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SINCE THE DAYS OF TOBIAS

The dimension of the Angel is ou-topic. Its place is the Land-of-no-where, the *mundus imaginalis*,* whose fourth dimension (axis) lies beyond the sphere that delimits the axes of the visible cosmos. No one could point to the path that leads there. Only the Angel, guardian of the divine Word, icon of the *ad-verbum*,¹ indispensable intermediary² of all the prophets³ up to Muhammad, can undertake long journeys from the invisible No-where, from its *Caelum Caeli* (Heaven of Heaven), unchanging and eternal *Domus* (dwelling) and *Civitas* (city) of the Lord (St. Augustine, *Confessions*, XII, 11), toward the interior temple of man, enter his darkness, and help him recover his proper Orient. The Kabbalah teaches that Angels ascend and descend in the vast space of the Kingdom, so much so that they wonder whether their Lord dwells “above” or “below.”⁴ The nostalgia for the supreme Point that irrepressibly determines their movement, *is* itself the presence (the only conceivable presence) of that Point in the regions of the Kingdom. It gives itself in the intellectual light, in the matutinal knowledge whose archetype is the Cherub; it offers itself in the highest power to love of the Seraph, in the rotating *spiritus* (spirit) of the *Ofannim*: all indivisible aspects of the same, incessantly creative act of God,⁵ of the advent that never ceases.

Thus Suhrawardi, in one of his great mystical tales, *Le bruissement des ailes de Gabriel*,⁶ sees in Gabriel the dator formarum (giver of forms), Angel of knowledge (“Nunc scio vere, quia misit dominus angelum suum. Now I know truly that God has sent me His angel. When God sends His angel to the soul, she becomes truly knowing”, Meister Eckhart, *Nunc scio vere*)⁷, the hermeneut of the silence of the superior worlds, who restlessly passes between the visible and the invisible, witness and icon of the invisible.⁸ The “God-nourishing” Silence (*Chaldean oracles*, fr. 16), in fact, can be gathered only by the *flower of the intellect* (ibid., fr. 1).⁹ Unity with the Silence of the One in itself, Apex Mentis (summit of the mind), is attained by casting off every thing, exciting the highest faculty of the soul “beyond all entities . . . in the profound peace of every power” (Proclus, *In Platonis theologiam*, I, 3).¹⁰ Likewise, the angel of Suhrawardi turns the soul toward that Apex and makes it move in harmony with its intelligible Sun. The angel essentially appears as Angelus interpres (mediator Angel), in accordance with the prophetic and, later, apocalyptic dimension indissolubly associated with its figure.¹¹ The forms of angelic communication differ in principle from those of sensible apprehension and sight. The Angel witnesses the mystery as mystery, transmits the invisible as invisible, without “betraying” it to the senses.¹² The Angel most certainly is a mirror, but of “the divine purity of the stillness and mystery of God, as far as that may be” (Meister Eckhart, *Ecce mitto angelum meum*; Walshe trans., vol. 2, p. 37). It *figures* the living presence of the mystery¹³—but only for the gaze of pure *theory*. Theory does not correspond to spiritual realities as our seeing-knowing corresponds to sensible objects that are other with respect to our being. Man does not confront Truth as he confronts the world; in the world he “sees the sun without being sun; and he sees the heaven and the earth and all other things, but he is not these things” (“Gospel of Philip,” 61:24–25);¹⁴ to see something of this Land-of-no-where, though, he must transfigure himself into it. This is the profound Neoplatonic¹⁵ inspiration of all mystical angelology which understands supreme theory as *henosis* (unification), as the disappearance of the distinction between subject and object.¹⁶ While knowledge “is in a certain respect separated [from its object] by otherness” (Iamblichus, *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum*, I, 8),¹⁷ the Angel e-ducates* to a vision in whose form object and subject

become a “monad.” The figure of the Angel is the sign that “we are surrounded by divine presence and from it we derive the fullness of our being.”¹⁸ The development and questioning of the fundamental “krisis” between knowledge and theōrein (contemplation) constitutes the most proper object of angelology: its annunciation does not concern the becoming visible of the invisible, the translating-betraying of the invisible in and for the visually perceptible, but the possibility for human beings to correspond to the invisible as such, to that Invisible which the Angel safeguards precisely in the instant in which it is communicated through its forms. The paradoxical character of this relation haunts and dominates angelology—this book follows its traces.¹⁹

The Angel transforms the gaze itself into a gaze of the nowhere. To the mundus imaginalis figured by the Angel there must correspond the gaze of an imaginatio (a vision). The mysteries of the Angel can be intuited *sola mente* (only by the mind). The proliferation of angelic hypostases in the Gnostic and Christian-Gnostic traditions, just like in the developments of Neoplatonism and in Islam, certainly is not designed to satisfy a barbaric horror vacui, just as it does not satisfy the need to close up the abyss between human and divine. An interpretation of angelology that followed similar criteria would reduce it to demonology—an essential distinction to which we will return at length later. The Angel, with its manifold connotations (one thinks of Maimonides’s synthesis of the meanings of the term),²⁰ manifests both the inconceivable richness of the Invisible, the infinite names of the No-where and incites the extraordinary vis (power) of imagination dwelling in man. Angel, says Maimonides, is the name of the imaginative faculty once it dialogues *actu* (actively) with the Cherub. The space of angelic Names (Angels or messengers of the Logos, according to Philo, “ideas” of the living God who cannot remain circumscribed within the identity of being with itself)²¹ is, indeed, structured according to the image of a ladder or Axis, which traverses the threshold between terrestrial world and spiritual realities. But this image is not to be interpreted in a “physical” sense, as if it were a question of filling, by degrees, some definite container. Here the Invisible ab-solves itself from its concealment.²² But Truth cannot show itself naked to the world—as Gabriel, the great messenger, the *man* of God, tells Muhammad; Truth is veiled by sev-

enty thousand veils of light and darkness.²³ If Truth suddenly were to appear to us unveiled (that is, no longer in the form of re-velation) we would die of it. The Taboric light overwhelms and disheartens even the Apostles, although it is merely the prefiguration of the final Parousia. Apocalypse is the un-veiling of the Truth; when it occurs, *ta prota apelthan*, this first world has passed away, *this* creation is finished (Revelation 21:4).²⁴ But for now the myriads of angelic hosts contained in the Jewish mysticism of the Throne of the Holy One, the hierarchies of Pseudo-Dionysius, the Islamic Angels all demonstrate a necessity: that Truth must re-veal itself in Names (in infinite Names) for it to correspond to the theōrein of humans, so that, in turn, they may comply with it. Even the “Deo assimilari” (becoming similar to God) of Thomas Aquinas (*Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 19) does not require the elimination of the finite character of separate angelic substances.²⁵ The object of immediate angelic intuition is neither the material world in itself, nor the Creator: the Angel contemplates their nature only *analogically*, that is, in the mirror of its own spiritual world, of its own aevum (sempiternity). In the Angel, the inner experience of its own species, the intuition of its own nature, is absolutely perfect: it is grasped *totum simul* (entirely at once), not by way of succession and juxtaposition as occurs in humans. But everything that remains outside the immediate and infused intuition of itself is also contemplated indirectly by the Angel, through analogy and similitude.²⁶

In guiding from visible things to invisible ones, the Angel is the figure of the *anagogy*, of the *sensus anagogicus*, that pertains to future life and heavenly things. This anagogy edifies, better: it gives grounds to the hope for a heavenly Jerusalem, beyond the movement of allegory that pertains to the edification of faith, beyond the movement of tropology that edifies charity. The anagogy can lead *hic et nunc* (here and now) to a sort of vision of the eschaton (the last), “*ad contemplanda mysteria caelestia*” (for the purpose of contemplating celestial mysteries).²⁷ But no matter how high it *soars*, it too will never unveil the true Face of God. “*Quaerite faciem eius semper; ut non huic inquisitioni, qua significatur amor, finem praestet inventio, sed, amore crescente, inquisitio crescat inventi*” (“Seek his face evermore; meaning that discovery should not terminate that seeking, by which love is testi-

fied, but with the increase of love the seeking of the discovered One should increase”) (St. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum 104,3*).²⁸

The study of Scripture and the ascent through its meanings can conclude in the grace of the ek-stasis represented by the anagogic-angelic flight. The *wings* of the Angel pertain to contemplation.²⁹ But not even the wings of angelic intelligence, the quickest of all, attain to the identification with the Point of their desire. These wings testify to a spiritual freedom from “service” to the letter and the Law, rather than to the perfect enjoyment of the End. This is also the meaning of the symbol in Dante: the “feathers” free one from the “sirens”: “but before the eyes of the full-fledged / in vain is net spread or arrow shot” (*Purgatorio*, XXXI, 43–63).³⁰ If man can avoid turning “le penne in giuso” (“the wings downwards”), then, like the Angel, he will be able to move “freely” and, by virtue of the strength of his *attentiveness*, be immediately present at the point to which he is spiritually directed; like the Angel, he will finally be able to do whatever *pleases* him: “Take henceforth your pleasure for your guide” (*Purgatorio*, XXVII, 131).³¹

What makes the cosmos into a *uni*-verse is not, therefore, a process of identification, but the analogical-symbolic *religio* that binds its elements, the musical harmony that informs its structure, its being “like numerous chorists associated in one common dance” (Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV, 4, 33). The expression of the “solar eye” has to be understood in this way: the solar eye can attain to the contemplation of the Sun; it is not the Sun. *Although distant*, the eye and the Sun *see each other*. The “physical” distance is eliminated, but not the spiritual difference internalized in the movement of every entity. The attending* to the vision of the Invisible that informs the whole universe prevents any hiatus, but also any identity, between the spiritual and the corporeal. This attending links, level by level and note by note, through the angelic circles and along the Tree of Sefiroth, the terrestrial world to the Face of God—but this Face is only the highest Angel, the Teacher of Abraham, the Angelus faciei (Angel of the Face) of the *Book of Jubilees*,³² the Metatron of the *Hekhaloth*, of the heavenly Palaces.³³

The impossibility of attaining the Name through the Names—or, as in Nicholas of Cusa, the possibility of attaining the Name only inattigibilter (unattainably)—is, for Corbin, the dominant theme of Islamic angelology.³⁴ In this respect, this angelology

reproduces the purest note of Neoplatonic metaphysics, equally distant from any dualistic formulation as from any “assimilative” impatience (present, instead, in the *Corpus Hermeticum*). In the Islamic Angel, Corbin sees the same figure to which Rilke alludes in the famous *Letter to Witwold von Hulewicz* dedicated to the interpretation of the *Duino Elegies*. Does the “intimate and lasting metamorphosis of the visible into the invisible,” which appears to Rilke already “perfect” in the Angel,³⁵ represent the supreme goal of the earthly pilgrimage narrated by Avicenna in his great trilogy?³⁶ The passage leading from knowledge to the *ōrein* is to be undertaken, according to Avicenna, in imitation of the Angel, as a “production” of the Invisible. This passage bestows on the soul the power to unite with the Light (in accordance with a theme developed in the *Chaldean Oracles* and up to Iamblichus and Proclus), not immediately but through that mirror which the Angel *is*. It reflects to *us* the immutable and indivisible Light, “so subtle that corporeal eyes cannot sustain it” (Iamblichus, *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum*, II, 86), toward which the unquenchable nostalgia of all creatures turns. The Angel educates to this nostalgia for a vision that “no one has ever seen or will ever see” (Pseudo-Dionysius, *De coelesti hierarchia*, IV, 3). Entirely impossible and *only symbolically imaginable* the “Deo assimilari” resonates, for Ibn ‘Arabi, in the very name of *Al-Lah*: it is indeed the supreme Name, but, precisely because it is still a name, it is moved incessantly towards the theory of its inaccessible Principle.*³⁷ The *visio facialis* (vision of the face) of the Name does not un-veil the Principle.³⁸ Double and inseparable movement—the entire universe is constituted by the inexhaustible totality of divine Names, which love and love to be loved, which praise and long to find those who praise them. “These orders all gaze upwards and prevail downward, so that toward God all are drawn, and all do draw” (Dante, *Paradiso*, XXVIII, 127–129). The innate desire, which moves all of them toward the Principle of their origin, communicates to each the movement proper to it. Intuiting ineffabiter (ineffably) the divine *nutus* (sign), they guide the terrestrial bodies by means of angelic power, (*angelica potestate*) (St. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, III, 11). A musical vision of angelic power will be found again in Thomas Aquinas and Dante. In Augustine, the rhythms (*numbers*) of the angelic souls transmit “*legem ipsam Dei . . . usque ad terrena et infra iura*” (“the very law

of God . . . to the judgments of earth and hell”) (*De Musica*, VI, 17; trans. R. Toliaferro, *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 4, [Washington, D.C.: 1947]); Angels are the names of these rhythms; every Angel is *number* of the Unum Absconditum (Hidden One) that remains, in the Plotinian sense, beyond every determination, and therefore beyond the determination of the One itself. In Dante this musical vision undergoes a decisive re-elaboration: the harmony of the spheres becomes a *polyphonic* discors concordia (discordant harmony). “Paradise is one gigantic concert of instrumental and vocal polyphony in which participate stars, angelic choirs and blessed spirits, and which is divided still more sumptuously into partial choirs, just like a Sacred Symphony of Gabrieli and of Schütz can be at times divided into choirs.”³⁹ One could say that the analogical-symbolic intuition of the universe, the angelological dimension of being (as Corbin calls it), and polyphonic music constitute the names of a single Principle. At the summit of the scale of musical values lies not the *numerus sonorus* (resounding number) of the Spheres, in the perfect repetitiveness, in the eternal return of its circles, but the sympathy of diverse elements intertwined in the rhythm of a heavenly liturgy. The *Divine Comedy* represents the highest point, in the Western Christian tradition, of such a concept of metaphysically oriented music.⁴⁰ This is evident even where a coincidence between angelic notes and the *numerus sonorus* of the universe is seemingly established. When the Angels intone the Psalm of hope for Dante, who is petrified in front of the “*pietade acerba*” (“stern pity”) of Beatrice, they are indeed designated as “those who ever sing / in harmony with the eternal spheres” (*Purgatorio*, XXX, 92–93), but the notes that they actually follow, their sign, their own trace, appear as “*dolci tempre*” (“sweet notes”) (*ibid.*, 94).⁴¹ Their *sweetly modulated* words are words of hope and mercy, called upon to transform into “spirit and water” “the ice that was bound tight around my heart” (*ibid.*, 97–98). Angelic music accomplishes the *miracle* of this *spiritual transformation* of the *numerus sonorus* of the Spheres, of the astral necessity “*de li eterni giri*” (“of the eternal spheres”). One should note here that it is a question of transformation, not of negation—for the “*dolci tempre*” of angelic liturgy are *in dialogue* with the *numerus sonorus* of those “*eterni giri*,” and precisely from such dialogue is born the polyphony of the composition.⁴²

But what remains of this musical vision in Rilke (that is, in what is perhaps the most vast angelology of the twentieth century)? Precisely the *Duino Elegies* would seem to hinder any simple, linear relation.⁴³ Although Rilke's term, *Ordnungen* (orders), certainly recalls the Areopagitic hierarchies and, generally, the orthodox angelological tradition⁴⁴ (in fact, as we will see, it recalls orthodox iconology more than orthodox theology), the Angels that stand before us in extraordinary relief at the beginning of the *First* and *Second Elegy* do not relate to us with *sympathy*. They do *not* hear my cry, nor could I resist their stronger "Dasein" (existence) if they were suddenly to press me against their heart. The call ("Lockruf") of the Angel is held back, nearly stifled, in a "dark sobbing": "Alas, who is there we can make use of? *Not angels*, not men" (*First Elegy*, 8–10, my emphasis).⁴⁵ The choirs of Angels are still beautiful, but we can admire them only because they calmly, "gelassen," do not deign to destroy us. Essentially they have stopped *re-garding* us:⁴⁶ if they would do so again, if their attention would strike us again, our Dasein would expire like mist before the light of their beauty.

A light that of necessity is terrible because it reflects the formidable Lumen (Light) of the Principle. "Illuminans tu mirabiliter a montibus aeternis" ("Glorious are thou, more majestic than the everlasting mountains") (Psalm 76:4): with the letters of *na'or* (Lumen) one forms *nora*, which means terrible, terror: "tu terribilis es; et quis resistet tibi?" ("But thou, terrible art thou! Who can stand before thee?") (Psalm 76:7). Perhaps nobody, before Rilke, has heard this word that inextricably joins light and terror with more profound anguish than Turner in his *The Angel Standing in the Sun* of 1846 (clearly inspired by Revelation 19:17). With flaming sword, the Cherub casts away from its vortex of lights the larvae of mortals; its eyes are turned toward some point up there that seemingly escapes it and its mouth is open in a cry or grimace of pain. Even to the Angel its own light sounds terrible.

What role of mediation will the Angel still play? Can its Land-of-no-where still be defined as the place of the encounter, of the reflection unto us of "the divine law itself"? In the *Duino Elegies* the glory of the Angel, the Herrlichkeit of its order, is nothing but the "beginning of Terror": *herrlich* (glorious) and *schrecklich* (terrifying) here form one semantic family.⁴⁷ The Angels of Rilke are as

beautiful as the ones that appear on the royal Doors, but they turn to the faithful only to prevent their entrance. Their own *tremendous* presence is a sign of distance, of separation. A metaphysical fracture intervenes in the angelological tradition. Instead of being the guardians of a threshold, here Angels appear to be unsurpassable demons of the Limit. The tradition that had always imagined them as guides, interpreters, clarifiers⁴⁸ undergoes in the *Duino Elegies* a radical questioning. The image of the Angel is not reduced to a fable nor does its function cease because—as in the rabbinical orthodoxy—one fears the idolatrous aspects of the cult or because—as in the great syntheses of Byzantine theology in Palamas and Cabasilus—it is deemed unnecessary after the Incarnation of the Verbum,⁴⁹ but because its figure has been concentrated and absolutized in the terrible figure of the limit which, unsurpassable, afflicts every human Dasein.

From this limit (as if the Angel were always only to say this one word, abstracted from all others: “only the Son has known the Father”) rises the invocation to the Angel. Though “knowing what you are”—in other words, though recognizing the separation that has come about, the already consummated Trennung—“I invoke you” (*Second Elegy*, 1–3). The place of the Angel has become this very invocation or, better, the anguish that its unsatisfiability occasions. “Are we not strange creatures to let ourselves go and to be induced to place our earliest affections where they remain hopeless?” (Rilke, *Puppen*).⁵⁰ It is with the Angel as it is with the doll-soul, the Puppenseele: when will we ever be able to say that it is *truly present*? Of you, soul of the doll, “one could never say exactly *where* you really were” (ibid., p. 48, English trans.).

The “days of Tobias”, when “one of the shining-most” (*Second Elegy*, 3–4), Raphael, inhabitant of the Civitas that has never known any “pilgrimage” (St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XI, 9), closest to the homo in statu viatoris (man in the condition of earthly traveler), as a youth went to the youth to guide and heal them—those days are gone forever.⁵¹ The question posed to Angels, “Who are you?” is still answered by Rilke with tones recovered from the *Celestial Hierarchies* (“dawn-red ridges of all creation”),⁵² only to remind us immediately (with as violent a leap as the one that divides, in Hölderlin’s *Schicksalslied*, the “soft paths” of “happy genii” from the fading and falling of “afflicted mortals”) of the expi-

ration and vanishing “from ember to ember” of our ephemeral beauty. The great play of mirrors that held the angelological dimension of being appears shattered. The light of the “divinity in bloom,” which the Angel reflects, closes into itself like a vortex, and it is no longer offered to us in images, detaching itself from the all too weak force of our imaginatio. The “measure” of the Angel (“Those whom you see here were modest,” *Paradiso*, XXIX, 58: modesty is the virtue of the limit, and it characterized the faithful Angels that did not fall into the “wretched pride”) is pried loose, in Rilke, from the “insistent tension” of our epoch, from its formless (“gestaltlos”) character addressed in “das klagende Lied” of the *Seventh Elegy*.⁵³ “Temples it knows no longer,” this epoch; for the temple defines the speculative dimension par excellence, the place that is cut out (temnein-tempus) from the indifferent-equivalent space-time, where the “sea” of Ideas and that of the sensible world converge in mutual, polyphonic resonance.⁵⁴ Then how can the destruction of the temple, the production of “spacious garnerers of power” (*Seventh Elegy*, 55) that lay to “waste” the precincts of the temple, allow us to correspond once again to the figure of the Angel? Where else can the Angel live if not in the mundus imaginalis, in the Imago (image), which the poet says we have lost?

Still, the Angel is invoked. *We* invoke it. The Angel dwells in this invocation, which belongs to our being-here; it dwells on the *earth* where we are. We invoke the Angel so that it may pluck “that small-flowered herb of healing” (*Fifth Elegy*, 58), so that it may find a vase to preserve it “among joys / not *yet* open to us,” so that it may tell that we are still *this*: “die Bewahrung (defense, guard, but also testimony, proof) of the still recognizable form (Gestalt)” (*Seventh Elegy*, 66–67). This form is shown “innerlich” (inwardly) by man to the Angel, in the interiority of the invocation he addresses to it. And the Angel (“o du Grosser”), so much larger than us, is astonished by this: it knows nothing of the transformation of the thing into the invisible, of this supreme metamorphosis; it has not led us there, it has not e-ducated us, it can hardly interpret the transformation. *We* show the Angel; we tell to the Angel, and our saying is praise of the *Hiersein*, of the “veins full of existence” of being-here. The invocation is the form of this showing. We do not implore the Angel to lead us and show us; and even if we implored, it could never return to the days of Tobias, come

into our sayable, into the time of our sayable things. But, invoking it, we show and tell. *Praedica verbum* (proclaim the word)⁵⁵—but to the Angel. In saying to the Angel, the word does not flow to the exterior, but interiorizes itself in the image, in the Imago, where the time of succession does not penetrate.⁵⁶ “That word is spoken within the mind. ‘Pronounce it!’: that is, become aware of what is in you” (Meister Eckhart, *Praedica verbum*).⁵⁷ There is a word that *one* speaks, the word that comes out of us and becomes rigid in representation, becomes a property of what it designates, which is *deposited* in the designatum (signified). But there is also a word that remains inside whoever pronounces it, like the originary images of creatures remain inside the Father, who is also Logos (Meister Eckhart, *Ave, gratia plena*).⁵⁸ The Rilkean *Er-innerung** of this mystical “movement” is indubitable: saying to the Angel recollects precisely this pronunciation of the word—we must speak, we must participate in the action of the Verbum and correspond to it, but we return into ourselves through this very saying. To say in such a way so as to invert the sense of the ex-pression and transform it into the recollection of what is inmost in it, “into which time has never penetrated and into which no image has ever cast its reflection” (Meister Eckhart, *Praedica verbum*).⁵⁹ That is, to say in such a way that the ex-pression is praise of the invisible, without expecting anything from it, without provoking anything in it. Such saying re-edifies in the heart, invisibly, the thing. The angelic Land of no-where is not if not in us, innerlich. The angelological dimension of being withdraws into the heart of the creature. Meister Eckhart already praises the humility in the nature of the Angel—but here its humility must reach deeper in order to entrust itself to the human word, to the invisible that this word can safeguard. Extreme metamorphosis of the Angel, but *not* its simple disappearance.

The end of the order of the mundus imaginalis does not mean the end of all encounters with the Angel—it means that every encounter will now have to begin by putting ourselves at risk. In the word that implores there resounds the wait for what saves, for a kind of salvation that comes from beyond the misery of the creature. In the invocation, instead, the same voice that invokes also repels: “like an outstretched / arm is my call” (*Seventh Elegy*, 88–89). The invocation *wrestles* with the Angel. Invocation is that

of Jacob; invocation is that of Christ at Gethsemane, when he confronts and questions the rigor of the Father without looking for salvation (J. Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum*, LX, 25).⁶⁰ To invoke the Angel is to astound it with this strength of the creature in saying its own irredeemable being-there, that is, in *not* imploring. The Angel is astonished by how happy (“glücklich”) and “schuldlos” (innocent, but the term has certain echoes that no simple translation can render: not being-cause, to have no aim)⁶¹ such an earthly thing can be, by how things can believe in us, the most fleeting of all creation. We astonish the Angel by showing it the difference between the transformation into the invisible granted to the humility of the word and the Angel’s own unsayable. For humans can transform into the invisible *only by saying*. They save the thing only in that Er-innerung which their word can be, can risk itself to become. The word is what transforms into the invisible by interiorizing the thing, hence: praedica verbum. “In the midst of Fate, the extinguisher” (*Seventh Elegy*, 68), the thing can resurrect in the life of the word. But for this to happen, the usual movement must be inverted: the word cannot flow away toward the thing, transform itself into it, “substitute” for it—but the thing has to penetrate into the invisible that is the spiritus of the word. We are here for the sake of saying—but to say in this form, measured against the terrible distance of the Angel, a saying that is Er-innerung. House and Bridge, Door and Window, Column and Tower and Fountain and Tree—all our artifacts together with what we have found, *are*, but are in that place (“Ort,” *not* Raum!) which “I can carry in the heart” (*Fifth Elegy*, 73) and therefore which I can only remember by heart.*

To invoke is to struggle with the unsayable. To the Angel’s unsayable, this terrible beauty, we show the thing saved in the invisible. Risking ourselves in the terrible (“schrecklich”), terrifying (“furchtbar”), and dangerous (“gefährlich”) struggle with the unsayable, we can find the humble word that is the Er-innerung of the thing. That is why the earth and things entrust themselves to us, the most fleeting, and not to the Angel—but only insofar as we risk ourselves in the struggle with the Angel. The word that is Er-innerung can be pronounced only *in* this struggle. In this way there endures in Rilke a necessity of the Angel. If in Rilke no trace is left of the Angel’s triumphal image,⁶² neither can the figure of the

fugitive, the expiration from “ember to ember,” he said apart from this invocation-repulsion of the Angel. The initiator-hermeneut Angel, the *Shaykh* Angel of Avicenna and Suhrawardi does not guide the fugitive because the figure of the fugitive is metaphysically distinguished from the one of the pilgrim; it is the *other* of Tobias. But what the fugitive has to say is still always an attempt at the unsayable, a testing of all that is sayable. Therefore the danger of the Angel never leaves the fugitive. The Angel in itself no longer manifests itself, but its image must irrupt into the order of our trying-to-say as an ineluctable *problem*. Paradoxical, antinomical angelology, where fragments or sparks of the accomplished human-divine hierarchies, of their “modest” harmonies by now flash like signs of mourning, as if, like the rest of things, they asked us just to be remembered (*ri-cor-dati*). As if the Angel, now, implores us who invoke it.

The Angel’s kenosis (emptying out) had already begun in *Das Buch der Bilder*.⁶³ Its name “is like an abyss, a thousand nights deep,” to whom I can only stretch out my arms, for “how can I call you?” (*Der Schutzengel*). Terrible and so very high—but already “fallen” in as much as this name is unpronounceable. The Angel is the beginning “which pours itself greatly / I am the slow and fearful Amen”—but how can this Amen, this miserable “frame,” compare with the Angels, these “intervals” in the melody of the Lord’s garden (*Die Engel*)? The same theme of distance and nostalgia also appears in the splendid *Verkündigung*, in the words that the Angel addresses to Mary; but the difference that separates the two figures is now comprehended in another, infinitely more vast: the difference that averts both from God, “wir sind ihm all weit” (“we are all far from him”). The Angel is weary; the way was so long, the vertigo of the fall so violent that it has forgotten what it had to announce, what it had heard up there, by the Throne of gold and jewels. Now it stands immense in the little house, unable to *praedicare verbum*. Mary is lonelier than ever, she hardly notices the presence of the one who should have greeted her with these words: “the Lord is with you.” The Angel is the beginning, the origin, the day; it has seen and heard—but now it depends on the “slow and fearful Amen.” The Angel is ungraspable and unsayable like the first instant of the day or the first drop of dew (“*ich bin der Tau*”)—but now its destiny lies with the “plant.” That beginning, that instant

now have to pass through its “door.” The Angel with immense wings and great robes is but a wind. She *meditates* (“du Sinnende”) on the unsayable annunciation that this wind carries; her soul tries to listen and welcome it. In this way she is transformed into the plant of the spiritus that flashed for one instant, barely remembering itself, confused by the space it had traversed, in her miserable home or in her dream.

The figure of the Angel lasts only the time of this listening, in the meditation and invocation that the listening concentrates in itself. And would not our struggle with the Angel, which is shown, precisely, in the form of the invoking meditation, then be its “salvation”? The Angel that comes in the night “to test you by struggling with you” (*Der Engel*, in *Neue Gedichte* [English translation, Rainer Maria Rilke, *New Poems*, trans. J. B. Leishman (New York: Hogarth Press, 1964)]) undoubtedly wants to seize you and “wrench you from your retaining mould,” as if it had created you; but the Angel itself arrives *thirsty* from the extreme distance of its no-where. Its gaze seems *dry*,⁶⁴ and only from our features can it drink “the clear wine of faces.” “Steinerner” (*L’Ange du Méridien, Chartres*), of stone, is the Angel: what does it know “of our being”? But *our* flood can inundate its gaze. It has come out of the powerful wheel of what eternally returns, expelled from the rose windows of the ancient cathedral, from the original expanse of the Realm where “a casual point can have no place” (*Paradiso*, XXXII, 53). Only its thirst is left of the word it had to announce. *This* the Angel addresses *to us*; with it we have to wrestle. To entrust ourselves into the hands of the Angel would mean to be ravished into the pure unsayable. But to measure ourselves with its thirst is our “number,” the “modesty” that is proper to our saying. It is as if the Angel imparted its unsayable to our word and to its power of transfiguring innerlich the thing—as if even for the Angel, ancient master of measure, the only salvation lay in the “circumspection of the human gesture,” the *Aidōs* (reverence) forever remembered in the Attic stela (*Second Elegy*, 66).⁶⁵