

The Time that Is Left

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Let me start with a question. As you know, Paul in his letters refers to himself as an apostle. Why apostle and not, for instance, prophet? What is the difference between the apostle and the prophet? To grasp this difference will mean to understand concretely the problem of *messianic time*. You certainly remember the importance of the prophet, the *nabi*, in Judaism and, generally, in ancient cultures. But no less important is the legacy of the posterity of this figure in our culture up to modernity. For instance, Aby Warburg used to classify Jakob Bruckhardt and Nietzsche as two opposite types of *nabi*: the first turned backward to the past and the second turned toward the future. And I remember that in his lesson at the *Collège International de philosophie* of February 1, 1984, Michel Foucault distinguished four types of “veridiction” or truth-saying: the prophet, the wise, the technician, and the Pharisee; and, in the ensuing lecture, he traced the posterity of these four figures in the history of philosophy. It is an interesting exercise, and I suggest you try it!

What is a prophet? It is, first of all, a man who is in immediate relationship with the *ruah Jahwé*, the spirit of God, from whom he receives a word that does not belong to himself. “Thus speaks Yahweh” is the formula that opens prophetic discourse. As a spokesperson of God, the *nabi* is clearly distinct from the apostle, who—being an emissary for a particular concern—must accomplish his work with lucidity and find himself the words of his announcement, which in his case Paul can thus define as “my gospel, my announcement” (Rom. 2:16).¹ In Judaism, prophecy is not an institution whose function and place could be clearly defined. It is, rather, something like a force or tension constantly struggling with other forces, which try to enclose it within fixed boundaries both in space and in time. Thus the rabbinic tradition tends to close the legitimacy of prophecy with the first destruction of the temple, in 587 B.C. To this closure of prophecy—so to say from outside—another limitation

corresponds, coming this time from within it, as if prophecy contained within itself the announcement of its own closure. Thus we can read in Zechariah 13:2, "At that time I will make prophecy and unholy spirit disappear from the country. And if anyone dares to prophesy, his mother and father shall say to him, 'you will die, for you prophesy even in the name of the Lord.' His father and his mother will pierce his heart with a knife owing to his prophecies. And at that time, every prophet will be ashamed of the vision he announces."

I suppose, by the way, that you recognize here the very mode of the curse of the poet in the beginning of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal*. No matter how this closure of prophecy is to be understood, in any case the prophet is essentially defined by his relation to the future. Thus we read in Psalm 74:9, "We do not see any more signs. There is no prophet left, there is no one to ask: 'how long?'" *How long*: each time that the prophet announces the coming of the messiah, the announcement refers always to a time to come, not yet present. This is the difference between the prophet and the apostle: the apostle begins to speak when the messiah is already there. At that moment, prophecy must remain silent: it is, now, truly accomplished (and this is, I believe, the meaning of its closure). The word is now given to the apostle, the messiah's envoy, whose time is not the future, but the present. That's why the technical term for the messianic event is, in Paul's letter, *ho nyn kairos*, the now time, the *jetztzeit*, the actuality. That's why Paul is an apostle, not a prophet.

The apostle must be distinguished also from another figure, with which it has been often confused, exactly in the same way as messianic time gets confused with eschatological time. Not the prophetic figure, which is turned toward the future, but the apocalyptic, which beholds the end of time, is the most dangerous misunderstanding of the messianic announcement. The apocalyptic dwells in the last day, the Day of Wrath; he sees the end and describes what he sees. On the other hand, the time in which the apostle lives is not the *eschaton*, is not the end of time. If I were to define (in a formula) the difference between messianism and Apocalypse, between the apostle and the visionary, I would say that the messianic is not *the end of time*, but *the time of the end*. The apostle's concern is not the last day, the moment where time reaches its end; it is the time that contracts itself and begins to finish—or, if you prefer, the time that is left between time and its ending.

The Jewish apocalyptic tradition and the rabbinic tradition were familiar with the distinction between two times or two worlds (*olamim*): the *olam hazzeh*, which means the time which goes from the creation to the world's end, and the *olam habba*, the coming world, which will follow the world's end. In the same way, Greek-speaking Jews distinguished two *aiones* or *kosmoi*: *ho aion touto*, *ho kosmos outos* (this aeon, this world), and *ho aion mellon* (the coming world or aeon). Both terms appear in Paul's letters, but messianic time,

the time in which the apostle lives, is neither the *olam hazzeh* nor the *olam habba*, neither chronological time nor the apocalyptic *eschaton*: it is, once again, a remnant, the time that is left between two times.

That is why it is important to correct the common misunderstanding, which confuses messianic time and eschatology, thus making unthinkable precisely what constitutes the specificity of the messianic. If we think, for instance, from that perspective, to what took place in Germany in the sixties starting from Karl Löwith's book on *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschichte* (1953) and Hans Blumenberg's book on *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (1966). Though the positions of the two authors were different, they shared a common presupposition: the irreconcilable difference between modernity and eschatology, that is to say, a Christian conception of time. For both of them, the Christian conception of time oriented toward the eschatological end was obsolete and inconsistent with the modern experience of time. I will not enter into this debate, but rather would remark that neither Blumenberg nor Löwith distinguish between messianism and eschatology, the time of the end and the end of time, so that they missed precisely what was essential to Paul: messianic time, insofar as it calls into question the very possibility of drawing a clear distinction between the two *olamim*.

How shall we represent this time? Apparently, there seems to be no problem: we have first, profane or chronological time, which goes from creation to messianic event (which for Paul is not the birth of Jesus, but his resurrection). With the messianic event, time contracts itself and begins to finish, and this shrinking time, which Paul calls *ho nyn kairos*, goes on up to the *parousia*, the full presence of the messiah, which concludes with the end of time. Here time explodes—or rather implodes into the other aeon, into eternity.

Let's try to represent this on a line:



A is the creation, B is the messianic event (the resurrection of Jesus), C is the *eschaton*, where time crosses into eternity (*dove il tempo tapassa nell'eternità*). This representation is useful because it shows clearly that messianic time, the *ho nyn kairos*, coincides neither with the end of time nor with profane chronological time. As a matter of fact, messianic time is not exterior to chronological time: it is, so to say, a portion (*una porzione*) of chronological time, a portion that undergoes a process of contraction which transforms it entirely (this heterogeneity is represented in an insufficient way in our graph by the dotted lines).

But can we say that, in this way, we have truly understood messianic time? We must cope here with a more general problem that concerns our representations of time, which are mainly spatial, as projected on space. It has often

seen—which is poor, because too perfect—but by means of referring the constructed image to the operational time of its construction. In this way, Guillaume is able to make more complex the usual representation of time, projecting on it the process of its making, thus obtaining a new representation—no longer linear, but tridimensional—of what he calls chronogenetic time, a time which includes its own genesis.

But let us try to develop this paradigm of “operational time” beyond the confines of linguistics in order to refer it to our problem of messianic time. In every representation of time, in every discourse by means of which we try to define and to represent time, another time is involved, which cannot be exhausted in them. It is as if man, insofar as he is a thinking and speaking being, produces an additional time, which prevents him from perfectly coinciding with chronological time, with the time of which he can make images and representations. Yet this time is not another time, not a supplementary time that could be added from outside to chronological time. It is, rather, a time within time—not ulterior, but interior—which measures only my disconnection with it, the impossibility of coinciding with my representation of time—but for the same reason, it also opens up the possibility of grasping and accomplishing it.

I can now propose a first definition of messianic time: *it is the time it takes for time to come to an end, to accomplish itself*. Or, more exactly, the time we need in order to accomplish, to bring to an end our representation of time. It is neither the time—representable but unthinkable—of chronological time, nor the instant—equally unthinkable—of its end. Nor is it a segment cut off from chronological time, a segment that goes from the resurrection up to the end of time. It is, rather, the operational time that drives chronological time and transforms it from within; it is the time it takes us to bring time to an end—in this sense: *the time which is left to us*.

While our representation of chronological time, or the time *in* which we are, separates, divides us from ourselves, and makes us the powerless spectators of ourselves, observing without time the time that runs away from us, messianic time, or operational time, in which we grasp and accomplish, is the time that we *are*, and for that reason, the only real time, the only time that we *have*. (This is the reason why Paul in his letter constantly says, referring to the constitution of the messianic community: “until we have time”—*hos kairos echomen* [Gal. 6:10]—or also, *ton kairon exagorazomenoi*, redeeming time [Eph. 5:16 and Col. 4:5]).

In general, *kairos* and *chronos* are opposed or heterogeneous, which is certainly true. But decisive here is not simply the opposition, but the relationship between them. What do we have when we have a *kairos*, an occasion? The most beautiful definition of *kairos* I have ever found is in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*,

and it is one which in fact characterizes *kairos* with respect to *chronos*. I will quote this definition: *chronos esti en ho kairos kai kairos esti en ho ou pollos chronos*, “the *chronos* is where we have *kairos* and the *kairos* is where we have a little *chronos*.” Mark the extraordinary implication of the two concepts, which are literally the one within the other. The *kairos*—to translate it simply as “occasion” or “chance” would be trivial—is not another time: what we get when we grasp a *kairos* is not another time, but only a contracted and abridged *chronos*. The precious pearl in the ring of chance is only a small portion (*porzione*) of *chronos*, a time which is left. This is the same as the old rabbinic apologue that Benjamin once told to Bloch, according to which the messianic world is not another world; it is this same profane world, but with just a little shift, a very small difference. But this little shift, which results from my having grasped the disconnection with respect to chronological time, is in every way decisive.

Let us continue our analysis of messianic time in Paul. As you know, Paul decomposes the messianic event in two times: resurrection and *parousia*, the second coming of Jesus at the end of time. That’s why theologians define the Pauline conception of redemption as an *already* and a *not yet*: the messianic event has already happened, salvation is already accomplished, and yet, in order to be really achieved, it needs a supplementary time. How should we understand this particular scission, which seems to introduce into messianic time a kind of continuous deferment or delay? The problem is important, because what is at stake in it is the possibility of a correct solution of the antinomies which mark modern interpretations of the messianic. So, according to Scholem—who represents a point of view quite common in Judaism—the messianic antinomy is characterized as “*Leben im Aufschub*,” a life lived in deferment, when nothing can be really achieved and brought to an end (*aufgeschoben ut nicht aufgehoben*). So Scholem writes: “the so-called Jewish existence is a tension which is never satiated.”³ Even more aporetic is the position—which surfaces in Christian theology—that conceives of messianic time as a kind of border zone, or, rather, as a “transitional time between two periods and two *parousie*, the first one marking the beginning of a new aeon, and the second the end of the old one.” The danger here is a deferment inherent in the very concept of a *transitional time*: you know from the history of revolution how every transitional time has a tendency toward an infinite deferment, making ungraspable and unthinkable the end that it should bring forward.

It is in the perspective of the operational time that the Pauline decomposition of presence acquires its true meaning. As operational time, as time we need to accomplish our representation of time, the *ho nyn kairos*, the messianic now time, can never coincide with a chronological moment internal to

this representation. As a matter of fact, the end of time is a time-image, which represents the last point on the line of chronology. But as such, it is itself ungraspable, and tends to infinitely defer itself. It is a time of this sort that Kant had in mind when, in *The End of All Things*, he spoke of a perverted conception of the end of time, “that we produce when we misunderstand the last end.”⁴ It is something of this kind that we find in the masterword of Giorgio Manganelli, where we read of an extraordinary heresy which pretends that the world is already over; we are not aware of that, because the end of time “produces a sort of time, in which we dwell and which prevents us from experiencing the end of time.”⁵

The fallacy here is to transform operational time into a supplementary time, which adds itself to chronological time in order to indefinitely delay its end. This is why a correct understanding of the word *parousia* is so important. *Parousia* doesn't mean the “second coming” of Jesus, a second messianic event that follows the first one, the resurrection. *Parousia* in the Greek means simply: presence, *para-ousia*, literally, being-beside, in the present; being is, so to speak, beside itself. It doesn't refer to a complement—which is added to something to make it complete—nor to a supplement, which adds to something without completing it. Paul employs the term to designate the ultimate individual structure of the messianic event, insofar as it is composed by two heterogeneous times, *kairos* and a *chronos*, an operational time and a represented time, which are coextensive, but cannot be added one to the other. The messianic presence lies beside itself, because, without ever coinciding with a chronological instant and without adding to it, nevertheless it grasps and fulfills it.

The particular decomposition of the messianic presence is much like the extraordinary Kafkaian *theologumenon*, according to which the messiah will not arrive on the day of his coming, but on the very last one [*am allerletzten*].⁶ The messiah is already arrived, the messianic event has already occurred, but its presence contains within itself another time, which stretches its promise not in order to defer it, but, on the contrary, to make it graspable, that it may be grasped [*per renderla afferabile*]. And this is why, in Walter Benjamin's words, every instant can be the little door through which the messiah enters. About the fallacy—so common today—that consists in mistaking operational time (the time it takes for time to come to an end) for a supplementary time that adds itself to time, the rabbinic commentary known as *Genesis Rabbah* contains some interesting reflection. This reflection concerns the Sabbath, which in Judaism and in Christian revelation constituted a sort of small-scale model of messianic time. The issue in the commentaries is the interpretation of Genesis 2:2, “On the seventh day God finished the work he had made and on the seventh day he rested from all his work.”

The Septuagint, in order to avoid the paradoxical overlapping of achievement and rest, emended the first words, writing “on the sixth day” (*en te hemera te ekte*) instead of on the seventh day (*te hemera te hebdome*). But the author of the *Genesis Rabbah* comments: “Man, who does not know his times and his moments and his hour takes some profane time and adds it to the holy time; but the holy one, blessed be his name, as he knows his moments and his time and his hours, entered the Sabbath by a hair.”⁷ The Sabbath, the messianic time, is not another day, homogeneous to the others. It is, rather, in time, the disconnection through which one can—by a hair—grasp the time, and accomplish it [*portarlo a compimento*].

Paul defines the relationship between chronological time—that is to say, the item that goes from “creation to” resurrection of Christ—and messianic time, by means of two fundamental concepts. The first one is *typos*, foreshadowing, prefiguring, figure. Paul recalls here, in I Cor. 10:1–11, a series of episodes in the history of Israel: “Brothers, I want you to know that our fathers were all under the cloud, that they all crossed the sea and all were dipped in the sea and they all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from a rock who was the messiah.” Then he adds, “all these things happened to them as types, as figures of us, in order that we do not desire bad things, as they did.” And a few lines later, he takes up the same mode: “these things occurred to them in a figural way [*typicos*], and were then written for our instruction, for us, for whom the extremities of the times have met (*ta tele ton aionon katenteken; anatao*—the “*anti*” signifies ‘face to face.’)”

Auerbach has shown the importance of this “figural” conception in medieval culture (I say “figural” because Jerome translates *typoi* in I Cor. 10:6 with *in figura*), when it becomes the ground for a general theory of allegorical interpretation. Through the concept of types, Paul establishes a relationship—which we from now on call typological relationship—between each event of the past and *ho nym kairos*, the now-time, present-messianic time. Thus in Romans 5:16, Adam, through whom sin entered the world, is defined *typos tou mellontos*, “figure (or foreshadow) of the future,” that is to say, of the messiah, through whom peace will abound among men. And in Hebrews 9:26, the temple built by men is an *antitype* of the heavenly one, which could indicate a symmetrical relationship with respect to the type.

The point here is not simply that each event of the past becomes a figure or allegory of the present time and finds its fulfillment in it; decisive is rather the transformation of the time structure that the typological relationship brings about. It must imply a question of interpretation of the scripture, of the hermeneutical relationship that is established between two texts, between types and antitypes, as in the allegoric paradigm that prevailed in medieval

culture. The hermeneutical relationship is only a secularization of the typological-messianic relationship. What is at stake in the *figure*, is not a hermeneutical problem, but a tension that transforms and binds together past and present, types and antitypes, in an inseparable constellation. The messianic is not one of the terms of the typological relationship: *it is the relationship itself*. And this is what Paul means when he says “for us, for whom the extremities of the times have met, are face to face.” The two extremities of the *olam hazzeh* and *the olam habba* contact one another—their face-to-face is messianic time.

In 1918, Gershom Scholem prepared, as a gift for the twenty-sixth birthday of his friend, Walter Benjamin, a set of theses on the Hebrew letter *waw*.⁸ The Hebrew verbal system distinguishes the verbal forms not simply according to the tense (past and future), but rather according to the verb’s aspects: accomplished (which is usually translated with the past) and unaccomplished (usually translated with the future). But if you put the letter *waw* before the form of the accomplished, this becomes unaccomplished and vice versa. This is why the *waw* is called here the inverse or converse. What Scholem is suggesting here is that messianic time is neither the accomplished, nor the unaccomplished, neither past nor the future, but their *inversion*. And the typological relation is the perfect expression of this messianic movement. It is a field of tension where the two themes join in a constellation that Paul calls *ho nyn kairos*, where the past becomes unaccomplished and the present—the unaccomplished—acquires a sort of perfection.

The second concept by means of which Paul defines messianic time is recapitulation, *anakephalaiosis* (Paul does not use the substantive, but the verb *anakephalaioomai*, which means literally “to recapitulate,” to summarize). The decisive passage is Ephesians 1:10, which reads: “for the economy of the plentitude of time, all things, both in heaven and on earth, recapitulate themselves in the messiah.” This line is truly so charged with meaning that it seems about to explode. And I think we could say that many important concepts in the history of Western philosophy come out of this explosion. The doctrine of apocatastasis both in Origen and in Leibniz, the concept of repetition in Kierkegaard and Heidegger, the eternal recurrence in Nietzsche are all, so to say, fragments of this explosion.

What does Paul say here? That messianic time—insofar as what is at stake in it is the fulfillment of times—brings about a recapitulation, a sort of abridgement of all things, both heavenly and earthly—a vertiginous consummation of the whole history, in which all the events which occurred from the creation on are summoned to appearing in the messianic *now*. That is to say, the messianic time is a kind of summary—also in the juridical sense of the term—of the past. This recapitulation of the past produces a *pleroma*, a

fulfillment, and accomplishment of the *kairoi*—the messianic *kairoi* are then eventually full of *chronos*, but of a specific summary *chronos* that anticipates the eschatological pleroma at the end of time, when God will be, as Paul says many times, “all in all.”

In this sense, the recapitulation is only the other face of the typological relationship that the messianic establishes between past and present. And here we can clearly see that “figure” does not mean simply a foreshadowing or a prefiguration, but more truly, a constellation and a contraction of the two times, so that the whole past, the whole of history is, so to say, summarily contained in the present, and the claim of a remnant to posit itself as a whole finds here its foundation. And the three things “which remain” in I Cor. 13:13 (“now these things remain: faith, hope, love”) are not to be understood as moods or feelings (*Stimmungen*), but rather as the three arches that support and realize the messianic experience of time.

It happens here in some way as in the panoramic vision of their life said to be had by men at the moment of dying, when, in a vertiginous abbreviation, one sees the whole of his existence pass before his eyes. Also in the messianic recapitulation there is something of a memory and a recollection of the past—but in a memory of a particular kind, in which what is at stake is only the economy of salvation. But is not memory always something of that kind? As only in the recollection of things past, the past becomes for the first time *my* past, in the same way as in the “economy of the plenitude of time” men appropriate their own history and what once happened to the Jews is recognized as type and reality of the messianic community.

And as in memory, the past becomes again somehow possible, what was unaccomplished accomplished—in the sense that in the messianic recapitulation men can finally take leave from this past. That is why the common opinion, according to which messianic time is only beyond the future, is simply false. We are accustomed to hear that, in the decisive instance, the “hour of salvation,” one has to look at the future and eternity. Quite to the contrary, however, what Paul is saying to us is that *ho nyn kairos*, the messianic time, is a contraction of past and present, and that in the decisive moment, it is, first of all, with the past that we have to cope. Obviously, this does not mean nostalgia or attachment—rather, the recapitulation of the past is also a summary judgement pronounced on it.

By way of example, let us examine a kind of small-scale model of the structure of messianic time that we have attempted to grasp in St. Paul’s text. This model will perhaps be a surprise, but I think that the structural analogy it presents is absolutely pertinent. This model is the poem. Or, better, the particular poetic structure in modern poetry, and particularly in the Romance lyric that constitutes it from its origins.

Rhyme appears only occasionally in classical poetry and develops itself in Latin Christian poetry starting from the fourth century, until it becomes romance lyric as an essential constructive principle. From the varieties of romance metric forms, I will choose one, the *sestina*, or sextime. But before I analyze the form, I would like to draw your attention to a quite simple remark that concerns the temporal structure of any poem, especially when we have to do with a given metric form, whether it be a sonnet, a *sestina*, a song, etc.

A poem is—in this perspective—something that you know from the beginning will necessarily end at a certain given point—if it is a sonnet, at the fourteenth verse, with a bit of delay (three verses of delay [*ritardo*] in the case that the sonnet has a coda). The poem is thus an organism or a temporal device which from its very beginning is tensed toward its end: I mean that there is a kind of eschatology internal to the poem.

What is peculiar to the sextime is that here the rhyme modifies itself, so that instead of regular repetition of the last syllable, we have two repetitions—according to a quite complicated order—of the six rhyme words that conclude each verse of the strophe. And after the sixth and last strophe, a *tornada* recapitulates the six rhyme words, contracting them in these verses. The order that governs the repetition of the rhyme words is the so-called *retrograde cruciate*, which is an alternation of inversion and progression, according to which the last rhyme word of a strophe becomes the first of the following one, the first becomes the second, the penultimate the third, and so on, so that if the movement continued beyond the sixth strophe, the seventh strophe would repeat exactly the first one. What interests me here is not simply this numerical plot, but, rather, the temporal structure which the sextime brings about. As a matter of fact, the sequence of the 39 verses (36 + 3), which could be presented as a linear succession perfectly correspondent to chronological time, is instead articulated, rhymed, and transformed through the alternating succession of the rhyme words, so that each of them retakes and recalls another rhyme word (in the precedent strophes and, at the same time, announces its own repetition in the following.) Through this complicated shuttling, through this to-and-from movement, the chronological sequence of linear time is completely transformed and composed in rhythmic constellations.

But this is not something of another time that replaces the chronological one: on the contrary, it is the same chronological time that, through its internal pulsations, transforms and organizes itself to produce the specific time of the poem. And then, right at the moment of the end, when the *sestina*'s alternate movement is accomplished, and the poem seems condemned to repeat itself, the *tornada* restarts and recapitulates the rhyme words, ordering them in a new sequence.

I think that by now you will have perfectly understood in which sense I proposed the sextime as an example of messianic time. The sestina—but in this sense every poem—is a soteriological machine that, through the mechanism of the announcements and reprise of rhyme words (which correspond to the typological relation between past and future) transforms chronological time into messianic time. And as messianic time is not another time with respect to chronology or to eternity, but is the transformation time undergoes positing itself as operational time, in the same way, Paul's time is the metamorphosis time undergoes positing itself as the time of the end, as *the time it takes the poem to come to an end*.

What is most surprising is the fact that, at least in the case of the sextime, this structural analogy does not seem fortuitous. Modern scholars have rediscovered the importance of numerology in medieval poetry. Thus the evident relation of the sextime to the number six has been analyzed in order to show not only the chronological meaning of this number, but also its relation to the six days of creation. There is a distich by Ornorio di Autun underlining the importance of the sixth day, in which both the creation and the fall of man take place, and its relation with the six ages of the world, in which redemption takes place. Also, in Dante's *Paradiso*, the sixth hour, the "*ora sesta*," explicitly alludes to the sixth hour of Adam in Eden [*Par. XXVI, 141–42: "de la prim'pra a quella che seonda / come'l sol muta quadro, l'ora sesta"*—author's insertion (NS)] and the sextime in the Petrarchan *rime* also acquires in this perspective a soteriological meaning.

Thus the movement of the sestina through the six strophes repeats the sequence of the six days of creation and, at the same time, articulates its relation to the *shabbat*, the Sabbath, as a symbol of the messianic accomplishment of time. One could say that Arnaut Daniel⁹—exactly like the author of the *Genesis Rabbah*—does not consider the *shabbat* as a day homogeneous to the others, but rather as the recapitulation and the messianic abridgement of the history of creation (thus the *tornada* recapitulates in the verses the entire structure of the sextime). And this is why the sextime, like every poem, cannot truly finish its end—its end is missing—just as the seventh strophe is missing.

These considerations can perhaps throw some light on the problem of the origins of the rhyme in European poetry—a problem on which scholars are far from having reached an agreement. As we already noted, the rhyme appears in Latin Christian poetry toward the end of the Imperial era, and then develops progressively until it reaches the importance that is now familiar to us. Georges Lote, in his extraordinary *Historie du vers français*, quotes among the first examples of rhymed poetry a composition by Augustine—an author who was particularly interested in the problem of time.¹⁰ In this poem, the

rhymes appear exactly at the point where Augustine quotes the parable of the Gospels that compares the Kingdom to a net for catching fish. And when Lote wants to point out a poetical composition in which rhyme has become a common principle of formal organization, the example he gives concerns the *hora novissima* of messianic time:

*Hora sub hac novissima
mundi petivit infima
promissus ante plurimis
propheticis oraculis.*¹¹

Moreover, scholars have remarked that Christian Latin poetry organizes its relationship with the Scriptures according to a typological structure. Sometimes, as in the epic distich form found in Sedulo and in Rabano Mauro, this typological structure takes the form of a metrical structure, in which types and antitypes correspond to one another by means of a parallelism between two hemistiches, so that the first half of the verse A corresponds to the second half of the verse B.

What I am suggesting here, that the rhyme appears in Christian poetry as a metrical-linguistic transformation of messianic time, organized according to the Pauline model of typological relationships and recapitulation, is more an epistemological paradigm than a historical hypothesis. But since I have shown that the history and the destiny of rhyme coincides with the history and the destiny of messianic announcement, when this is coupled with the fact that the very text of Paul's letter is articulated by an incredible series of internal rhymes and alliterations, it should be clear that the rhyme is the messianic inheritance that Paul leaves to modern poetry.

That this theme is meant to be understood literally—that is to say, that the formal structure of the poem is linked to a kind of theological legacy—a single example will show beyond any doubt. When Hölderlin, on the threshold of modernity, conceives his theory of the god's leave-taking—and particularly of the last god, the Christ—there, at the very moment in which he announces this new atheology, the metrical form of his lyric breaks and loses any recognizable identity. If God's leave-taking coincides with the exploding of the closed metrical form, then atheology is immediately a-prosody [*aprosodia*].

NOTES

1. This essay is based on a chapter from Giorgio Agamben's book *Il tempo che resta: un commento alla Lettera ai Romani* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000), 60–84. A translation of the book is forthcoming. All of Agamben's English translations

- of St. Paul are based on the Italian/Greek interlinear text found in the appendix of his *Il tempo che resta: un commento alla Lettera ai Romani*.
2. Guillaume, Gustave, *Temps et verbe. Théorie des aspects, des modes, et des temps. Suivi de L'architectonique du temps dans les langues classiques* (Paris: Champion, 1970).
 3. Scholem, Gershom. *Judaica*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1963), 73–74.
 4. Kant, Immanuel, *Das Ende aller Dinge* in *Werke. Akademie-Textausgabe, VIII: Abhandlungen nach 1781* (Berlin: de Gruyter & Co., 1968), 223.
 5. Manganelli, Giorgio, *La notte* (Milano: Adelphi, 1996), 19.
 6. Kafka, Franz, *Hochzeitsvorbereitung auf dem Lande und andere Prosa aus dem nachlass* in *Gesammelte Werke*, Max Brod, ed. (Frankfurt a/M: Fischer, 1983), 67.
 7. Genesis Rabbah, *The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 10.9.
 8. Scholem, Gershom, *Gershom Scholem zwischen die Disziplinen*, Peter Schäfer and Gary Smith, eds. (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 1995), 295.
 9. Arnault's sestina, *Lo ferm voler qu'el cor m'intra*, to which the author refers in his explication of the sestina form, is found in *Les poésies lyriques du troubadour Arnault de Mareuil* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1973.) [—Editor's note]
 10. Lote, Georges, *Historie du vers français* (Paris: Boivin, 1950), 38.
 11. Lote, 98.