<sup>47</sup> Interpretation is never a simple retelling but an imaginative journey from hell to heaven, from literal to abstract, monochrome to color, negative to positive. Understanding is not a simple re-production, but it is always productive: "*Verstehen ist kein reproduktives, sondern stets auch ein produktives Verhalten.*" (Gadamer 1986, 301.) Understanding changes alongside the history of the reception (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) of that which wants to be understood. Understanding is always understanding differently (*anders verstehen*)<sup>48</sup> since Tradition (*Überlieferung*) emphasizes transmission rather than conservation.<sup>49</sup> This transmission (*trans-fero*) does not mean a direct bringing to the opposite side while keeping things unchanged and preserved in their original appearance. It is far more challenging to see things anew and express the old in a new way.

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Hołda is an engaged listener experiencing the work of art as a communicative event, which calls for active participation (*participatio actuosa*). The work of art is capable of addressing us, and its call for understanding is an invitation or a command to be attuned to the work to the point of being entirely captivated by it. Here, we can go back to Heidegger's and Gadamer's understanding of existence as *ex-sistence*, *ex-stasis*.<sup>50</sup> This ecstasy is not a matter of being outside of ourselves in order to lose ourselves. Being outside of ourselves is a condition of the possibility of being with the Other or otherness. To be genuinely present, we need to experience self-forgetfulness (*Selbstvergessenheit*), which allows us for the undisturbed turning (*Zuwendung*) to the matter of understanding. To understand the work of art means to welcome a radical exposure of our own world to the world of the Other in our human condition as being-in-the-world, which is always a being-with-other (*Mitsein*).

Hołda pursues the interdisciplinary research from hermeneutics as an art of interpretation in relation to literary texts, literary criticism, and theory to

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47 Inspired by Virginia Woolf's three novels, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves*, Wayne McGregor's *Woolf Works* is first full-length production for The Royal Ballet that translates Woolf's literary works to the stage.

48 Cf. Gadamer 2000, 296.

49 Cf. Wierciński 2019a.

50 See Gadamer, "Zur Problematik des Selbstverständnisses," in: Gadamer 1986, 129.

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the studies on hermeneutics in philosophy with an in-depth discernment of its ontological status. Resultantly, the broadening of the hermeneutic horizon by understanding hermeneutics as a *mode of being* means for her an engagement in a new way.<sup>51</sup>

Hołda's reading of literature is hermeneutics in enactment (*Hermeneutik im Vollzug*).<sup>52</sup> Whoever has ever read Gadamer cannot read literature anymore only as the testimony of a triumphant or wrecked talented human being who lived either before us or is living in our time. Essential for Gadamer is that understanding is always in relationship to the history of its effects (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*).<sup>53</sup> What we understand is not the text as the artifact, but the text in its *Wirkungsgeschichte*, i.e., what is interpreted is not the text itself but all the subsequent interpretations that make the text live in the real history of real people. Understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood. We can understand literature only in its *Wirkungsgeschichte*, an artwork of the author, and how this work has been read, interpreted, and transmitted through time to us as contemporary readers.<sup>54</sup> And this remark

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51 "The *conditio humana* is the condition of a human being rooted in the world, i.e., a human being who poses questions about him/herself and others, and who does not give in to stagnation and self-satisfaction due to having achieved successes, but who asks creatively, consistently, and in a new way the question regarding one's mode of being. With that, we understand an integrally developing existence within the horizons of the truth of struggling for one's life as a life struggle and concrete experience." (Wierciński 2019b, 315.)

52 "Hier wird also nicht Literatur als ein Gegenstand zum Thema gemacht, wie etwa der Forscher seine Beispiele oder Belege unter einer bestimmten Fragestellung und mit dem ganzen Aufgebot wissenschaftlicher Zurüstung behandelt. Hier ist meine Absicht allein, dem Vollzug zu dienen, durch den Dichtung zum Partner eines nachdenklichen Gesprächs zu werden vermag. Was das meint und warum das nottut, bedarf selbstverständlich philosophischer Rechtfertigung." (Gadamer, "Vorwort," in: Gadamer 1993, v.)

53 "Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard. Only in the multifariousness of such voices does it exist: this constitutes the nature of the tradition in which we want to share and have a part. Modern historical research itself is not only research, but the handing down of tradition. We do not see it only in terms of progress and verified results; in it we have, as it were, a new experience of history whenever the past resounds in a new voice." (Gadamer 2000, 285.)

54 "Die Spannung zwischen besonderer Information und solcher, die man aus dem

applies equally to the interpretation of Tradition's masterpieces and the love letter written last night in the bliss of joy or trails of misery. Hermeneutics is not only the way of reading texts but the way we live our lives as human beings.

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Gedicht selbst schöpfen kann, ist nicht nur [...] eine relative. Sie ist wohl auch eine veränderliche von der Art, daß diese Spannung sich im Laufe der Wirkungsgeschichte eines Werkes mehr und mehr abschwächt. Vieles wird am Ende selbstverständlich bekannt sein, so daß jeder es weiß." (Gadamer 1993, 429.)

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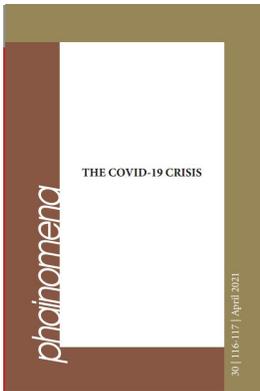
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