

2014

Reference, mimesis, and application: An examination of Gadamer's rehabilitation of allegory

Evan Weinzierl
Gardner-Webb University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/religion_etd



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Weinzierl, Evan, "Reference, mimesis, and application: An examination of Gadamer's rehabilitation of allegory" (2014). *MA in Religion Theses*. 2.

https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/religion_etd/2

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy at Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. It has been accepted for inclusion in MA in Religion Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. For more information, please see [Copyright and Publishing Info](#).

GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY
BOILING SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA

REFERENCE, MIMESIS, AND APPLICATION:
AN EXAMINATION OF GADAMER'S REHABILITATION OF ALLEGORY.

SUBMITTED TO DR. SCOTT SHAUF
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE
RELI 695: THESIS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND PHILOSOPHY

BY
EVAN WEINZIERL

SPRING 2014

This thesis has been examined and approved.

Thesis Director, Dr. Scott Shauf, Ph.D., Professor of Religious Studies

Dr. Larry D. George, Ph.D., Associate Professor of New Testament Interpretation

Dr. Jim McConnell, Jr., Ph.D., Assistant Professor of New Testament Interpretation

MA Coordinator, Dr. Kent Blevins, Ph.D., Professor of Religious Studies

Department Chair, Dr. Eddie Stepp, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Religious Studies

Date

ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is, first and foremost, the presentation of the stance of allegorical interpretation and its potential revaluation in a postmodern context (as argued for by Hans Georg Gadamer), giving special consideration to select pre-critical voices and allegorical methodologies that are becoming relevant to this discussion concerning personal, revelatory Truth or Truths. This goal is enriched by the incorporation of pertinent, contemporary (postmodern) perspectives in literary theory that concern the relationship between the world of a text, the world of the individual or society in which that text is interpreted, and any possible or useful allegorical link between the two. Secondly (and finally), given Gadamer's unique view of Truth and its postmodern relation to pre-critical thought, I ultimately offer the hermeneutical methodology of the Antebellum African American Church (as constructed and articulated by Dwight Hopkins) as an acceptable and appropriate model for interpretive mimesis for those reading communally relevant texts as sources of positive social change and as sources leading to the revelation of personal Truths that disclose the measures, methods, and meanings of being human beings with infinitely complicated contexts.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1) Introduction	5
2) Interpretive Allegory and Its Places	8
a. Perspectives on Gadamer's Allegorical Theory: A Response to De Man	13
b. Allegory, Art, and Knowledge in <i>Truth and Method</i>	19
c. The Fusion of Horizons and the Individual Self	27
3) Origen's Allegorical Model & Its Relevance in the Present	
Hermeneutical Debate	33
a. Stoic Allegoresis: A Philosophical Precedent for Allegorical Revaluation?	33
b. Origen's Allegoresis and his Biblical Interpretation	37
c. Interpretation for Community and Individual: Origen's Allegorical Purpose	41
d. Origen's Allegory and Problematic Passages	54
e. Kerygma and the Uniqueness of the Christian Gospel and Biblical Interpretation	57
4) Fiction and Ethics: Systems and the Connection of Worlds	66
a. Reference, Mimesis, and Meaning: Clarence Walhout on Truth and Fiction	66
b. Fiction, Ethics, and the Social-Communal Function of Mimesis	72
c. Allegory and Mimetic Interpretation: A Mechanism for <i>Anwendung</i> ?	80
5) The Bible, African Americans, and Allegorical Interpretation	86
a. Interpretive Methodological Difference: Imagination, Community, and Society	88
b. African American Biblical Interpretation and Gadamer's Distinct Vision of Truth	90
c. The Rehabilitation of Allegory and African American Interpretation	96
d. Prescriptive Allegory and African American Social Critique	103
6) Conclusion	108
7) Bibliography	110

1. Introduction

This essay's primary intention is to examine the relationship between a community and the text or texts that it interprets together and the implications that this relationship implies. Secondly, this essay's intention is to explore the interpretive tool of allegory as it is explained by Hans Georg Gadamer and compare his notion to historical examples of allegorical interpretation, arguing that his call for a rehabilitation of allegory in a contemporary horizon/World would look (at least methodologically) something like the historical examples of allegorical interpretation that I offer in the body of the essay.

I will begin my argument with an introduction to allegory in general and (much more importantly) the idea of allegory as it is articulated by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*. My discussion of this interpretive tool will be framed within Gadamer's larger discussion of interpretation, semiotics, art, and history within the humanistic disciplines, and I will attempt to give a thorough account of his thought on the subjects and their relationship to allegory as it is presented as a philosophical tool. Beyond this, I will give ample consideration to Gadamer's very distinct view of Truth and how it is actively acquired (especially as his view stands in relationship to more passive views on how Truth is acquired), since this will be central to the rest of my essay. Following this, I will explore how Gadamer sees the idea of kerygma (fundamental to his understanding of Christianity and Christian biblical interpretation) as related to allegory, not as identical by any stretch of the imagination, but as a procession from one to the other: kerygma, being a personal call rather than an acceptance of abstract principles, is achieved through allegorical interpretation that makes concrete and personal understandings out of

abstract textual ideas possible. Finally, I will discuss how this all operates within the individual (and sometimes communal) level, though it can have social effect.

Building from my discussion of Gadamer and his idea of allegory, I will offer my first of two historical examples of allegorical interpretation: Origen of Alexandria's. Focusing first on the Stoic allegoresis that preceded Origen, I will then turn my attention to Origen's methodology in his use of allegory in biblical interpretation *and his purpose in using it*, ultimately making the observation that Origen's allegory seeks to make the words of the Bible, though of an entirely different horizon and social World, speak to the people of a congregation in their situations as persons. I will be focusing on his allegorical methodology and his allegorical purpose, arguing that Origen is employing allegory in transforming abstract textual notions and ideas that may be foreign to his audience into concrete, personal, and important ideas that make sense within the congregation's contexts. In this sense, allegory is the philosophical tool that bridges the interpretive chasm from text to actual world of experience, but in doing so, not only does it produce an "effect" when understood, it always transforms the abstract into concrete, the disconnected into the personal, the unit of text into theological kerygma; a portion of my purpose in showing this transaction will be to argue for the relevance of this kind of allegory today, ultimately relating Origen's allegory to the allegorical rehabilitation for which Gadamer calls.

Following this observation, I will discuss the relationship between text and action on a more theoretical level, not offering any specific historical figure or scenario in which allegory is employed. Rather, I will explore the relationship between Truth and fiction, especially as articulated in the thought of Clarence Walhout, literary critic, who argues that the relationship between fiction and ethics is more important and profound than might be immediately apparent, an observation that, once noticed, can hardly be ignored in working toward a complete critical

reading of a text. Key to this discussion will be Walhout's terminology in his examination of this relationship: his notions of textual referent, that which exists only as idea within the text, and mimesis, that which is taken by the reader to be in relationship with the referent, are fundamental in developing a coherent allegorical methodology, especially if it is the intention of the interpreter to apply the text to the actual world and society in some kind of prescriptive, effective, or meaningful way. I will give particular attention to communities that assign literature, as well as communities that read the assigned literature, acknowledging that the relationship between text and reader(s) is both personal *and* social in scope and effect, thus clarifying Gadamer's notion of *Anwendung* as both personal and social.

Finally, I will consider the experience of African Americans and the African American use of allegory in interpreting the Bible theologically. Beginning with the methodological and teleological difference (different from European and European American) of African American biblical interpretation, I will consider African American theological allegory in comparison to Origen's theological allegory and will show them to be methodologically similar. Beyond this, I will argue that they both fulfill Gadamer's standard for Truth, being revelatory of what it means to be human at a given point in history, which is an idea that will henceforth be rendered "revelatory of *human being*," or "*being human*." In conclusion, I will show how African American allegoresis and Origen's allegoresis, both in strong relationship to Gadamer's notion of allegory, are worthy and valid candidates to be historical examples of allegorical interpretation that can be used by a contemporary audience toward a reinvigoration of allegoresis of the Bible (or any communally-relevant text) that will render the abstract text referents of the text well into coherent mimetic correlations that are both relevant and revelatory of human being. This process is therefore liberating for the human person who experiences the actual world within history, a

person with the potential to have his/her life transformed by a dramatic worldview reimagining using the philosophical mechanism of allegory.

2. Interpretive Allegory and Its Places

Take, for an illustration, this story about a counselor who helps children who have recently lost parents or other close loved ones. During one of these grief-counseling sessions, the counselor lets a child play “angry birds” on a cell phone, since children’s attention spans are apparently quite shorter than those of most healthy adults, and the mindless distraction, oddly enough, can aid a child in concentrating on the conversation at hand. The two of them discuss what it is like to lose a parent and what it is like to be without them; the counselor is doing his best to describe the grieving process to the child in terms that he can understand, until the child speaks up after some very serious reflection. In a voice with more authority than he realized, the child tells the counselor that “grief is just like ‘angry birds.’ You have got your house all set up, and everything’s fine, and, out of nowhere, something strikes and your whole world falls apart and right on top of you.”

The story is quite touching, but this is hardly the point. I have not bothered to research the reasons for the development of the game “Angry Birds,” but I assume that the game was not invented in order to offer grieving children a simplified and interactive model by which to come to an understanding of their emotions connected with grief (however noble a goal this might have been). The counselor in the story, for all the reader knows, has no intention of communicating the emotions of grief to the child via the cell phone game. There are two possibilities that are not mutually exclusive; either the child somehow makes sense of his own situation through an interpretation of the game he is playing, the child makes sense of the game

through an interpretation of his experience that is then applied to the game, or both of these are happening at the same time. Either way, the child has better understood his own condition and can explain it using the illustration of the game, or (more appropriately) the allegory of Angry Birds. This very simple allegory representing his experience with grief not only serves as an explanation and microcosm of his experience, but also as a game-World and device that is itself understandable through the lens of grief. Even beyond this, the game serves the child (and potentially any grieving person) as a catalyst for catharsis achieved through understanding and meaningful connection through the practical application of symbol and allegory toward the goal of revelation of human being.

Of course, these conclusions reached about allegory and symbol regarding a story about a child and a cell phone game are drawn from an illustration that is simple, elementary, personal, and easy to understand. I would argue, however, that the principles are constant, even if the parameters of the model are extrapolated for a wider and more complex personal, communal, or social reality. Just as there is a story World in which the child experiences pain, grief, and longing for meaningful connection and understanding, there is also an actual World in which actual people experience actual events and then meaningfully connect them to (and understand them in relationship to) other events in their actual lives, the lives of others, or in meaningful stories perpetuated by their individual communities or societies of origin. These Worlds of connection, symbol, and allegory, best exemplified by the game World of the child, are those fictional worlds of parallel experience that inform existence in the actual world, a relational dimension in which one is in dynamic conversation with his/her experience, an artistic way of living in which anything experienced has the potential to be related to the experiencer, who is the interpreter.

This kind of thinking, of course, is not new, and I intend to make an argument concerning the usefulness of symbol, allegory, and their immediate value for the human experience. In making this argument, I intend to concentrate primarily on Hans-Georg Gadamer, who argues for a revaluation and rehabilitation of interpretive allegory in the postmodern West, observing that (given the recent dawn and flourishing of science and the rigorous scientific method) interpretive allegory has largely fallen out of fashion as a tool that is capable of assisting an interpreter in having any kind of real knowledge. I will also give substantial attention to the biblical allegoresis of Origen of Alexandria (and the Stoic philosophical influences that undergirds much of his philosophical allegory). I will give abundant attention to an exploration of the kerygmatic aspects of fiction writing, or the argument that fiction not only already contains an ethical dimension, but that it is also a possible and valid source of ethical exhortation or ethical axioms by which persons as individuals or as members of communities make sense of the world morally. Toward an investigation into this phenomenon, I will examine certain communities and the certain respective texts around which they are gathered or are drawn. For instance, it has generally been true for decades now that Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been taught literature in (particularly American) schools, and several decades is a substantial amount of time. It is doubtful that the novel has been taught in schools for decades without sufficient reason; thus, I plan to organize my argument in explanation of this reasoning by way of two mutually dependable (yet potentially mutually inclusive) communities of persons: the assigning community and the learning community. Of course, it should be noted that it is possible for one person to be a member of both communities that go toward the sustentation and reimagination/reinvention of the Western literary canon. What will be necessary at this point of inquiry is the theoretical relevance of allegory and allegorical interpretation to assigning

communities and learning communities in their interpretations of the canonical literature that has an effect on the actual world, not only for their *communities* of interpretations, but for themselves as *individuals within communities* doing ethical reflections on the actual world. The African American biblical tradition will also be discussed and interpreted (in part) through Gadamer and in relationship to Origen's allegorical interpretation, as African American interpretive methodologies are quite different from the biblical interpretive methodologies specific to Gadamer's (or Origen's) social stance. Beyond this, the African American interpretive tradition is one rooted in the experience of oppression and brutality, and it rightly gives primary consideration to this experience as authoritative in an honest engagement with any communally relevant literature, which certainly includes the Bible, and it tends to engage the text as a World and identity source, often a source of strength and social criticism. These conclusions were often reached using methodology that embraced allegory as a valid and valuable part of any interpretive work done in community.¹

Gadamer argues that allegorical interpretation is of immense value when interpreting the artistic from any time (which will reveal non-falsifiable Truth) and that denial of truth outside the scientific method is equivalent to limiting human being. In the same way, I will argue that art from a different World (a World consisting of people with different horizons than we have in the present) cannot be explained well, understood appropriately and, thus, applied to one's life without a healthy relationship with signs, symbols, allegory, and (perhaps most arguably) pragmatics (that is, the sign, symbol, or allegory is not best understood until it has been applied in a practical way).² In bridging two Worlds that would, otherwise, never connect through the

¹ Vincent L. Wimbush, *The Bible and African Americans: A Brief History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003): 28-9.

interpretation of art from the past, it is necessary to show one's work through the allegorical process, but also show how that interpretation matters today. The pragmatic piece of the puzzle is application (or exhortation in cases of Origen's biblical exegesis or African American engagement with community and society). The Bible, a work of art in its own right, is the product of minds from another social World, and it seems that an audience cannot correctly understand what it means today without exploring its use of the symbolic and recognizing the possible allegorical systems that are capable of informing the lives in the contemporary social World, including the life of the interpreter, as if the interpretive process will lead the interpreter and his/her audience to recognize the other side of a metaphorical coin, the other side of which will show him/her the Truth behind the physical reality that s/he experiences.

As the artistic interpretation of symbols and allegory is in itself the connecting-link between two parallel lines of an imagined Scriptural, fictional, or otherwise artistic World of the encountered text *and* the actual social World of the individual, community, or society who interprets (or for whom the text is interpreted)—it is semiotics (perhaps more accurately, the pragmatic effect of interpreted symbol and allegory) that bridges the chasm from dead history/lifeless unity of a text into a kerygmatic exercise in revitalized and reinterpreted truth in *time*. Given Gadamer's vision for a revaluation of allegory within a postmodern setting, it is necessary to first consider the meaning and limits of that desired revaluation. Beyond this, it is also necessary to determine which versions of allegorical interpretation are worthy of examination and redevelopment in a contemporary setting. I plan to argue that (given a certain

² The concept of World, here, is related to the concept of horizon, but these are distinct. While a horizon functions on the individual (or at best communal) level, Worlds are more comprehensive and social, consisting of individuals of varying horizons. As social Worlds move apart gradually through time, similar individual horizons become less and less likely to exist in two separate Worlds, until it becomes impossible, or at least implausible. One's individual horizon, thus, depends on one's social World.

understanding of fiction's relationship to Truth via reference and mimesis) the ancient allegorical methodology of Origen of Alexandria is of particular value to this very present hermeneutical debate. The African American (allegorical) engagement with the Bible (when read through Gadamer) is also of special interest because of its relationship to Gadamer's distinct view of Truth and its purpose and function as source of social criticism, personal identity, and strength within the African American interpretive community. The postmodern rehabilitation of interpretive allegory (as Gadamer envisions it) will be actualized to the benefit of society only if proper consideration and authority is given to those individuals (and communities) in history who have best exemplified the allegorical purpose and methodology that Gadamer argues to be appropriate, useful, and revelatory of human being.

Perspectives on Gadamer's Allegorical Theory: A Response to De Man

In his 1969 essay, "The Rhetoric of Temporality,"³ Paul de Man, intellectual contemporary with Hans-Georg Gadamer, interprets Gadamer's reflections on semiotics and the postmodern revitalization of aesthetics via subjectivism and individualism (particularly the opposition of symbol and allegory according to the individualist interpretation) as an indication that Gadamer believed symbol and allegory, though both interpretive tools, to have nearly opposite relationships to individual freedom.⁴ Gadamer argues that, while the symbol may function several ways within a single horizon, allegory is limited to a single function within a system and, after having been utilized in achieving its purpose, is spent of all its utility and will be of no further service to the interpreter. Gadamer's own words, in fact, describe symbol as

³ Charles S. Singleton, ed., *Interpretation: Theory and Practice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969): 174.

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. and rev. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1994): 42-80, esp. 70-72.

“endlessly suggestive” and “indefinite (in) its meaning,” while describing allegory as opposed to symbol “as art is to non-art.”⁵ Some explication of what art is to these thinkers may be necessary, but suffice it to say here that they are almost certainly not in precise agreement on even the definition of (non) art. De Man interprets Gadamer’s language here as suggesting that allegory is dry, overly-rational, and potentially dogmatic; even while we must acknowledge that this is indeed a possibility, it need not be the only interpretation of this distinction. In fact, I intend to argue that this is not only a misinterpretation of Gadamer’s broader distinction, but also that Gadamer’s specific contrast of symbol and allegory in this instance (if taken at face value and outside the context of this great thinker’s *Magnum Opus*) does not accurately reflect his argued reality of allegory elsewhere in *Truth and Method*, especially as allegory applies to art and knowledge, nor does it reflect the reality of allegory as it has been presented, synthetically or otherwise, elsewhere in the Western (postmodern) interpretive tradition with which Gadamer is in implicit dialogue, the contexts out of which he is arguing interpretive allegory ought to be reinvigorated, though these other positions from the greater tradition on the proper place of allegory are, admittedly, not in view within de Man’s specific statement. Rather than arguing for the rehabilitation of an interpretive tool that has been (at times) known to be overly-rational or dogmatic, it seems more plausible that Gadamer is arguing for the rehabilitation of an interpretive tool from a context in which that tool was utilized, not just as a dry catechetical device, but as a democratized communicator of a text that, to the interpreter’s mind, deserved humanization.⁶ That is, Gadamer certainly argues for the rehabilitation of a certain allegorical method (that is, he is being selective about what kind of allegory ought to be reinvigorated), a

⁵ Ibid, 70.

⁶ Ibid, 309. Gadamer references the allegorical interpretation of the Bible within the Church—specifically the Christian interpretation of the gospel, which he argued to be distinct and to which he gave special attention.

methodology that ought not to be the kind of allegory that de Man has in mind, since allegory has been treated differently within different horizons; this is crucial, as many forms of allegory are less vulnerable to the reproach of excessive rationality.

For ages, allegory was too often subject to the abuse of dogmatists, and, following the European Baroque period, it fell sharply out of fashion in artistic interpretation.⁷ However, it seems that the reason(s) for allegory's past successes and modern aversions come from outside the realm of allegory itself. That is to say, allegorical interpretations that might carry any kind of meaningful authority are impossible without an authoritative tradition upon which they may be founded and within which they may be interpreted. The modernist distrust of tradition as a source of authority inescapably implies a distrust of allegory within an increasingly "free" aesthetic framework.⁸ Thus far, allegory and symbol have been argued to be in opposition and, while this can certainly be true for Gadamer, it has not always necessarily been so, and it has been precisely false for many, as Joel Weinsheimer reminds us: "It is worth recalling that symbol and allegory—like imagination and fancy—were for centuries used as synonyms, and that in antiquity they were not antithetical but simply unrelated."⁹ This was true of antiquity, not because symbol and allegory were not both hermeneutical devices (for surely they were and are to a certain extent),¹⁰ but because allegory (when used in antiquity) belonged to the "sphere of

⁷ Ibid, 79.

⁸ Ibid, 79. "With the breakup of this tradition allegory too was finished. For the moment art freed itself from all dogmatic bonds and could be defined as the unconscious production of genius, allegory inevitably became aesthetically suspect." Allegory requires meanings more fixed and subject to rational discussion than symbols require. In an environment that considered itself more liberated from ancient dogmatism and mythology, the symbol, the freer of the two interpretive forms discussed here, could not fail to triumph over its counterpart.

⁹ Joel Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985): 89.

¹⁰ In both structures, one thing is said instead of another, but both are intended to illuminate the other, and the meaning of both utterances is thus enriched.

the *logos*,”¹¹ as Gadamer puts it; that is, it belonged to the arena of *discussion*, of language, and it was therefore a figure utilized in the clarification of meaning through this rational engagement in dialogue with a mind other than one’s own. Symbol, on the other hand, while its meaning(s) can be deciphered to the uninitiated via explanation, communicates its meaning simply by its being: “its sensory existence has ‘meaning.’ As something is shown, it enables one to recognize something else.”¹² This distinction is key, not only for its own sake, but for the sake of my argument.

While symbol communicates via being, allegory is verbal discourse and, even for initiates within a community that discusses and revolves around a text, must come from the mind of an interpreter who makes an argument based on the shared text of the community and their shared understanding of what that text means, should mean, and has meant in the past. This form of allegory, while not *necessarily* abusive or manipulative in itself, can be dogmatic insofar as it has the potential for instructive usage, and it seems that Gadamer is arguing that a form of allegorical interpretation that does not rely *solely* upon the authority of a rationalized interpretation of a cryptic text for its own sake, but rather an allegorical interpretation given or taught from a text within the framework of a community’s shared experience together (with that text) ought to be, not only permissible, but encouraged; this is the religious function of allegory and its use in the interpretation of art toward a goal.¹³ This goal, as Gadamer puts it, is itself the communal struggle toward the recognition of a valid Truth behind a text, a Truth that is otherwise concealed. The purpose of allegory, then (in this light), is hardly overly-dogmatic or overly-

¹¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 72.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, 73. Allegory arises from the theological need to eliminate offensive material from a religious text—originally from Homer—and to recognize valid truths behind it.

rational, but is instead the tool by which a community engages its authoritative artwork or other authoritative aesthetic construct in an honest effort to experience it together so that, through these efforts, the artwork might reveal Truth about human being in the world.¹⁴ It is this specific kind of allegory that Gadamer seems to be arguing needs revaluation within our Western, postmodern context.

Thomas Kiefer, discussing Gadamer's unique understanding of Truth, especially in comparison with Heidegger's different conception, comments that Truth, to Gadamer, "emerges in acts of understanding that embrace rather than deny the disclosure of human being, a process which requires a hermeneutical and dialogical engagement with an other."¹⁵ This is a view of Truth in which the individual actively and creatively engages the world and the "Other" in her/his quest for a disclosure of Self, as opposed to a more Heideggerian position that would have the individual's Self passively revealed by the world in which s/he is.¹⁶ More simply, Gadamer posits a more active individual in his view of Truth and the Truth-seeker, while Heidegger suggests an individual that is passive but is revealed by an active world; both understandings of Truth involve the Self (or Selves, if the engagement is done in community) in engagement with an environment or social setting. Moreover, and in conjunction with this idea of a personal and active engagement with the world, Jean Grondin, in his biography of Gadamer, writes:

¹⁴ Ibid, 85. Art does not contain truth and, thus, truth cannot simply be removed from the art and distributed to the community—the hermeneutical task is one that reveals truth: identity of self, for instance.

¹⁵ Thomas Kiefer, "Hermeneutical Understanding as the Disclosure of Truth: Hans-Georg Gadamer's Distinctive Understanding of Truth," *Philosophy Today* 57, no. 1 (2013): 42.

¹⁶ Ibid, 42.

The universe of our life and intercourse with each other, of what can be brought to language and shared, our love, our sympathies and antipathies, the life of unconceptualizable affects—all of this remains far removed from the areas that are subject to the control of method. And yet here too a “truth” is experienced that we share, communicate and live by. This is the hermeneutic truth with which Truth and Method is concerned.¹⁷

To Gadamer, this active and intentional communication that one does within his/her community that is directed at the world in which that community finds itself is part of a process in which allegorical interpretation of communally relevant texts is acceptable and encouraged, but in light of this distinctive understanding of a Truth that cannot fall subject to the specific, empirical methodological critiques to which other forms of knowledge do, it seems Gadamer is indicating that allegorical interpretation as a path toward *this* kind of Truth/knowledge (love, sympathy, etc.) is not subject to a more objective methodological critique, and of course I agree that it is not. Again, this does not mean that a more subjective methodological critique (even emerging out of the community of interpretation) is out-of-bounds. Put differently (and in illustration), a critique stating that allegory is too dogmatic *is a methodological* critique, because the text can be dogmatic only in relationship to an audience. If we can agree that it is possible for dogmatism to lend itself to an interpretive methodology, which is generally acknowledged to be the case, the valid critique here is one of dogmatism, not allegory, which can lend itself to dogmatism, but will not necessarily do so. Overly-dogmatic approaches may not embrace the disclosure of human being and understanding, which, again according to Gadamer’s view, is a prerequisite for the revelation of Truth.¹⁸ Valid allegorical interpretation that is worthy of revaluation, then, will come out of a tradition that is subject to the authority of the community it supports. The

¹⁷ Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003): 285.

¹⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 97. “Self-understanding always occurs through understanding something other than the self, and includes the unity and integrity of the other. Since we meet the artwork in the world and encounter a world in the individual artwork, the work of art is not some alien universe into which we are magically transported for a time. Rather, we learn to understand ourselves in and through it.”

methodological process of understanding and disclosing True Self and/or Social Self through dialogue with the “Other” and works of art are thus democratized.

Allegory, Art, and Knowledge in *Truth and Method*

The democratization of allegorical methodology and its validation has led (or should lead, at least) to communities’ reconsidering the nature of Truth as it relates to time and human being, especially communities whose textual sources of authority come from horizons and Worlds other than those to which they themselves belong or have belonged.¹⁹ This process of understanding what a text says in this World must begin with the contemporary readers’ questioning of their own historical conditioned-ness, along with that of the text and the worldview out of which it was conceived. Anthony Thiselton writes:

We are...faced with the undeniable fact that if a text is to be understood there must occur an engagement between two sets of horizons (to use Gadamer’s phrase), namely those of the ancient text and those of the modern reader or hearer. The hearer must be able to relate his own horizons to those of the text. Gadamer compares the analogy of the “understanding” which occurs in a conversation. “...In a conversation, when we have discovered the standpoint and horizon of the other person, his ideas become intelligible, without our necessarily having to agree with him.”²⁰

¹⁹ Here, I have in mind the Church and other religious institutions, but the paradigm doubtlessly will apply to other communities who revere documents from other social worlds and individual horizons.

²⁰ Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980): 15-6. The only way in which I would qualify this otherwise accurate characterization of inter-horizon dialogue between an ancient text and a contemporary hearer, is that it leaves little room for the social conditioned-ness *and social-dependency* that many forms of textual interpretation require and off of which they thrive. For example, a modern reader of Homer may very well be doing so alone and for her/his own enjoyment; however, this is not how Homer is read in the academy—neither is it how Homer is read in the classroom in which he is taught. Conclusions reached about Homeric interpretation in many contexts today requires that many contemporary horizons (that are already in communication) collectively interpret

Using Gadamer, Thiselton is making the assertion that should have been obvious all along: a reader need not accept the worldview of the text if s/he is attempting to understand it, *but it is important that the worldview be engaged and acknowledged if any transaction is to take place at all*. Beyond this, Thiselton asserts that, when approaching an ancient text (or, I would argue, any art, textual or otherwise), we bring first our own experiences and a desire for their interpretation according to the worldview of another or others deemed suitable for this.²¹ Therefore, regardless of whether or not one considers allegory an appropriate tool for the interpretation of texts, it is entirely possible (if not very likely) that the worldview of an ancient text might *expect* interpretive allegory to be applied by a reader or hearer to the artwork coming out of it. This is part and parcel to the Gadamerian “conversation” leading to discovery of a new horizon and possible alternative perspectives that can then be either accepted or rejected for the reader’s present time, but this eventual acceptance or rejecting bears no judgment on the validity of the ancient worldview within its own time, as the warranted-ness of a position is judged according to the time out of which it came and what worldview(s) were appropriate and/or possible at that time. Crucial for Gadamer, however, is the idea of the transcendence of the artistic consciousness, as opposed to the historically conditioned consciousness of the artist or interpreter. In other words, a work of art will necessarily relate to many horizons and/or Worlds, since minds from different times will each bring their own desire for interpretation (or desire for catharsis) to that which offers it (art, including texts). Therefore, (as it is widely acknowledged) there is no objective interpretation of any piece of artwork; conversely, since art is said to be

and relate the ancient text to the present day; instead of the mind of a single interpreter, many ancient texts have communities interpreting them.

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984): 45-50. Ricoeur argues that the desire for interpretation of events finds its root in the very human need for catharsis, the purging of emotions (pity and fear), that is experienced in art and reflection.

transcendent in a sense,²² it is possible to say that, while no single mind (or group of minds) has access to an objective interpretation of a historical work of art that is revelatory of human being (Truth), it is possible that a mind has (or group of minds have) a relative access to Truth revealed by art. The Truth of one age will not necessarily be the same Truth of another, but it is possible for the same work of art to be revelatory of two distinct Truths within two distinct Worlds and still be the same transcendent whole, a position taken mostly from Gadamer's reflection, but one nonetheless finding some historical precedent in Patristic-era biblical interpretation, especially as it relates to allegory and its use in the interpretation of the Bible on an individual, communal, social, or even metaphysical plane—this is seen perhaps most clearly (at least in Patristic-era Christian biblical interpretation) in the exegetical practice, exhortative sermons, and allegorical methodology of Origen of Alexandria, a figure who will eventually receive attention as he pertains to the contemporary revaluation of allegory and its historical precedent.

To Gadamer, art is both necessarily timeless and necessary for all times, since an age's art leads to that age's Truth,²³ and in his estimation, an artist (and a responsible interpreter of Truth) will not necessarily speak for a community, but for his/her own idea of what *could* be.²⁴ By relying on his/her own historical consciousness (coupled with creativity and imagination), the artist will reimagine history and produce an artistic objectification of Truth as it is understood to exist temporally to the necessarily historically-conditioned artistic consciousness. This is possible through both the creation and interpretation of art, but responsible completion of either is possible only through understanding. In relation to Origen, this sounds similar to the role of

²² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, throughout but esp. 81.

²³ Stephen H. Watson, "Gadamer, Aesthetic Modernism, and the Rehabilitation of Allegory: The Relevance of Paul Klee." *Research in Phenomenology* 34, (September 2004): 51. See also Walter Lammi, *Gadamer and the Question of the Divine* (New York: Continuum, 2008): 64-77, esp. 72.

²⁴ Watson, "Gadamer, Aesthetic Modernism," 53.

the ecclesial biblical interpreter: through an “artistic” discovery of Sacred Truth in Sacred Scripture (through allegoresis, or allegorical exegesis), the interpreter draws out from the past’s artwork that which once was not understood, and this is done for the purpose of a new understanding at a new point in history. Put differently, the acquisition of Truth for the present *is* possible through the interpretation of artwork from the past, but it requires interpretation *from* the present.²⁵ In discovering artistic Truth, Gadamer considers the roles of symbol and allegory to be paramount, and they aid the human in his/her discovery of that which is transcendent.²⁶ It will therefore be necessary to explore the nature of Gadamer’s understanding of symbol and allegory, especially as it relates to Patristic biblical interpretation and the production of an exhortation/kerygma based upon an authoritative text.

To Gadamer, an artist’s intelligent handling of words in their forms and modes of meaning contributes to the production of a literary artistic unity. That is, the manipulation of signs, whether of language or otherwise, contributes to artistic expression of any kind, but this is especially noticeable in the literary arts and their use of language,²⁷ since words (either individual words or phrases) can so easily stand for things beyond themselves, and in fact sometimes they must. Symbol and allegory, while distinct from one another, have something profound in common: in both cases, one thing will stand for another;²⁸ the symbol’s meaning is related first to its literal sense, then to the end of its interpretive possibility according to the

²⁵ Ibid, 51.

²⁶ Ibid, 46. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argues for a rehabilitation of allegory primarily in relation to humanity’s understanding of artistic expression. This includes the biblical text, but Gadamer later clarifies that the Bible, should the Church interpret it, is to be interpreted with a goal in mind. Rehabilitation of allegory thus applies to both the Bible and the rest of artwork but is to be taken differently in each case.

²⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 71.

²⁸ Ibid, 72.

context in which it is interpreted. That is, the effect of the symbol is rooted in its literal *being*, which is objectified and, thus, cannot change, but the artistic *effect* that the symbol has upon *human being* will not cease at the literal and, therefore, it *must* change, according to how being is functioning within each human mind: it is taken to the end of the potentiality of its meaning according to the interpreter's knowledge of the text's history of interpretation (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), the interpreter's experience of the symbolic, and the interpreter's position in time.²⁹ Thus, the symbol is simultaneously a textual link to the past and a potential source of kerygmatic application (*Anwendung*) in the present through an interpreter's relative access to the transcendent Truth the artwork reveals in time.

On the other hand, allegory, while it, too, will stand for something beyond itself, is distinct from symbol, as I have been saying, not so much because of its sphere of categorization (as in antiquity), but because of its *function*. According to Gadamer, "'Allegory' originally belonged to the sphere of talk, of the *logos*, and is therefore a rhetorical or hermeneutical figure. Instead of what is actually meant, something else, more tangible is said, but in such a way that the former is understood."³⁰ Allegory, understood this way, not only goes beyond what is actually said and meant by the text, showing the meaning to have implications far beyond the literal, but it functions in a hermeneutical way so that the *literal* is understood in terms of the allegory. In other words, allegory *functions*, not only as path toward kerygma, but as explanation (*Erklärung*) of the literal, not only as a tool for an ethical exhortation, but also as a tool that will

²⁹ James E. Crouch, "Augustine and Gadamer: an Essay on Wirkungsgeschichte." *Encounter* 68, no. 4 (September 1, 2007): 12. A contemporary interpretation of a text is not necessarily superior to any other interpretation in a given text's *Wirkungsgeschichte*, but past interpretations become a part of contemporary interpretations. That is, the history of a text's interpretation is at the front of the mind when contemporary interpretation occurs; thus, symbolic interpretation accords with both the symbol's *Wirkungsgeschichte* and the interpreter's individual experience with his/her experienced symbolic universe.

³⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 72.

illuminate a meaning of the story that is being allegorized. For instance, in reference to Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, an allegory dealing with Huck Finn, a free white child, and Jim, the slave, rafting down the Mississippi River, literally between free states and slave states in American territory could be allegorized so that it is understood to stand for a certain individual's (or community's) experience grappling with what slavery and freedom are today in American life (as opposed to what they were in the past or are in the text) and his/her/their assigning of these text-references of slave-free distinctions in the novel to things and experiences in the actual world of human experience. This is the allegorical process. It involves a thorough examination of what is going on in the text and the assigning of these references to things in the "actual" world. That is, it involves both *reference* within a text and *mimesis* by those who read the text in order to inform their human being.³¹ Gadamer's point beyond this is simply that this allegory, which has made the story personal, communal, or both, will then be used by the interpreter and interpretive community as its own synthetic system for viewing the world *and* for reading the text out of which it was drawn.

Gadamer's argument not only seems to be that this kind of interpretation of another horizon's text is not only warranted but crucial if the interpreter is going to reveal the meaning of the text, since, to Gadamer, understanding the meaning of the text cannot exist apart from its application or an understanding of its significance:

It is important to note here that Gadamer's position does not merely overlook a distinction between understanding meaning and understanding significance; it denies one. On his view, we understand the meaning of a text, work of art or historical event only in relation to our own situation and therefore in light of our own concerns. In other words we understand it only in light of its significance.³²

³¹ Roger Lundin, Clarence Walhout, and Anthony Thiselton, *The Promise of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Press, 1999): 73-78.

This may seem radical, but, upon reflection, it is hardly so within the postmodern context in which we find it, though there is (of course) a certain degree of tension between this conception of meaning/significance and a more classical conception.³³ Understanding a horizon from the past, for example, is not viewed as something that is done outside of one's own concerns.³⁴ We engage Huck Finn and Jim's relationship through the lens of slavery and freedom in America because this is a relevant question for our situation today, and the conclusions we glean from our interpretations will inform, not only our worldview of the actual world, but our view of the text out of which these conclusions come.

What is less radical than it is revolutionary is Gadamer's contention that the modernist and Enlightenment-era ways of "knowing," while they are certainly genius and worthy of continuation, have (by their demands of certain methodologies and post-Enlightenment, European definitions of history) excluded many other ways by which human beings come to knowledge, and symbol and allegory (he argues) are both ways in which human beings have historically come to knowledge, and they are both still valid ways in which humans can come to know certain things of a non-falsifiable nature, even if one or both of them is in need of a certain level of rehabilitation, as Clarence Walhout accurately observes in Gadamer:

³² Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987): 68. To continue in my use of the example of Huck Finn, one would do well to notice what the text says about the delicate dynamics of slavery and freedom in America; however, if the significance of these vastly important ideas remains unapplied to the reader's (or hearer's) consciousness, the "meaning," as Gadamer would have it defined, is lost. The meaning of the text is therefore inseparable from (if not synonymous with) its significance and application to the actual world.

³³ Roger Lundin, et al, *The Promise of Hermeneutics*, 109.

³⁴ Ibid, 100-101. It is worth noting that Walhout argues that, while the authorial intent may be impossible, if not undesirable, to reconstruct, the interpreter need not give up on, what he calls "authorial stance." That is, while we cannot retrieve the mind of the author, it would be imprudent of us to also surrender the World of the author, unless we are otherwise required to do so, which Walhout argues that, in most cases we are not, as there is often sufficient evidence to reconstruct social Worlds out of which texts emerge. This can be vital to the task of an interpreter.

We can see in Gadamer the tension between older conceptions of truth and modern conceptions of historicity. In the first part of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer sets out to distance himself from the subjectivism of the Kantian tradition of aesthetics and Kant's view that knowledge and art are as unmixable as oil and water. In contrast, he asserts his view "that art is knowledge." Our responses to art are cognitive as well as aesthetic, and therefore we "hope to understand better what kind of truth it is that encounters us there."³⁵

The assertion to which Walhout is drawing attention is drawn up into a tidy maxim that "art is knowledge," which can be misleading; surely, it dabbles in a bit of hyperbole, but it is true that Gadamer wants his audience to know that art and human knowledge have a great deal to do with one another, as opposed to the assertions of some earlier philosophers who would say things to the contrary. As art is cognitively investigated through human consciousness, Gadamer argues that the experience achieved with and through art (whether allegorical or otherwise) can lead a person to knowledge just as warranted and justified as any other "methodology." The experience of art is therefore valued as a kind of pseudo-epistemological foundation.³⁶ That which is experienced by the creative person is then purified and objectified, intended to convey this experience to those who would interpret, who then come to an understanding of this artwork by virtue of their own experience(s) to which the artwork will speak. This inter-horizon communication of knowledge, as it were, is what Gadamer aptly names and describes as the "Fusion of Horizons" that is necessary in this kind of interpretive work. That is, meaningful interpretation (that is applied and understood as personal or concrete rather than abstract) can be accomplished through allegory or some other interpretive method, but there must be a communication between the World of the text and the World of the interpreter or interpreting community; beyond this, when the interpreter understands the social World out of which the text,

³⁵ Ibid, 109-110.

³⁶ The concept of *Erlebniskunst* (experience-art) contains an important ambiguity. Originally, *Erlebniskunst* obviously meant that art comes from experience and is an expression of experience. But in a derived sense the concept of *Erlebniskunst* is then used for art that is intended to be aesthetically experienced. Both are obviously connected. The significance of that whose being consists in expressing an experience cannot be grasped except through an experience.

artwork, etc. is coming and how/why it is making its argument, the interpreter will not only be better informed about the art's potential for revelation of human being but will also then have a bit of the authorial stance (or authorial horizon/World) as a very real part of his/her own horizon, and, thus, a fusion of horizons has occurred.

The Fusion of Horizons and the Individual Self

If these two Worlds (the World of the text and the World of the reader/hearer) are to participate in some kind of transaction (meaning that the first World is to inform the second in some way) then this engagement is possible only through the relation of the reader/hearer's World to the World of the text, and (at least initially) it cannot be the other way around. Put differently (and using Gadamer's vocabulary), the reader's own horizon and social World is the starting point, and making sense of a past horizon and social World, even if it is done using art and documents from an ancient World, must be done from the present and according to a present worldview (even if that worldview includes a knowledge of the worldview of the text), and it cannot be done the other way around, which sounds like a truism. The implications, however, are more profound than we might expect: in this transaction that is dynamic conversation between reader, historical text, and the world, the reader may identify the historical conditioned-ness of the text's horizon, and (as history informs his/her consciousness) the text's ideas will become increasingly intelligible *without* the reader necessarily having to give assent to the historical

standpoint as a valid opinion at his/her own point in history.³⁷ Moreover, while discovery of a new position doesn't imply agreement with that position, hearing the ideas for which the text is arguing and explicating (under the assumption that they are at least valid for their point in history) is not only useful, but necessary for the understanding or application of that text in the present, and action, given the nature of textual authority as it functions within communities surrounding certain texts, is a vital component of interpretation.

This, of course, presupposes that the meaning of an interpreted text will go far beyond the author's context; if two Worlds are to be connected by meaning, this meaning will not necessarily be limited to what the author either intended or imagined as possible within the framework of possible authorial worldviews, or authorial stance(s).³⁸ The reinterpretation of a historical text in the present (and the reimagining of the possibility of meaning), therefore, is not necessarily unfaithful to the tradition under which the text was composed: making a text of a different World speak to a second World will require a reinterpretation within the context of the interpreted text itself. For instance, one of Shakespeare's plays would have been well-performed in sixteenth or seventeenth century England if it had been performed outside, the cast had been all male, and so on, according to the standards of Elizabethan and Jacobean theater; however, a *reproduction* of the same play (that is, performing it to standards that an Elizabethan or Jacobean audience would have expected and to which they would have responded positively) will not necessarily speak to the present World in the same way as it would have done in its World of composition. For this reason, the process of making sense of a text (and displaying one's conclusions to an audience) will necessarily be creative and cannot be merely reproduction.³⁹ A

³⁷ Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 15-6.

³⁸ Ibid, 20.

reinterpretation and re-appropriation of a play by Shakespeare might include female cast members, an indoor theater, or even a non-live production. These are things that may or may not have been impossible in a past World that have now become possible within more present social contexts, and they are things that people of present contexts have often come to *expect*. The text (present in both Worlds) is thus limited to the constraints of neither World, as the social arguments that texts make are not necessarily limited to the contexts in which they were originally conceived and argued. Thus, a reinterpretation (that is, a production including female cast members, put on indoors, etc.) of Shakespeare in a present context that has a similar effect on an audience as the play did in Elizabethan or Jacobean England can be understood as a truer representation of the text than a reproduction might have been;⁴⁰ therefore, it can be said that the interpretation of authoritative texts in general must be more than the reconstruction of a past meaning, significance, or application (since this is only part of the process). Rather, the applications made, significances noted, and meanings explicated ought to be both pertinent to the World for which they are drawn up and correspondent to (or at least in acknowledgement of) the history of the text's interpretation. Therefore, a new interpretation of a creative work will itself be creative and, therefore, it will be aesthetic in its own right.⁴¹

It is worth noting that all of these examples have, of course, been in reference to the few persons who provide interpretations of art from past Worlds and horizons, and none of them has been in reference to those for whom the interpretation is being done. That is, this presupposes and applies only to interpretive *structures* in which there is an interpreter with authority and a

³⁹ Ibid, 309.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 9.

⁴¹ Ibid, 298-9. See also, Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 174 and 309.

community who grants him/her that authority, or a director of a play (who interprets it) and a gathering of people who watch/hear the interpretation, and it is exclusive of an interpretive structure that might include audience participation in the production of a play (if such a thing exists) or an interpretive community that has no single authoritative interpreter and, rather, does the interpretive work communally. This model is not in view here and it is therefore an exception, and this exclusion might lead to a (perhaps warranted) criticism that the entire model of interpretation upon which Gadamer, Thiselton, and others focus is flawed from the start, given the democratic tendencies, trends, and presuppositions of most modern and postmodern contexts in the West,⁴² a criticism arguing that proper interpretation of a text granted authority by a community is then properly interpreted *only* by that community (in other words, according to the community by which the text receives *and for whom it exercises* its authority).⁴³ In the West, authority has been democratized over the past several hundred years, and this democratization (along with the rise of individualism in modernity) is something that cannot be overlooked if a proper examination of allegorical rehabilitation within Gadamerian and postmodern contexts is to be attempted.⁴⁴

⁴² Stephen A. Schmidt, "Experience as Canon: Lutheranism in North America," *Religious Education* 92, no. 3 (1997): 406-8. Tendencies toward democratization of authority (political and otherwise) in the West have driven many toward the presupposition that no interpretation is complete unless the ones for whom the interpretation is being done are (in some way) part of the interpretive process. Schmidt asserts that, within Lutheran Christian contexts, events are given authority as interpretive lenses before anything else. People are encouraged to read their own experiences into the biblical text and interpret *each* independently.

⁴³ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989): 7-10.

⁴⁴ Anthony Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995): 19-26. Thiselton asks the very relevant question: "do all controlling models in religion serve manipulative purposes," and we take manipulative here to have very negative connotations. Thiselton is engaging Nietzsche's criticism of religion (particularly Christianity) as a generator and perpetuator of servile mediocrity among its population: he charges Christianity with manipulating a populace into mediocrity when it could have been more. Thiselton acknowledges this as, not only possible, but a historically accurate observation; however, he does still acknowledge that there is a possibility for something better, that this need not be the only case, and that religious authority has, in the past, served non-manipulative purposes.

The “Fusion of Horizons,” as Gadamer puts it, is done via text—the vehicle through which the fusion of two minds and horizons is made possible. This implies that minds and texts function in a “participatory” manner, which is called as such for two distinct but related reasons. On the one hand, a mind’s relationship to a text “participates” in its interpretation much in the same way as time participates in eternity.⁴⁵ The historical nature of understanding reveals the contemporary interpreter’s position in a text’s interpretive history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). In this sense, a modern interpretation of a Shakespeare play, for instance, would participate in the play’s *Wirkungsgeschichte* similar to the way in which a moment participates in eternity. A single part of interpretation history cannot be understood apart from the whole of interpretation history, just as a moment cannot be divorced from the moments that surround it, but they are “fused” together. On the other hand (and in a different sense), understanding (in Gadamer’s mind) requires *application* and is impossible without it, especially since he argues that humans do not understand apart from their own condition and in light of their own concerns. Here, Gadamer echoes Aristotle (who has little to say of horizons, but plenty to say of the merits of a practical understanding of the abstract).⁴⁶ Here again, there is participation, as human understanding of a text presupposes that text’s participation in the life of the one who interprets and understands. To continue the Shakespeare example, an interpretation of a play is best understood (or Gadamer might say, *only* understood) in light of our own concerns as people, when we are able to make interpretive applications to our experience in the world. These interpretive applications, or

Here, again, we see the idea of selective rehabilitation working. What ought to be revalued within postmodernism is not religious authority in general, but a specific kind of religious authority that is non-manipulative and works *against* human mediocrity and *toward* (what Thiselton calls) creative respect for the Other.

⁴⁵ Kevin E. O’Reilly, “Transcending Gadamer: Towards a Participatory Hermeneutics,” *The Review of Metaphysics* no. 4 (2012): 841-845.

⁴⁶ O’Reilly, “Transcending Gadamer,” 845.

hermeneutical leaps, that require fusions of horizons are absolutely essential to the vision of allegorical revaluation and/or rehabilitation for which Gadamer calls. An allegorical interpretation that has the goal of explaining the precise functions of the natural world or has empirical fact as its goal is not what is in view of rehabilitation; rather, the allegory to be revalued is that allegory that is revelatory of human being—meaning that this has more to do with Gadamer’s distinctive view of human Truth, as this allegory is meant to function within the sphere of discourse over human being.⁴⁷ As it is, both of these allegorical models have historical precedent, and it seems that Gadamer is simply being a bit selective (and prudent) about which allegorical model he views as worthy of revaluation. Though there are several examples of this kind of interpretation available, Gadamer chose to give special attention to the Christian interpretation of the Bible, which he finds unique among interpretive systems. In the interest of examining his choice, I have chosen to briefly investigate the pre-Christian philosophical precedent(s) for certain forms of early Christian allegorical interpretation of the Bible (that may be excellent models for postmodern revaluation), especially as it exists in the hermeneutics of Origen of Alexandria.

⁴⁷ Anthony Thiselton, *Interpreting God*, 51. “This [*agape*] means *creative regard for the Other*; it is a love prompted by will, not by prior ‘like-mindedness’...all understanding, including the interpretation of texts, involves stepping ‘out of one’s own frame of mind’. Does not this distinguish human care and love from supposedly value-neutral ‘observation’? Mere observation reduces texts and human selfhood to mainly passive objects, subject to our own mental manipulation. Is this so-called scientific approach not, in the end, a defeat for the very goal of openness which we associate with the scientific method?” Again, in reference to the scientific methodology made epistemologically normative by post-Enlightenment thinkers, that same methodology that Gadamer claims is hardly the lone approach by which human beings come to knowledge, is the methodology that Thiselton might even go so far as to call incomplete in the face of the postmodern values of openness and selfhood (or individualism). The empirical method, then, as in Gadamer’s view, is incomplete, both as an epistemology *and* as system for reflecting the values of the society in which we now find ourselves. This opens the door, in Thiselton’s mind, to more creative approaches to relationships within the human experiences—approaches that do our identities justice, of which intra-horizon communication (“stepping out of one’s own frame of mind”) is an immense part.

2. Origen's Allegorical Model and Its Relevance in the Present Hermeneutical Debate

Stoic Allegoresis: A Philosophical Precedent for Allegorical Revaluation?

Coming from a camp that demanded acquisition of philosophical truth that is somehow applicable to the way in which humans live together in society and in relationship with the gods, the Stoic philosophers (of course, along with other Greco-Roman philosophical schools) developed their own tradition of a textual exegesis of sorts—allegoresis.⁴⁸ That is, the exegete/philosopher would choose a text understood to be culturally relevant, including cultural myth, poetry, or even religious ritual, and then extrapolate and explain the many meanings of the text or action existing outside the literal meaning of the text itself by way of allegorical interpretation. This means that, according to the Stoics, allegory, while understood to be a

⁴⁸ Ilaria Ramelli, “The Philosophical Stance of Allegory in Stoicism and its Reception in Platonism, Pagan and Christian: Origen in Dialogue with the Stoics and Plato,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 18, no. 3 (September 2011): 336-339, esp. 339. “Allegoresis performs the very task of finding the philosophical Truth under the veil of riddles. This is why it belongs, and must necessarily belong, to philosophy.”

literary device, was certainly not limited to that, as it was even *primarily* philosophical in its value and application.⁴⁹ To philosophers like Zeno, Cleanthes, and Cornutus, it is allegory that uncovers the hidden truth behind a seemingly mundane and lifeless physical entity, having implications for both ancient physics *and* ethics; that is, a Stoic allegoresis of a text would *sometimes* result in a kind of ethical exhortation, but it would always prove to be *the* connecting link between theology and physics when these things were reached via textual interpretation—it is always the link connecting a human perception of the physical and the potential for a human understanding of the theology effecting the physical.⁵⁰

In considering culturally revered texts (like those of Homer or Hesiod), the majority of Stoic philosophy seems to contend that realizing what is literally going on in the text is one thing, but it is quite another to understand the extrapolated implications of that *literal* textual reality, especially when considering the reality of divine forces to these authors or philosophers. It was allegory and its value in the interpretation of these culturally revered texts (along with an understanding of the symbolic as it exists in the text and the perceived world) that was understood as the *best* way to express the sublimity of what is divine in the text and in the world. In this way, one sees how Stoic allegoresis of a physical reality shows 1) the physics of the perceived world and 2) the theology of what is unseen to be intimately connected, as if they are two sides of the same coin.⁵¹ This idea of the perceived world of forms (a Platonic idea, to be sure) was interfused with the Stoic philosophy of allegoresis in a revival of Platonic philosophy in the Early Christian period (a revival of which Origen was arguably an indispensable part), and

⁴⁹ Ibid, 336.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 338.

⁵¹ Ibid, 339. See also, Jon Whitman, *Interpretation and Allegory* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003): 9-10, 71-95, esp. 73-76.

this revival provided the Early Church with several of its philosophical underpinnings, including allegorical interpretation of texts, perceived reality as potential illusion, and the use of reimagined Aristotelian logic to show the interconnectedness between philosophical/theological propositions.⁵² During the first century BCE and the first century CE, Greek and Roman literature in general had been so influenced by Greco-Roman Stoic philosophy that interpretation or understanding of much of it required a working knowledge of Stoic doctrine; since the writings of the New Testament emerged toward the end of this period, one would assume that an interpreter's knowledge of Stoic philosophy could only assist his/her understanding, since it has so much to do with the authorial stance.⁵³ That is, knowledge of the history behind a text's production can only assist an interpreter in his/her task. Discovery of this history, however, should not be the end of one's interpretation (which is true even and especially in the Stoic tradition), as this avoids the possibility of application of new knowledge to life, application being, arguably, essential to understanding, just as Gadamer would say.

It would seem that the purpose of a Stoic allegorical interpretation of a text would be to illustrate the intimate connection between the physical perceptions of reality (whether that occurs in the lines of an epic poem or elsewhere) and the theological realities (influencing human being and Truth) that are interwoven with the physical/literal, but only discoverable through the employment of allegorical interpretation. It must be made abundantly clear that the purpose of allegoresis, even to the Stoics, was never to do away with the physical/literal level of the text, but

⁵² Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, & Fate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005): 302. See also R.W. Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1996): 24.

⁵³ Brad Inwood, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 56-58. See also Ronald H. Nash, *Christianity and the Hellenistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984): 100-101. Nash makes the argument that Hebrews' linear-causal view of time is a direct challenge to the Stoic cyclical-experiential view of time.

to show that it was but one side of reality; the theological level of textual understanding was not, in itself, allegorical, but achievable *through* allegory. That is, allegorical interpretation of a text is employed when one wishes to achieve understanding of a divine reality or philosophical truth. For the Stoics, it is impossible to reach this philosophical truth from the text without the use of allegory. The text should be understood, then, as an object that points the way toward a broader philosophical truth, but it is up to the interpreting philosopher (or sage, as the philosopher will sometimes be called) to reach that truth and show the divine/philosophical reality existing behind this physical world, detailing how this truth is important for the life of a community wishing to live enriched by the knowledge of that Truth interpreted from the physical world. That is, the references within the texts were recognized not only as things, but as symbols, and their relationships were allegorized for the purpose of inspiring mimesis in those for whom the text is interpreted. In this way, we might understand the interpreted literature as a kind of art form existing physically, yet pointing the way toward something bigger, something existing behind it, something discoverable only through interpretation. The Early Church inherited this Stoic allegorical tradition, along with numerous other Greco-Roman cultural/societal gems, and it is from this Greco-Roman tradition that Origen (and other Church Fathers) draw out their argument for what biblical interpretation should be.⁵⁴

For this reason, I would assert (with others, obviously) that the Stoic philosophers are an integral part of Origen's worldview concerning Scriptural interpretation and cannot be ignored if one is considering Origen's view on allegorical interpretive methodology. That is, Stoic allegoresis, while not necessarily identical with Origen's allegoresis, is a serious philosophical

⁵⁴ Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth, *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 212-4. See also Francis Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002): 215.

precedent from which he draws his pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*) of not only how textual interpretation is done, but the goals which it is intended to accomplish for human knowledge and being. Moreover, as it is to be argued that Origen's allegorical method is to be considered in a selective postmodern revaluation of interpretive allegory in general, we cannot exclude from our examination the authoritative philosophical sources that informed his worldview, especially as they influenced his opinions on good and proper Scriptural interpretation. In fact, as this interpretive methodology informed Origen's, it may not be out of the question to consider Stoic allegoresis as valid interpretive methodology within postmodern contexts, as the method is quite imaginative and hardly seems outdated.

Origen's Allegoresis and his Biblical Interpretation

Artistic textual interpretation, including the kind of allegorical interpretation Gadamer believes to be in need of revitalization, finds incredibly relevant precedents throughout the history of Christian biblical interpretation, but no figure is quite as famous for allegorizing the biblical text as is Origen of Alexandria. Drawing from various ancient philosophical (and theological) resources (Stoic and Platonist philosophy, for instance), Origen interpreted his community's authoritative text using those interpretive methods which were not only appropriate for the time in which he lived and interpreted, but were also the methods to which his audience would have responded, the methods they would have expected; it could be argued, then, that interpretation's appropriateness (at least regarding texts that are given communal authority: a complicated and interesting notion in itself that will be fleshed out later) is determined according to the normative philosophical stance of the place and time of the interpretation, but its meaning

does not cease there.⁵⁵ Just as in my earlier example concerning Shakespeare, the presentation of an argument that is drawn out of a text recognized to have communal authority would do itself justice to be presented in a manner that is socially *expected*, not merely socially acceptable, and there is a very great distinction here.⁵⁶ The distinction between acceptable and unacceptable implies an either/or paradigm, when this may be something of a misconception according to the majority of audiences. We are likely safe in the assumption that Origen, since he is using allegory, enjoyed an audience that had been conditioned by prior communities in which allegoresis was not only warranted, but necessary and expected. It would have been acceptable to use the Bible for many purposes (history is one of these, as we see partially within his homilies on the book of Joshua⁵⁷), but within Origen's context, it seems the primary purpose of reading the Bible was drawing connections between the literal words of the texts and the spiritual truths to which the text pointed—similar to how the Stoic philosophers read their communally revered

⁵⁵ Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 296. "The work of art can never be reduced to the level of the consciousness of any one individual in history, but always transcends it."

⁵⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 521. If it is impossible to limit the meaning of a text to the opinion of its author, this implies that it is not only desirable but *necessary* to acknowledge more than one meaning of a text. See also, Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 164. Gadamer posits that the work of art is "actualized when it is 'presented.'" This is true, he argues, of any text—that the meaning of a text is brought into reality when it is understood in a way that is revelatory of human being. Being understood thus belongs to the "meaning" of a text just as much as being heard belongs to the meaning of music (to use Gadamer's example): it is nothing until it is brought into reality. My argument here is simply that the appropriateness of the manner in which the interpreter presents the text's argument is conditioned by what his/her context deems expectable, not acceptable. For instance, in third-century Alexandria, an allegorical interpretation of Jesus' resurrection in the gospel of John would have been preferable to a historical account using modernist historical methodology (evidenced by Origen's allegorizing of the gospel of John), not because a historical account would have been unacceptable and invalid, but because it would have been valued less and therefore, unexpected as interpretive currency. However, in nineteenth century Germany, these expectations are reversed, again, not because *allegory* has become unacceptable and invalid, but because it is no longer the expected and most valuable biblical interpretive currency available. Gadamer is arguing that allegory, while not the same thing as modernist historical methodology (and not as good at what this methodology does), does have philosophical value that is distinct from modernist historical methodology. It offers, in his view, a different kind of knowledge that is not less valuable, if less expected.

⁵⁷ Anders-Christian Jacobsen, "Allegorical Interpretation of Geography in Origen's Homilies on the Book of Joshua." *Religion and Theology* 17, no. 3/4 (September 2010): 290. Origen is convinced that the events in Joshua actually happened in history, but that could not be farther from the sphere of importance. What *is* important is that, from texts like Joshua, truth can be reached by way of allegory. Allegorical interpretation in the interest of personal, human truth takes precedent over historical fact as we now imagine it. This is the order of valuation that I argue we can assume his audience *expected*.

texts. This was achievable through allegoresis.⁵⁸ Through his allegory, Origen used the literal/physical text to interpret and construct the world of human experience for his audience rather than using the text to support assertions grounded outside the text.

Origen did not construct a metaphysical system that was separate from the Bible and then use the Bible in its defense, but the other way around—just as Stoic philosophers used allegoresis in their explanation/interpretation of myth and the divinity that it revealed,⁵⁹ Origen used the Bible to draw out conclusions based on the text itself, but (given his precedent) this could not be limited to the literal meaning of the words, since the Stoic tradition with which he was arguably familiar and by which his horizon and World were informed taught that this was not the method by which an interpreter arrived at truth. The literal level of the text must be transcended but also maintained if allegoresis was going to aid an interpreter in arriving at a philosophical conclusion congruent with the literal level of a text. The literal level was, therefore, fundamental to a text, just as a human body is fundamental to human identity.⁶⁰ Humanity is arguably more than a collection of individual bodies, and so must texts be more than a compilation of individual words with no meanings beyond those that are obvious on the surface. That is, the human body is one side of a metaphorical coin (the literal), just as the human soul is the other (the spiritual); these two are shown to be connected through allegorical interpretation of literal/physical reality. Just as the Stoics understood physics and theology to be the two sides of reality linked through allegory (whether in literature or otherwise), so does Origen see the Bible and its interpretation. So complete was Origen's transfer of allegorical

⁵⁸ Ramelli, "The Philosophical Stance," 358. "The purpose of the allegorical reading is to show the connection between spiritual and material realities, spirit and body, not to allow the spirit to annihilate the body."

⁵⁹ Ramelli, "The Philosophical Stance," 341-2.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 346-7.

interpretation from the Stoic allegoresis of ancient mythology (Homer and Hesiod) to the Alexandrian Christian biblical interpretive tradition that Porphyry and Jerome actually considered Origen to be *the* responsible agent of this transition,⁶¹ however appropriate that characterization may or may not have been.⁶²

In his threefold exegetical model of Scripture, Origen is careful to maintain the literal level of the text while he allegorizes his way to a meaning that is appropriate for his purposes. Interestingly enough, this was a meaning not necessarily understood to be infinitely appropriate, or meant for infinite re-appropriation. *Unlike* the allegoresis of the Stoic philosophers, Origen allows for allegorical interpretations of texts to take an interpreter to any number of spiritual truths (the third level) that are, quite literally, inexhaustible;⁶³ this happens to be in *direct contrast* to the Stoic notion of Cornutus or Cleanthes, who posited that allegoresis will land a philosopher at *the* philosophical truth, a truth that existed on a single level and was capable of transcending time just as the text would transcend time, since it was theological truth and, therefore, of the gods.⁶⁴ In contrast, Origen's exegetical model (as seen in various homilies and commentaries to be discussed later) allows for a slightly more fluid relationship between the text

⁶¹ Ibid, 343. See also, Ibid, 341. Ramelli argues that the allegorical interpretation of texts was so central to Origen's model for biblical interpretation that he included it in his philosophical masterpiece, *On First Principles*. His argument is that the way in which Origen describes allegoresis is the same way in which Stoics, especially Cornutus (who said that allegory could discern the philosophical truth from a text as from beneath a veil of riddles), describe allegory to be "part and parcel of philosophy."

⁶² Ibid, 348-51. Origen's allegoresis does part ways with the Stoic tradition after a point, since he considers the text as a whole unit and is much more reluctant to allegorize single scenes, preferring units of thought in their entirety—"a whole passage in its allegorical system." Stoics cared less for this. There are marked distinctions to be made between Origen's model of interpretation and the Stoic model he inherited that served as his foundation. See also Catherine M. Chin, "Through the Looking Glass Darkly: Jerome Inside the Book," In *The Early Christian Book*, edited by William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran, 114-5.

⁶³ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (trans. Ronald E. Heine, *The Fathers of the Church*; Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981): 47-8. Origen discusses the nature of Scripture at the beginning of his first homily.

⁶⁴ Ramelli, "The Philosophical Stance," 354-5.

and its Truth, reminiscent of Paul or Philo's method of typology, and even (essential to my argument) related to Gadamer's postmodern view of Truth as something historically conditioned, something in constant need of reexamination.⁶⁵ One must not lose the historical sense of the Scripture when doing allegoresis: the goal is to make the history intelligible and to make the effect for the community profound.⁶⁶ Like the Stoics, Origen seeks to show the interconnectedness of the material world and the world of the spirit, showing that one world is impacted by the other; therefore, the purpose of an allegorical reading is to artistically achieve this end⁶⁷—to demonstrably prove that spirit and matter are “one” (or peculiarly unified, in a way) by using evidence from the text that his community agrees is appropriately relevant.

Interpretation for Community and Individual: Origen's Allegorical Purpose

The very reality of a text as Scripture seems to drive Origen, not only to make sense of it himself, but to turn it into something exhortative for a community; to Origen, the Bible, though it consists of individual books, exists as a textual unity by which he seeks to explain theological realities for the benefit of his audience and community,⁶⁸ as Anders-Christian Jacobsen comments on Origen's *Homilies on the Book of Joshua*:

Origen never doubts that the story of the Israelites' conquest of the Promised Land is historically true. However, he is also convinced that the meaning of the texts is not only to be found on the literal or historical levels. There must be more to it. Otherwise the book would not have been included in the canon of Holy Scripture. Therefore, in his

⁶⁵ Ibid, 348-9.

⁶⁶ Burton L. Visotzky, “Jots and Tittles: On Scriptural Interpretation in Rabbinic and Patristic Literatures.” *Prooftexts* 8, no. 3 (September 1988): 263.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 358.

⁶⁸ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua*, trans. Barbara J. Bruce, ed. Cynthia White (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002): 82. Anders-Christian Jacobsen, “Allegorical Interpretation of Geography in Origen's Homilies on the Book of Joshua.” *Religion & Theology* 17, no. 3/4 (September 2010): 289-90.

sermons on the book of Joshua, Origen tries to establish what this deeper meaning of the text could be—and explain this to his congregation.⁶⁹

Not only is Origen under the impression that the history behind the Scripture is accurate, he is also convinced that this story's presence in the Bible implies its usefulness for the Church, and he is determined to uncover these deeper meanings for those who are incapable of uncovering them for themselves. Origen is determined to show his congregation (purportedly new converts to Christianity who are preparing for baptism) that the world of the text is not only historically and literarily complicated in itself, but that it most certainly has implications in the present time for the auditors. Origen accomplishes this through his use of allegorical interpretation in explaining Joshua, ultimately arriving at a truth for the new converts so that their understanding of his truth-point (achieved through allegoresis) might be *completed* in its application into their lives: "When people hear these things, it is likely they say, 'What is this to me? What does it contribute to me if I know that those who were living in Ai were conquered, as if similar or even mightier wars either have not been waged or are being waged?'"⁷⁰ Origen uses the Bible (with God's assistance, according to him) in demonstrating the hidden meaning behind the text of Joshua, and he does this, as Jacobsen correctly puts it, "to the benefit of the audience;"⁷¹ that is to say, it is one of Origen's goals to show how the Bible is related to the experience of the congregation in the actual world.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid, 290.

⁷⁰ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua*, 82.

⁷¹ Jacobsen, "Allegorical Interpretation of Geography," 290.

⁷² Origen, *Homilies on Joshua*, 82-3. Here, Origen, focusing on Joshua's initial retreat from Ai, identifies the king of Ai as standing for Satan and those following Joshua as the Church following Jesus. The retreat from Ai, while potentially problematic, is interpreted as a way of understanding both the persecution of Christians *and* the figurative "fleeing" from circumcision, the Sabbath, "legal burdens and precepts," and thus flees from these things, though Origen does end his interpretation with the assertion that nobody who has followed Christ, "the fulfillment and fullness of the Law," really flees at all. It is imperative that the reader note the usage of identity assignment and comparison of textual and actual events in Origen's methodology.

The general thrust of Origen's interpretation of Joshua includes understanding Joshua as a literal and historical character, but Jesus as the spiritual Joshua; Joshua leads literal Israel, just as Jesus leads the spiritual Israel (the Church), into a new land that is promised to them by God, which is interpreted allegorically to mean a new morally perfect place of life in the Church to which Christ leads.⁷³ The key to any hidden meaning for Origen will be Christ, and he uses this key in his interpretations both often and elegantly. His focus, however, is not on the life and teachings of Jesus or even Christology, but usually (curiously enough) on soteriology. Origen concentrates his focus on the "saving" nature of Christ and how the Church is mysteriously bound up in this saving work of Christ;⁷⁴ this is understandable, of course, since this exhortation is given to new converts, who would (more than likely) be at least interested to know what Christ did/is doing/will do for them, but also (perhaps even more urgently) what to do in order to live a Christian life that leads them forward in progress toward the goal of wholeness.⁷⁵ This is a pragmatic truth that is discovered allegorically but is immediately applicable for those listening to the sermon; its foundations, however, are located in the literal meaning of the text, as Jacobsen is careful in pointing out:

According to Origen, the Israelites' long journey from Egypt to the Promised Land is thus a true historical account about what happened to the Israelites, but at the same time—and more importantly—it is also an account instructing catechumens or recently baptized Christians about how they must progress morally from their former conditions of delusions and idolatry to a morally good life in the church.⁷⁶

To Origen, the literal level of the text is indispensable, but the deeper meaning of the story is less about Joshua's physical movement in geographical space than about the development of morality

⁷³ Jacobsen, "Allegorical Interpretation of Geography," 292.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 293–4.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 294.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 299.

in the catechumens Origen addresses. Geographical reality in the text, after all, is not that important to the catechumens, but moral instruction might be; therefore, Origen uses the text for these purposes. In illustration of the temporal nature of his point, however, I suggest only that this was a truth developed for Alexandrian catechumens who were, perhaps, familiar with allegoresis, but it is not a truth prepared for an audience today (perhaps with a less robust *Vorverständnis* of allegory). Should one attempt to apply this interpretation to his/her spiritual development or personal enrichment, it seems that s/he will first have to bring the allegorically obtained idea of moral development into the present (either from Origen's text or from the book of Joshua itself). The point is that application of this truth *may not be limited* to the audience for which it is intended, but (should it be applied to any other audience), that audience will first have to make sense of it in the present time and in its context. This may seem like a truism, but pragmatic application of a truth into one's life does require a certain amount of methodological work that cannot be neglected.

The fact that Origen's biblical interpretation (or even biblical interpretation in early Christianity in general) ends with some kind of argument or exhortation is hardly surprising, since biblical interpretation in early Christianity was centered on making the Scriptures not only inform but transform the lives of their readers/hearers. Making a distinction between what a biblical text *meant* and what it *means* is not in view here, as the Scriptures were understood as vessels through which the divine Logos addressed present readers and was not limited to the history behind the text in doing so; rather, the Scriptures were capable of speaking *directly* into the lives of the readers, a phenomenon achievable through careful biblical examination and

interpretation.⁷⁷ Origen, influenced by Stoicism,⁷⁸ understood the unity of the Bible to be the embodiment of the Logos on earth and, as such, its literal meanings were connected to hidden spiritual truths that, when discovered through allegoresis, were capable of transcending time and working toward the transformation of the reader.⁷⁹ The idea of discovery here is, obviously, discovery of new and hidden meanings through the process of allegoresis, but the *goal* of such an interpretive strategy is not the process itself but this “transformation” of the reader or receiver of the text. The transformation of the reader takes place through the application of the fruits of this discovering process; that is, it is through the application of a discovered truth that the reader is transformed into something s/he once was not and *could not be* without the application of the discovered truth.

In ascending the metaphorical ladder of understanding, the reader passes the literal and moral sense of the Scripture, arriving at the third and final stage of truth that is completed in application. The goal of this process of understanding, since Origen understood the Bible to be the earthly embodiment of the divine Logos, was a mysterious and spiritual ascent of the individual that s/he might participate (or even identify) with the Logos that was the spirit behind the text.⁸⁰ The process of understanding the spiritual level of Scripture through allegory was seen as divine in itself, since this involves movement of the individual reader to an identity more

⁷⁷ Paul B. Decock, “Origen of Alexandria: The Study of the Scriptures as Transformation of the Readers into Images of the God of Love.” *Hervormde Teologische Studies* 67, no. 1 (March 2011): 1-4.

⁷⁸ Ilaria Ramelli, “Origen and the Stoic Allegorical Tradition: Continuity and Innovation.” *Invigilata Lucernis* 28 (2006): 195-200. Porphyry claims that Origen inherited his allegorical interpretive theory from the Stoics; Ramelli argues here that pure Stoic allegoresis’ application to the Bible, while viewed as inappropriate, was not what Origen did. Rather, his version of allegoresis was a reinterpretation of the Stoic practice, one that considered the unity of the biblical text as fundamental to interpretation—this is in contrast to Stoic allegoresis, which is more likely to allow the taking of a passage out of its allegorical system if it serves a philosophical argument well.

⁷⁹ Decock, “Origen of Alexandria,” 3-4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

closely associated with the Logos.⁸¹ Stoics like Cleanthes held that the physical was impacted by the spiritual—that physics was one side of a coin, the other side of which was theology. That is, it is one thing to observe physical realities occurring, but another to understand the other half of the big picture. The way in which one acquires knowledge of the other side of this coin is through an introspective and meditative philosophical process that *must* include allegoresis of the literal/physical without consuming its literal integrity in the allegorical process (the problem Gnostics often ran into). In a similar way, we see Origen identifying the one side of the philosophical coin in the literal meaning/sense of the Bible. Through his philosophical allegory, Origen works for his congregation, ultimately arriving at a spiritual sort of exhortation that invites the audiences' participation and application. It is also at least partially dependent on the Stoic philosophical claim (or presupposition) of a spiritual reality that exists behind the literal/physical. Through his application of reinterpreted Stoic philosophy onto the book of Joshua,⁸² Origen offers his audience a Christian application to their lives, a kerygma in which they are invited to participate and with which they are encouraged to identify, a kerygma that can guide a community toward a new understanding of itself and appropriate actions from that newly understood identity.

When one considers interpreting the meaning of artwork, a variety of possibilities may come to mind, the most popular of which might be the untrained observer attempting to make sense of a piece of contemporary sculpture-work that has no hope of making sense to anybody

⁸¹ Ibid, 5-6.

⁸² Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism Re-thinking the Christianisation of Hellenism." *Vigiliae Christianae* 63, no. 3 (July 2009): 220-7. Ramelli argues that Origen, as a Christian Platonist, received criticism from inside and outside the Church, but he argued that grounding in philosophy was essential to the development of the Christian intellectual, especially when allegorical exegesis became necessary, as it so often was. Origen praised philosophy and recommended the study of it, especially since he interprets Scripture in light of Greek philosophy.

lacking a *Vorverständnis* of the tradition out of which it comes. When I say that the Bible can be taken as (literary) artwork, I do not mean that it is without connection to reality or is in some way enigmatic and without foundation or audience (as some contemporary sculpture-work seems to be). Rather, if one conceives of any good artwork as a response to an already established tradition, one is more likely able to make sense of the art. For example, American poetry written in free verse is not without its foundations in an already established poetic tradition. In the first half of the twentieth century, when free verse was growing increasingly popular, its most talented adherents had a thorough knowledge of the older and more traditional poetic forms and were responding to this tradition, not necessarily creating a new tradition of their own. In the same way, contemporary sculpture-work, while seemingly enigmatic to the uninitiated, is not without its foundations in traditional (and perhaps more familiar) sculpting. It is, thus, a response to an established tradition.

Understanding the Bible as part of a literary-artistic tradition should, then, be less uncomfortable to critics of an artistic biblical interpretation. Understanding the Bible as a work of art (with literature representing several centuries, all collected in a unity) is not only possible, but useful. Not only can we see the different literatures within the Bible responding to and interacting with one another, but we can track the interpretation and (more importantly) *application* of the Bible as it has been applied to the human experience in its *Wirkungsgeschichte*: Origen's application of the story of Lazarus is an example of an interpreter's application of biblical literary artwork onto a congregation's life-experience—not only does Origen describe the scene that takes place *in* the text, he explains how this story is the

cause of an *effect* in his present, which is an interpretation thoroughly on the artistic level.⁸³ That is, any art, should its usefulness and relevance span generations and therefore horizons, will have an effect on those generations interpreting it; this effect will come from an interpretation that will (hopefully) be in accordance with that art's *Wirkungsgeschichte*, responding to the history of interpretation that the artwork has experienced, just as human beings respond to the social and cultural traditions left to them by former generations.

The most pressing implication, then, is that *any* art *can* be applied to one's life, but this is possible only through an interpretive process that will result in application. Of course, this is not limited to the interpretation of the Bible, and there are arguably some key differences to keep in mind when considering the interpretation of that text (especially its community of interpretation and the goal under which it is interpreted). Artwork appeals to the creative dimension of the human, and it demands to be creatively and imaginatively interpreted, understood, and applied. Unlike methods that are subject to empirical verification, the interpretation of art (while it can certainly be intelligent) constructs its meaningfulness without falling subject to mathematical proof or the scientific method.⁸⁴ Understanding, in this case, makes its appeal to a distinct dimension of human consciousness, in that we who interpret art are to recognize its powerful connection to *ordinary* life; this connection may or may not be present in the natural sciences, but it *must* be present in art and its interpretation.⁸⁵ Furthermore, if one understands artwork as

⁸³ Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, (trans. Ronald E. Heine, *The Fathers of the Church*; Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989): 303. See also Randall S. Rosenberg, "The Drama of Scripture: Reading Patristic Biblical Hermeneutics through Lonergan's Reflection on Art." *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 127. In artwork and its interpretation, we should see a shift from solely description of what is going on *in* the artwork to that *and* an explanation of why the artwork matters to the individual or social human experience.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 126-7.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 129.

capable of informing one's life, and one considers narrative to be a work of art,⁸⁶ it is possible for the individual to understand his/her own life as artwork and through artwork (the two participate in a dynamic relationship, informing one another⁸⁷—we create for ourselves dramatic patterns of experience we then find objectified through the artwork, patterns that are informed and upheld by a collection of traditions, explanations, and exhortations that are then harmonized within the individual's consciousness and, finally, applied to one's life in a meaningful and purposeful way.⁸⁸ Put differently, one's life has the possibility of becoming one's work of art, and the individual is capable of deciding which artistic insights and life-applications to make onto his/her life that will (ultimately and necessarily) effect his/her decisions—essentially, to which artistic tradition one's life will artistically respond, or which artistic objectifications will ultimately reveal subjective Truth to the individual interpreter.

This effect seems to be precisely the intent of Origen's biblical interpretation and exhortation, since, through his work with the text for his community, Origen seeks to generate a particular way of life in his congregation, and he does so by appealing to the people's ordinary way of being, showing that his message is immediately applicable to ordinary life. In other words, through his interpretive process, Origen uncovers a level of meaning within the biblical text *and communicates this meaning* so that its effect will be a newly-informed lifestyle. In this way, we see wider application becoming possible through the interpretive and explanatory

⁸⁶ See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Perseus, 1981), throughout, but especially 1-24. Alter argues that biblical literature of the Hebrew Bible comes out of a literary artistic tradition that, while "other" than the Western tradition, demands to be understood on those terms.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 128.

⁸⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1994): 97. "The pantheon of art is not a timeless present that presents itself to a pure aesthetic consciousness, but the act of a mind and spirit that has collected and gathered itself historically."

process of one individual, and it is through this application that Origen seeks to transform the lives of his hearers *by* the transformation of their everyday living, a level of individual understanding through application that signifies the opening of one's horizons through the horizon-granting artistic unity of the biblical text as Origen understands it to exist. A new horizon is opened for the individual because of a newfound understanding and application of art from a past horizon.⁸⁹

It is essential that we recognize how Origen achieves this inter-horizon bridge of understanding. Between the two parallel lines of the World of the biblical text and the World of Origen's congregant and his/her everyday experience, a bridge of sorts has been constructed through allegorical interpretation and an understanding of the text on a *symbolic* level. For instance, read allegorically, Lazarus comes to be a symbol of sorts, standing for any of those hearers who once knew Christ and have died to him. Lazarus' resurrection comes to be a symbol of the power of Christ to resurrect those who have died and need revitalization of their relationship to the Divine.⁹⁰ These are the things that Origen chooses as applicable to one's ordinary life, and it is clearly his intention that they be applied. The symbol, in this sense, cannot exist as a lifeless entity within the text, but it is something to which the reader/hearer/interpreter is to relate, not so much as a mirror in which to view the self, but as a living organism with which to react and relate.⁹¹ Put differently, one need not be in a tomb in order to feel *symbolically* dead, and it is on *this* level that the text relates to the reader. If art should inform the individual life, symbols are to be understood as a necessary part of both art and the human experience, since humans who are using art to inform their existence must exist (at least in some

⁸⁹ Ibid, 131.

⁹⁰ Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 303-4.

⁹¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 133.

part) on the symbolic (and therefore artistic) level.⁹² It is art and the creative dimension of language (and its many implications) that Origen uses as a bridge connecting the two Worlds; that is, semiotics (specifically pragmatics, symbols, and allegory) becomes the vessel through which application (and therefore understanding) of art from the past becomes possible for a congregation belonging to Origen's present, and it is through this understanding that the congregation discovers the potential for the immanent possibility that their lives might have new meaning. Through Origen's allegorical interpretation, the cold *abstraction* of scripture is reformed and reimagined, so that it becomes something *personal*:

And thus by ascending through the individual dwellings [within the ark], one arrives at Noah himself, whose name means rest or righteous... Therefore, it is said of this spiritual Noah [Jesus] who has given rest to men and has taken away the sin of the world: "You shall make yourself an ark of squared planks." Let us see, therefore, what the squared pegs are. That is squared which in no way sways to and fro, but in whatever way you turn it, it stands firm with trustworthy and solid stability. Those are the planks which bear all the weight either of the animals within or the floods without. I think those are the teachers in the Church, the leaders, and zealots of the faith who both encourage the people who have been placed within the Church by a word of admonition and the grace of the teaching, and who resist, by the power of the word and the wisdom of reason, those without, whether heathens or heretics, who assail the Church and stir up floods of questions and storms of strife.⁹³

Here, Origen's method has led him toward constructing an interpretation resting upon the two inter-related fulcrums of *identity* and *event*—the very same inter-related fulcrums by which Origen interpreted the Joshua passage earlier; characters in Origen's actual world, beginning with Jesus himself (as center of the Church), are assigned identities correspondent to all those who are within the ark, and the storm in the story is anthropomorphized so that it, too, can stand for something personal: those figuratively "outside" the Church who take aggressive attitudes toward it. Those who would offer safety (and participate in salvation) to those within the ark who

⁹² Ibid, 133.

⁹³ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, (trans. Ronald E. Heine, *The Fathers of the Church*; Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981): 79-80.

are more vulnerable (the animals) to the attack than these “squared pegs,”⁹⁴ are assigned the identities of teachers, theologians, zealots of the faith, and so on. The detail of this identity assignment is quite exact and is prescribed quite thoroughly onto Origen’s context; however, these identity assignments would be senseless without an event present to occasion such a comparison. A further identity assignment, and it seems the most important, is given to the onslaught of the storm itself, not only as personified attack from those outside the Church, but as an *event* that occasions the construction of an ark in the first place. It would seem that this interpretation of the Genesis flood story is first occasioned by the distinctly personal and concrete situation in which the Church finds itself during the time of Origen’s interpretation. Without a personal and social “storm” in the actual world in which Origen lives, there would be no need at all to interpret the literal storm in Genesis as having anything to do with the figurative storm in the actual world, and to use Gadamer’s word, it is a miracle that the interpreter’s mind makes an association such as this, that a whole abstract unit of Scripture can be taken in its system and read through the experience of the interpreting community in order to produce a personal sense of the abstract, often drawing resourcefully from other parts of the Bible, treating it as a unity made to speak into the concrete and personal situations of the actual, inhabited world.

In illustration of this point, Randall Rosenberg offers a recounting of Origen’s interpretation of the story of Noah’s ark for a congregation of believers:

⁹⁴ Ibid, 81. “Meanwhile you have seen what the squared pegs are which are arranged by the spiritual Noah as a kind of wall and defense for these who are within from the floods which come upon them from without, which planks are coated “with pitch within and without.” For Christ, the architect of the Church, does not wish you to be such as those “who on the outside indeed appear to men to be just, but on the inside are tombs of the dead,” but he wishes you to be both holy in body without and pure in heart within, on guard on all sides and protected by the power and purity of innocence. This is what it means to be coated with pitch within and without.” Here, Origen allegorizes even further, and the ark is taken to stand for, not only the Church, but for a body, mind and spirit belonging to an individual human person—he has “personalized” the interpretation a level further.

After describing the planks [of Noah's ark], he surprisingly relates them to the leaders of the Church. He offers a sense of variation by including the cypress of Lebanon from Ezekiel and then turns to Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Paul to assert that we ought to depend on God alone. Finally, he brings his interpretation together by speaking of Christ as the spiritual Noah, architect of the Church. While there is a sense of structure, Origen's manner of proceeding resembles a kind of artistic improvisation from a description of the attributes of a plank to several Scripture passages, and finally to Christ and the Church. And while more meanings can certainly be discovered in this text, Origen's interpretation is consonant with Scripture as a whole and is meaningful for the faithful believer.⁹⁵

What the reader should first notice is Origen's treatment of the Bible as a unity; he could easily take the Genesis story for what it is, but, instead, he allows different stories from the understood unity to inform his interpretation of the individual story, understood first as literal account, but second (and more importantly) as an *allegory* for Christ and the Church. Before this, however, Origen identifies the individual pieces of wood used to construct the ark (the Church) as *symbolizing* individual Church Fathers—Noah (Christ) uses individual people in the Church to build it up and make it worthy of holding creation. Furthermore, though an exhortation is not immediately evident, the general sense of the interpretation does invite participation or even identification with the story, understood to be both narrative of the past and (allegorically) happening in the present, as the spiritual ark is “now” being built. The invitation is to be a part of the building of this ark, or at least to identify oneself with the existence of the ark, and this is why Rosenberg argues the message to be relevant and meaningful to the individual believer, and this is why I argue the interpretation to have a pragmatic dimension: it is immediately useful and applicable to the hearer existing in his/her ordinary fashion. This, perhaps, is the quintessential example supporting my argument; in his interpretation and exhortation, Origen *allegorizes* the biblical story in an effort to make it applicable, his interpretation of key elements of the story function on the *symbolic* level (in the case of the planks) in his effort to make the story have an effect in his present, and his interpretation invites the application and understanding of the story

⁹⁵ Rosenberg, “The Drama of Scripture,” 138-9.

in a way that connects his congregation to the story while simultaneously enriching their everyday existence, which is its *pragmatic* effect. In his theological reading of the Bible, Origen seeks to infuse God's existence with the existence of his congregation, opening their horizons through the revelation of the possibility of identification with God's story as it is happening in their lives—informing their physical lives with the spiritual reality to which they are all connected, demonstrating both sides of the metaphorical coin.⁹⁶ It is in this way that Patristic biblical exegesis may assist us in our understanding of contemporary exegesis of the artistic, a possibility worth exploring. Rosenberg, bringing his argument into more recent decades, contends that, “tradition, similar to [what we see in the philosophy of] Gadamer, plays an important role in facilitating this exploration of human possibility.”⁹⁷

Origen's Allegory and Problematic Passages

The premise of Origen's allegoresis was that the Bible conceals a deep philosophical truth relevant to the Church and world—reaching this truth is achievable only through allegoresis,⁹⁸ through which (by using the person of Christ as the interpretive key) Origen arrives at a truth into which his audience of catechumens can live, meaning he provides them with a mysterious way in which to participate in the gospel that seems to be valid at least for the time in which he discovers it. One must not forget that Origen is interpreting contextual biblical literature for a context of his own, just as contemporary societies interpret their literatures from their own standpoint within a historical framework. Therefore, it is worth drawing attention to the reality that Origen, as we too are likely to do, ran into problematic passages that (even if they

⁹⁶ Ibid, 135.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 141.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 249.

are not problematic for us) gave him pause; yet, he is able to make sense of these passages, concluding that they must and do have a purpose and can be understood as “saving.” As influenced as he (and arguably his community) was by Stoic philosophy and Neo-Platonism, one can expect Origen’s commentary on potentially problematic passages of Scripture to reflect his hermeneutical presuppositions, just as we can expect our own hermeneutical presuppositions to influence our readings of texts relevant to our horizons and World.

In his *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*,⁹⁹ Origen uses allegorical interpretation to explain Jesus’ tears at Lazarus’ death and the fact that Jesus (understood as the divine Logos) asked where the body might be; it is argued to be inappropriate for a Stoic sage (Jesus included, it seems) to succumb to grief as Jesus so clearly does, and it is also unacceptable that the divine Logos should be without perfect knowledge of all things, as has been helpfully highlighted:

Origen comments on Jesus’ request to know where the mourning Jews have placed Lazarus...Of course, the heavenly λόγος cannot be without this knowledge, Origen states; consequently, the Savior’s question must be interpreted allegorically. The request should be understood as a divine command concerning the disciples’ relation to their own mortal bodies: they themselves are to leave their corpses behind. Origen, somewhat enigmatically, explains, “If anyone ignores that he belongs to God, he will be ignored himself.”¹⁰⁰

As Jesus’ lack of knowledge on the literal level of the text proves problematic for Origen’s understanding of the way in which the world works, he works from this problem to another level of meaning, a level he gives priority of meaning, as he (ultimately) draws his exhortation from his allegorical interpretation of the text. The word used earlier for Lazarus’ illness is ἀσθενεία, which, consequently, was the word chosen by Stoic philosophers not only for debilitating illness

⁹⁹ Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 292-302.

¹⁰⁰ Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Ismo Dunderberg, *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010): 98.

but also for moral weakness; this arguably gives Origen some interpretive justification as he exhorts his congregation through the text.¹⁰¹ Whether or not his argument is convincing to an audience of contemporary interlocutors is irrelevant to my argument. The point is, in a manner that is congruent with his contextual presuppositions, Origen is able to read a text that (probably) made perfect sense in the past but no longer does on some level, reinterpret it so that it does make sense for the present, and conclude his interpretation with an exhortation *based on* (but certainly not limited to) the literal sense of the text. His exhortation relies on the literal sense as a foundation but is much more dependent on the allegorical sense he gleans from the text that is more likely to make sense to his historically conditioned audience.

In the same way (and in the same passage), Origen, finding the textual reality of Jesus' tears problematic, reinterprets the scene as saying something other than the literal, since Jesus crying was not in accordance with the ideal of Hellenistic moral philosophy.¹⁰² The word for Jesus' weeping (or shedding tears) is δακρύω, which Origen does not interpret as Jesus bursting into uncontrollable weeping, although it *could* absolutely and very easily mean that. Rather, Origen prefers to interpret this word as the involuntary and natural human reaction that comes before weeping—to “begin to cry” is thus understood differently from being unable to control one's emotions of grief, and this is crucial for Origen's understanding of the passage.¹⁰³ Though this is certainly interpretation, it is hardly allegoresis; Origen does, however, avoid a problematic reading of the text for his context. One should also note that, even though Origen does avoid the notion that Jesus might have succumbed to grief, there is no exhortation that is paired with this

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 98. The author argues that the Stoics preferred ἀσθενεία to ἀκρασία when discussing both physical illness and moral weakness, implying that illness, to them, was more holistic than we perceive today.

¹⁰² Ibid, 101.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 99-101.

reinterpretation, suggesting that, if the passage is to be applied (and it shall be), it must be taken within a system larger than itself. Still, this is a decent example of Origen's reinterpreting a text for his time *without* employing allegoresis, implying that reinterpretation *on the literal level alone* is possible in itself without the use of allegoresis and, thereby, moving up the interpretive ladder to the next level of biblical interpretation.

Origen reinterprets problematic passages on both the literal and allegorical level, as I have demonstrated, but he is always careful to end any interpretive *system* with an exhortation, inviting his audience to apply his interpretation to their existence. His interpretation of Lazarus' death and resurrection is no exception:

Origen summarizes his exegesis of Lazarus's death by drawing an exhortative conclusion: "Now, we ought to be aware that there are some Lazaruses even now who, after they have become Jesus' friends, have become sick and died, and as dead persons they have remained in the tomb and the land of the dead with the dead."¹⁰⁴

Through his application of allegoresis and reinterpretation to this passage, Origen has taken something presented to his context that is absolutely unacceptable (that Jesus would have been without knowledge or would have been unable to control his emotions—both are qualities we might find less problematic today), and he has reworked and reimagined these into something both grounded in the text and acceptable in his contextual community of interpretation. Not stopping there, he has turned his allegory into exhortation, thereby offering his audience a kerygma in which to participate. It is necessary for him that the *references* the text is making on a literal level not impede him in his allegorical interpretation toward appropriate text mimesis that is to be reflected in his community and society.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 98. Primary quotation from Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 303.

¹⁰⁵ Origen, *On First Principles* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005): 4.14-16, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.vi.v.v.ii.html>. In this key passage, Origen

Kerygma and the Uniqueness of the Christian Gospel and Biblical Interpretation

Biblical hermeneutics, then, is closely related to the hermeneutics of any classical or ancient text, though arguably distinct from it when being done within an ecclesial context.¹⁰⁶ Understanding ancient art, philosophy, or any of the ancient *Geisteswissenschaften* does not require timeless identification with a historical and temporal stand point, but a historical participation with a Truth that is historical itself—in this way, the Truth is understood only by those who participate in it,¹⁰⁷ which is exactly the goal of Origen's interpretation and exhortation to his congregants. His allegoresis of biblical stories seek to, yes, illumine the truth behind them, but, as we have seen, they also go to explain the reality of the literal. Through this, Origen's goal of reaching the theological Truth behind the words of Scripture is completed only when he offers his congregation a Truth in which they are invited to participate. The Truth communicated by any art is and must remain fundamentally historical; however, it is possible for Truth to transcend history through the interpretation and reinterpretation of that art (according the consciousness of the historically conditioned interpreter). In other words, the literal or physical level of a Truth (which is the artistic objectification of a Truth) is rooted in history, but its ability to speak across Worlds requires a level of reinterpretation and re-appropriation of the intended effect. This is true even and especially of Stoic philosophy as it applies to the interpretation of ancient literature. When the Stoics emerged, their communities held certain presuppositions that

seems to be arguing that the purpose of allegorical interpretation of the Bible includes a dimension of explanation, especially of things/situations in the Bible that seem impossible (or at least implausible), like God, who is understood as immaterial, as a *walking* character in the early chapters of Genesis. In these cases, it is Origen's position that the incomprehensible literal level need not be understood as having taken place in the actual world as it is described in the text; however, the meanings and applications of these problematic passages remain just as valid as the meanings and applications from passages that are less or non-problematic. In these problematic instances, in which the meaning is not immediately obvious, interpretive tools, such as allegory, ought to be employed. In this way, the meaning of the text might be made clear, and an exhortation might be possible.

¹⁰⁶ Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 119.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 208. See also, Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1986): 147-152.

were common in their World (i.e., that Zeus was the creator of humanity) that are uncommon (or even unheard of) in our World. Although we assume them to be either incorrect or misguided in their premises, it would be an insult to the Stoics (and a disservice to ourselves) to disregard their method and conclusions entirely based on their historically conditioned premises. According to William Irvine, this separation does not imply that the Stoic “good life” is inaccessible to us; it *does* mean that, in order for the Stoic good life to be possible, a re-examination of sociological premises becomes necessary. That is, Irvine is able to reinterpret Stoicism for a contemporary audience with different presuppositions so that the philosophy might have a similar effect now as it did in the past.¹⁰⁸ In this same way, it seems that Origen’s actions would indicate (and that Gadamer’s argument states) that the Christian life is possible across Worlds, just as Irvine argues that Stoicism is. Different Worlds will assume different things, but the pragmatic effect of a Truth, when appropriately reinterpreted, will be (in a sense) timeless.

The function of the symbol in art is to inspire reflection in the individual. One sees the physical object and imagines that it stands for something else, ideally and probably something less physical. The idea is that the physical objectification of an otherwise incommunicable idea is made possible through the intelligent and creative production of art. The artistic interpreter is creative and intelligent, as well, but the goal here is to work from the physical symbol, the objectification of the ineffable, to the incommunicable idea that is represented. Thus, if a work of art is to have its full effect, it must be *experienced* by the interpreter. Through the individual’s experience with the symbolic, the symbol in artwork reveals Truth to the interpreter without

¹⁰⁸ William B. Irvine, *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 231-7. Irvine argues that, while the ancient Greek might have assumed Zeus’ creation, the contemporary audience might assume evolution or non-religion. The argument is that, working from either presupposition, a way of life can be generated that is congruent with the ancient intended effect of Stoic joy.

containing Truth in the objectification itself.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, allegorical interpretation of the artistic creates this unity of literal story and spiritual reality by interpreting the literal story as pointing to something beyond itself—through allegorical interpretation of a story, the interpreter is able to recognize the literal history/physical object as valid while understanding this history/object to speak into his/her life. That is, s/he will recognize the story as “other,” but s/he cannot be limited by the “otherness” of the literal, and the ancient story is thus empowered to have its effect in the present.¹¹⁰ This is the pragmatic effect of allegory and symbol that is, indeed, miraculous (to use Gadamer’s word).¹¹¹ The power of the historically conditioned story to reach over chasms and exist as bridge between Worlds implies that the interpreted story becomes transcendent.

Gadamer says, however, that allegory and allegorical interpretation (at least in the twentieth century) have waned in their popularity, and he argues for a rehabilitation of allegory when interpreting the artistic and for recognition of its value for the reflective individual and community.¹¹² Combining the value of the experience of the artwork with the necessarily historically conditioned individual consciousness, Gadamer sees the transcendental nature of artwork as recognizable only through an appropriate application of allegorical interpretation and healthy relationship to the symbolic. That is, symbol, allegory, and pragmatism aid one another in allowing the individual to discover hidden Truth in artwork, and applying that Truth to his/her individual life, which is *essential* to understanding. Thus, we can conclude that understanding artwork of a past horizon may not be possible without the appropriate use of semiotics: one World understanding a second World is not possible without the assistance of certain semiotic

¹⁰⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 85.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 74.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 163.

¹¹² Ibid, 81. See also Watson, “Gadamer, Aesthetic Modernism,” 50.

devices—literary-artistic tools such as the symbolic. Indeed, if the value of allegory has declined in this present age, a proper understanding of texts from horizons more appreciative of allegory than our own cannot exist without an appreciation (or at least understanding) of that horizon's value of allegory and its usefulness in artistic expression.¹¹³

Allegory, in Gadamer's estimation (as I have already drawn attention to), not only draws the reader into a kerygma, but informs the meaning of the literal: the allegory allows for the interpreter to see that the literal stands for something other than what it literally is; that is, the literal story is read differently when Truth is revealed through allegory. In other words (and very similar to popular Stoic allegorical theory), allegory reveals a hidden truth behind the text, and just as this "other side of the coin" is revealed, the interpreter uses this newfound knowledge to inform his/her understanding of the first (literal) side of the coin, so the two sides are understood to not only be intimately connected through allegory, but in dynamic conversation with one another and the interpreter. Extrapolating this idea, Gadamer argues that the process of (allegorical) interaction with the artistic not only informs the interpreter of the horizon out of which the art comes, but it also necessitates a development of self-understanding: as a new horizon is discovered, the interpreter engages in a transactional relationship in which s/he is informed of both horizons that are in this dynamic conversation.¹¹⁴ Through conversation, the interpreter discovers that "otherness" does not necessarily imply "alien," as the Truth of artwork of a different World is heard for what it claims to be, reinterpreted for a different context, and finally applied and understood, the Truth at which it aims becomes transcendent, even while the history out of which it comes does not. In this reinterpretation, one becomes aware of his/her

¹¹³ Ibid, 80-1.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 97.

own context and how this discovered Truth might become *applicable* for humans in the interpreter's context, which sounds like what Origen accomplished with his reinterpretation of Noah's ark, suggesting that his hermeneutic and exhortative process may have some relevance to the modern hermeneutical debate.¹¹⁵ Beyond this, it may prove itself useful to consider methods of Patristic biblical interpretation, especially Origen's, as potential resources for methods of contemporary literary criticism.

Contemporary literary communities do not (and cannot afford to) consider literature from other horizons as somehow fundamentally disconnected from the contemporary world; rather, all literature produced today exists only by virtue of the literature of the past, as a response to the established tradition, as Gadamer argues:

Literature does not exist as a dead remnant of an alienated being, left over for a later time as simultaneous with its experiential reality. Literature is a function of being intellectually preserved and handed on, and therefore brings its hidden history into every age. Beginning with the establishment of the canon of classical literature by the Alexandrian philologists, copying and preserving the "classics" is a living cultural tradition that does not simply preserve what exists but acknowledges it as a model and passes it on as an example to be followed.¹¹⁶

(The best) Literary artwork is the most intelligent utterances of a World's imagination of what is and what might be possible—literature (as a form of art) represents the very extent of a horizon's imagination, and, when a second horizon reads and interprets the literature of the first (recognizing it as something human, understandable and, therefore, applicable), it transforms the ancient literature into something able to have an effect in the present. That is, interpretation grants ancient texts validity in the present—something once alien and other becomes something

¹¹⁵ Richard O. Knott Jr., "Bridging the Chasm: The Philosophical Hermeneutic of Origen and its Validity in the Present Hermeneutical Debate." *TREN: Theses & Dissertations* (January 2002).

¹¹⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 161.

familiar and intimate.¹¹⁷ By bringing ancient literature into the present through interpretation, a bridge is established connecting two otherwise parallel lines (that, otherwise, never would have met); that is, artistic interpretation (and the symbol and allegory that accompany it) is the bridge spanning human existence and consciousness, allowing understanding through dynamic conversation. To Gadamer, this is precisely how the Christian Gospel is to function, except that the Gospel is distinct from other artwork in a very important way.

Gadamer understands that the Bible, being the Church's sacred book, has been constantly read by representatives of the Church, which is not necessarily to be considered a bad thing; however, if the Bible's meaning is dogmatically determined at a point in history and is understood to be fixed and immovable for all time, this will hinder the relationship between a culture and the text; rather, the text that is part of a tradition of interpretation (a text that has a community of interpretation) will be constantly read and reread, even dogmatically.¹¹⁸ The Church and the culture to which it relates both move in history, but, if the interpretation of the Bible is historically fixed, the text ceases to be a dialogue partner in dynamic conversation, and it becomes a hopelessly historical artifact of sorts, a dead remnant of past culture. It is imperative that the text's contemporary interpretation be informed by (without being limited by) the text's *Wirkungsgeschichte*; in other words, the text and its interpretation will move with culture through history, like any other text. However, the difference between the interpretation of literature and the ecclesial interpretation of Scripture here is that the Church's interpretation of

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 163.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 174. "The Bible was the church's sacred book and as such was constantly read, but the understanding of it was determined, and—as the reformers insisted—obscured, by the dogmatic tradition of the church."

the Bible must be understood as kerygmatic—literary interpretation has the option of being non-kerygmatic, but the gospel cannot be so understood, as Gadamer says:

The gospel does not exist in order to be understood as a merely historical document, but to be taken in such a way that it exercises its saving effect. This implies that the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly—i.e., according to the claim it makes—must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application.¹¹⁹

No ecclesial biblical interpretation coming from within the church, according to Gadamer, should overlook the ecclesial claim that the Bible is a word from God, and its interpretation will take priority over doctrines developed in the past that may or may not be valid within a newer generation or interpretation—indeed, it may be possible that the doctrines *themselves* would need (re)interpretation. Any biblical interpretation, therefore, must not neglect the divine proclamation of salvation, whether it reaches this proclamation (or kerygma) through allegoresis or not.¹²⁰

Relatedly, Origen's Christocentric biblical lens caused him to read the text through, not his Christology, but his Soteriology; that is, Origen interpreted the Bible through his understanding of salvation, and he exhorted his congregation so that the gospel of salvation could be heard and applied to their lives—application being essential to the congregation's understanding of the Scripture being explained. One can't help but notice how similar these two great thinkers sound, though Worlds apart. For both thinkers, the Bible exists as a means of kerygmatic exhortation.

The use of allegory toward this end is, not only permissible, but appropriate and expected. I, therefore, argue that any present debate over biblical hermeneutics that is inclusive of Gadamer *cannot afford* to disregard Patristic biblical interpretation, especially that of Origen, as these two seem to be in almost intentional conversation with one another. Of course, one could argue that

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 309.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 330-1.

this is what the Church has been doing for centuries, but it seems that the Church would do well to pay attention to Patristic exegesis.¹²¹

The Christian gospel, therefore, is unique among all other artwork, in that its interpretive community (the Church) must adhere to a divine command of sorts: interpreting the gospel in such a way that it is accessible and applicable to the culture in which it is interpreted *for the goal* of salvation of the individual,¹²² which is where we find the pragmatic roots of this system. Symbol and allegory are, of course, fundamental here, as they are widely and easily accessible and are capable of bridging the chasm of time.¹²³ The point of ecclesial biblical interpretation, according to both Origen and Gadamer, seems to be supplying culture with a kerygmatic understanding of faith—a gospel in which to participate, which I think is correct; however, this should not be the end of our understanding of kerygma. If this criticism is to utilize artistic interpretation as that which undergirds it (and if this kerygmatic hermeneutic has merit), it follows that there must be dynamic implications for other artistic interpretation, as well.

¹²¹ Leslie Baynes, “Revelation 5:1 and 10:2a, 8-10 in the Earliest Greek Tradition: A Response to Richard Bauckham.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 816. See also Margaret M. Mitchell, “Christian Martyrdom and the Dialect of the Holy Scriptures: the Literal, the Allegorical, the Martyrological.” *Biblical Interpretation* 17, no. 1 (January 2009): 201-5.

¹²² Salvation can take on many meanings here, and it probably means something different to a Western person with a Protestant Christian background (like Gadamer) than it does to an ancient Christian like Origen.

¹²³ Lammi, *Gadamer and the Question*, 75-6.

3. Fiction and Ethics: Systems and the Connection of Worlds

Reference, Mimesis, and Meaning: Clarence Walhout on Truth and Fiction

Thus far, I have been utilizing the terminology “reference” and “mimesis” to refer, to a conceptual link made between the implied world of the text and the actual world of the reader. “Reference” refers to the words, characters, items, ideas, and so on within the particular imagined world of a given text, while, on the other hand, “mimesis” has referred to whatever there is in the world of the reader to which the reference is imagined to correspond. This relationship is, of course, complex and conditioned/influenced by the reader’s position in history as well as his/her system of values and location within society. I’ve taken this terminology from Clarence Walhout, who does a phenomenal job explicating exactly what this language is to indicate, using *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as an example (which may be considered a culturally relevant text):

We may say that the snake in *Huckleberry Finn* is the one that bit Jim and that the word snake in the novel refers to or designates that particular snake. We can do this without having to raise the issue of this snake’s relation to real snakes in the actual world. (This

relation is what we will subsequently treat as an issue of mimesis rather than of reference.)¹²⁴

Walhout's only assertion here that I might challenge is his indication that it is possible to talk about a particular snake to which a text makes reference without having to raise the issue of a snake or snakes in the actual world. While it is true that the discussion of the referenced textual snake need not be a discussion of a snake in the actual world, it is also true that the reader would know the referenced snake only by her/his experience with snakes in the actual world, which is consistent with Gadamer's notion of knowing and experiencing art only through our position in the world and in light of our own concerns. It seems fairly safe to assume that the reader would first imagine the referenced snake to be at least similar to a snake experienced in the actual world, unless the text suggests that s/he do otherwise, and it seems here that it does not. The "snake" in Genesis 3 is a good example in which the referential language is quite clear, though what this particular snake *stands for* is perhaps less clear, as it has been taken to mean a literal snake, the devil, some unnamed tempter, etc. The influence of these interpretive leaps concerning the Genesis 3 snake have been many, and their social effects great.

Beyond this, Walhout argues further that reference is not limited to textual worlds, but rather transcends them; language in general *has* reference insofar as it is descriptive within a certain sphere of imagination: Huck Finn, for instance, has a certain descriptive quality for those of us who have a pre-understanding concerning Huck Finn and what this term references, even if we are not necessarily making any claims about what the referential description of Huck Finn stands for in a broader and more general sense—we can, in other words, at least talk about Huck Finn, the character of Mark Twain, without discussing what he stands for as a character.¹²⁵ Here,

¹²⁴ Lundin, et. al, *The Promise of Hermeneutics*, 73-4.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 73.

Walhout seems to be drawing a distinction between descriptive language concerning the actual world and metaphorical language concerning the actual world, and, while a distinction seems prudent (or even obvious), we may find that the distinction often becomes murky, at best, when concerning interpretation. Whatever the case, it is clear that referential or descriptive language exists in both textual spheres and within the spheres of the actual world of human experience.

Walhout continues:

The language of a novel descriptively refers to or designates the fictional objects and states of affairs that the author picks out or projects by means of the language. We may regard these objects and states of affairs as constituting the world of the novel. As long as we limit our concern to the descriptive references of the novel's language, we are only surveying or mapping out its fictional world, that is, seeing clearly the states of affairs that are being descriptively pointed out. For example, the language of *Huckleberry Finn* refers descriptively to the states of affairs in which Huck Finn finds himself in Mark Twain's novel. Our concern with reference is a concern only with an accurate understanding of what these states of affairs are.¹²⁶

As long as the reader's attention is left in the narrow world of description and reference according to the world of the text, Walhout is arguing, not only that there need be no mention of meaning beyond that referential sphere, but that there can be no meaning beyond that sphere, which seems obvious enough. Even if describing the state of affairs in *Huck Finn* without considering the novel (or any discussed text) in light of our own concerns is possible, this narrow task will leave no room for the encounter that is necessary in order for the "Fusion of horizons" to occur between reader and text, which Gadamer considers hermeneutically necessary.

However, Walhout is not arguing that this ought to be the end of a hermeneutical journey, only that this is an elementary step in the hermeneutical process. "Mapping out" the textual language and landscape outside of our own world of experience is an acceptable point at which to begin an interpretive process, but again, to raise my prior criticism, the textual world is known only by

¹²⁶ Ibid. 74.

virtue of the actual world of the reader. It is impossible for the states of affairs within *Huck Finn* to be understood in a vacuum. Therefore, understanding descriptive language in any case (textual or otherwise) will begin with a historical-socially conditioned pre-understanding of how the world works in the first place, and this will serve as a frame of reference for Walhout's "Mapping Out" process.

If referential language is merely descriptive and is meant to carry no greater weight than that, Walhout is correct in implying that there is an enormous piece of the interpretive process still missing, and he uses the term "mimesis" to categorize the remaining portion of the interpretive process,¹²⁷ and, compared to the descriptive sphere of reference, the idea of mimesis is quite a bit more complicated, given that even the most familiar description will undoubtedly be the cause of certain questions about the actual world of human experience: the snake in *Huck Finn*, for example, if understood in a descriptively positive way, may lead the reader to question the role of snakes in the actual world, if the reader has viewed snakes in a negative way thus far. Conversely, it may lead the reader to question the text's interpreted portrayal of snakes as positive, if this runs counter to his/her experience. This, of course, is an example on a small and elementary scale, and questions of greater importance coming out of *Huck Finn* are sure to present themselves—most notably are, of course, the delicate conceptual dynamics of slavery and freedom in the United States, the interrelatedness of persons of different races within America, and many more questions that continue to make this novel culturally relevant.

These subsequent questions involve the ways in which the fictional world of the text is related to the actual world of authors and readers, and these are questions of mimesis. I am proposing, then, that the term reference be used to indicate the relationship of the language of the text to the world that is projected by the language, and that the word mimesis be used to indicate the relationship of the fictional world projected by the text to

¹²⁷ Ibid, 74.

the actual world that we inhabit... While the two concepts are interrelated, they are also distinct and can be examined independently.¹²⁸

Walhout calls the relationship between reference and mimesis interrelated, but I would challenge him here; of course, he is correct, but I do not think he goes quite far enough. I should like to characterize the relationship between reference and mimesis as, not interrelated, but interdependent: referential description seems pointless without the possibility of mimetic action, and description implies relationship to begin with, and mimesis is not generated without reference first coming into being. Although these concepts are intimately related and dependent upon one another, I do think Walhout is correct in his assessment that either concept can be examined independently of the other *as long as* it is understood that neither concept can exist without the other also existing, to add a further stipulation to his explication.¹²⁹

The dynamics of this concept of “mimesis” are, as I said earlier, far more complex than the dynamics of text reference and descriptive language, because within the sphere of mimesis lies, not only 1) the correspondences and correlations the reader interprets the descriptive language to share with the actual world, but also 2) the actions that this descriptive language

¹²⁸ Ibid, 74.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 74. “All fictional texts are referential because they designate characters, events, and situations, and all fictional texts are mimetic because their fictional worlds stand in a certain relationship to the actual world of authors and readers.” See also Sean E. McEvenue and Ben F. Meyer, eds., *Lonergan’s Hermeneutics: Its Development and Application* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989): 5-29, esp. 27. The discussion of critical realism is essential: “critical realists hold that one’s sensations, experiences, ideas, and judgments are all stages along the way of human knowing. Being is that which one is trying to know by making the journey. It is that which is known imperfectly along the way and that which will be known completely when they way is completed. The process of knowing begins with questioning, and being is that about which humans question.” Walhout, Lonergan, and Gadamer certainly see things differently, but Lonergan’s reflection on human being as a process of becoming in an environment that is in constant destruction and reassembly has interesting implications when compared to (or even synthesized with) Gadamer’s notion of fusion of horizons. More specifically, he is implying that the reader is challenged, in this nuanced approach to human being in dialogue with a text, to fuse his/her horizon, not only with the horizon of the text, but with his/her own past horizons that also have been in dialogue with the text. Taken this way, it could be argued that a reader’s mimetic reaction(s) to the snake in *Huck Finn* will be in constant flux as further insights are developed in the reader’s world of experience.

inspires in the reader as a result of her/his interpretation.¹³⁰ First, there is this two-fold sense of mimesis. Beyond this, there is the complexity and delicate nuance of how meaning is assigned at all. Within Walhout's concept of mimesis, we may see that there is a correlation of sorts between this notion and Gadamer's notion of a hermeneutical relationship between worlds resulting in a fusion of horizons. In order for a fusion of horizons to take place, however, understanding must exist between one horizon and at least one other; the social world of the reader must be related to the social world of the "Other." Understanding (in Gadamer's mind, at least) is completed, not in the assigning of identity and the correspondence of textual reference to entities in the actual world, but the *Anwendung*, or application, that a person's actual world of experience receives when the understanding of another horizon's text or artwork is actualized in the mind of the interpreting reader.¹³¹ Mimesis, then, includes this all-important *Anwendung* particle and allows for the actualization of the text:

Mimesis is concerned with the relations among worlds rather than with a determinate understanding of the actual world. How we construe this mimetic relationship in the case of a particular text depends, of course, on our theories about reality and the actual world, but the concept of mimesis is not itself thereby under attack. Our interpretation of the mimetic relation of particular narratives to the actual world will vary according to our understandings of the actual world, but the mimetic relation persists irrespective of our conceptions of the actual world.¹³²

Here, Walhout is essentially stating that mimesis will not diminish, regardless of how the reader perceives himself/herself to interact with the world socially or otherwise. That is, mimesis will remain, no matter the social location of the reader; however, this bare fact does *not* take primacy over the reality of mimesis as *event*. Put differently, mimesis is essentially concrete, personal, and experiential; it cannot be understood as an abstraction, though it may be thought of as a

¹³¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 84-97.

¹³² Lundin, et. al, *The Promise of Hermeneutics*, 78.

personal response that proceeds from an abstract transaction. Mimesis, sometimes called centrifugal meaning, is therefore defined not only by its existence in relationship to its referential counterpart, or its centripetal meaning, but *more* importantly by its interpretive fabric in the actual world: its human-experiential element.¹³³ Meaning cannot be understood as centrifugal without the realization of a potential effect on the world of the reader: identity (re)assignment, priority recognition, ethical admonition, aesthetic revelation, etc. These things, among others, participate in application; that is, they are significant insofar as they generate meaning through correspondence and application, which will be appropriate or inappropriate depending on a person's stance/location in the World. One's experience with the world will participate in determining that person's pre-understanding of where value is, what things are honorable, which identities are desirable, etc. Whatever patterns exist in the world of the reader will be brought to the world of the text and, through a dynamic relationship (including mimesis) with that text, a reader will have her/his horizon fused with the horizon of an "Other" and will thus be transformed into a new individual whose recognition of pattern in the world has been influenced by worldview of another—and these mimetic concepts cannot be understood apart from the human experience with them, regardless of whether or not mimesis is diminished persistently apart from the reader's perception of the world.¹³⁴

Fiction, Ethics, and the Social-Communal Function of Mimesis

¹³³ McEvenue, *Lonergan's Hermeneutics*, 67.

¹³⁴ Randall S. Rosenberg, "The Drama of Scripture: Reading Patristic Biblical Hermeneutics through Lonergan's Reflection on Art," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 129. "Art involves pattern. One can think of a pattern abstractly, such as a musical score. But the pattern is only realized concretely when the music is being played. The pattern is a set of 'internal relations' between tones. A note is related to other notes, and they are united as a whole to comprise a work of art." Through the recognition of pattern in a musical score, a poem, or in some other text, the reader's attention is brought to the pattern or patterns in his/her own experience to which the read patterns might have some understood correlation. These patterns are available for examination within themselves, of course, and they can be made sense of when considered within themselves, but they find their purpose, or application, or *actualization* when they are applied to the patterns in the life of a reader, since art is well-understood only in application.

On individual levels (or even communal levels), the textual concepts of descriptive reference and mimetic action seem like plausible and reasonable theorizations based on observation and good critical thinking, but there is a further concept that permeates the discussion of this topic in the first place. Thus far, I have been (rather freely) using the phrase-term “culturally relevant” in regards to the text being interpreted, and I do mean to be textually-selective, in a sense. I am being “selective” in my use of the term insofar as “cultural-relevance” would not apply to the lesser-known writers of history, though this would have nothing to do with the quality of these writers’ work. Rather, it has to do with how prolific (or not) a writer is and how well s/he is received by the general public in his/her time or the generations following him/her who have had time to reflect on the text s/he produced. For instance, thus far, I have made mention of Shakespeare (who would apply to most of the English-speaking world) and of Mark Twain (who would apply to American audiences, in particular), and I have also made reference to the Christian Bible as it applies to the community that has (and still today) considers it a relevant text for reflection and praise, among other things in a more religious setting, perhaps. In a broader sense, Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is taught literature at most American colleges and universities (and high schools, for that matter), as are many of Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets. The question must be asked, if the concepts of reference and mimesis are to frame the discussion: what makes these pieces of literature worthy of being chosen out of the wide breadth of literature already existing (by whatever power is capable of choosing), to be taught as literature to bright young minds in classrooms across the nation. Indeed, what could it be about Mark Twain, for example, that makes his text about a river trip on a raft so special that it is taught to almost every American with an education including some instruction in the humanities? Furthermore, and especially in reference to the conversation

between Origen and Gadamer, what is it about the Christian gospel and its relation to the Church that makes it worthy of sustaining as a piece of text worthy of being taught? These texts (all of them works of art) surely reveal something (that is, some Truth) about human being that those who teach and assign them have found profoundly valuable and worthy of development in those who would belong to the community; however, the dynamics of this text-authority-reader relationship are quite complicated and varied, and it requires some explication, especially in its relationship to the concept of mimetic action, which will function differently depending on the interpreting community.

In a broader sense, still (and to make a probably-safe generalization), it seems acknowledged, even across disciplines, that there exists some rule or marker of worth capable of distinguishing a certain work of literature from its contemporaries—one work of art over another work of art produced around the same time. Whatever ubiquitous yet ambiguous social power it is that grants certain “writing” its inclusion into the more prestigious category of “literature,” we can say with certainty that a literary canon (in some capacity, whether codified, mythological, or anywhere in between) exists in our society and that most literature that is “taught” is drawn from this canon.¹³⁵ It is important to note that the paradox inherent in this model of instruction lies in the nature of the canonical literature itself—the message(s) of some literature, if treated fairly, has the potential to be interpreted as culturally-critical or counter-cultural, especially in the case of popular American literature;¹³⁶ therefore, it could be said that the assigning or teaching culture is assigning and teaching literature that is critical of the body assigning it, or so it would seem.

¹³⁵ Paul Lauter, “History and the Canon,” *Social Text* 12 (1985): 95-98. See also Earl R. Anderson, “Defining the Canon,” *PMLA* 116, no. 5 (2001): 1442.

¹³⁶ William H. Becker, “The 1960s and Today’s Vision of America,” *Christian Century* 102, no. 19 (1985): 559. Take, for instance, the Beat generation of the forties and fifties, the hippy and anti-war culture of the sixties, and even some interpretations of the Christian gospel.

Allow me to suggest, however, that it is not the *culture* per se that is assigning these works, but a smaller “assigning community” within the culture, comprised of individuals sharing similar values (corresponding to the social location from which they come). In illustration of this, an assigning community might value a certain type of social criticism, considering it a virtue worthy of development in the learning communities under its power. This, of course, is meant to imply that any literature that is socially critical might be eligible for adoption into that “taught” body of literature, regardless of whether or not the literature is written by a member of that community or not.¹³⁷ Furthermore, any literature narrating a communally relevant attempt to understand the world¹³⁸ (developing a socially and communally-grounded worldview) is especially useful in the development of, not societies in a very generalized sense (that is, not “Americans,” but rather a smaller community of people who are part of the fabric of a more general “America”), but the individuals that comprise societies, a relatively more desirable scenario. For this reason, I find it reasonable to suggest that the assigning community or communities that established the “current” canon of American fiction (necessarily located within that culture) established a canon of literature thematically correspondent to the virtues they themselves deem worthy of development. Specifically, narrators, protagonists, or other main characters will almost certainly be worthy of examination/reference, might be worthy of imitation/mimesis (or its opposite), but are rarely worthy of duplication (or its opposite). In this same way, those who establish any canon of taught literature choose literature that they see as correspondent to the values, virtues, and social action they deem appropriate. This would apply, not just to American fiction and its

¹³⁷ Barbara Mujica, “Teaching Literature: Canon, Controversy, and the Literary Anthology,” *Hispania* 80, no. 2 (1997): 204-5.

¹³⁸ Stephen A. Schmidt, “Experience as Canon: Lutheranism in North America,” *Religious Education*. 92.3 1997: 205. See also Delwin Brown, “Limitation and Ingenuity: Radical Historicism and the Nature of Tradition,” *Tradition and Tradition Theories*. (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005): 215.

teachers/assigners, of course, but to any community that includes the teaching and examination of a text they see as “culturally relevant” and as a valuable revealer of human being.

It seems the cornerstone of the practice of virtue ethics has always (and necessarily) been figures (or a single figure) whose character a community finds worthy of reflection. However, obviously, in order to deem any character worthy of this demanding responsibility, an assigning community must first examine the character in his/her fullness. Perhaps any character with whom an audience is familiar should be examined for a moral/ethical purpose: in the New Testament, for example, Abraham is used as an example of righteousness several times—of course, because he was the “most righteous,” but also because everybody (at the time) knew about Abraham as an example of righteousness—that is, it would be ineffective (and odd) to reference a righteous figure unknown to an audience. In the same way, the Homeric figures of Odysseus, Achilles, Nestor, and so on were constantly the focus of the interpretations of ancient Stoic philosophers: teachers of metaphysics, ethics, and so on, making Homer an early kind of required reading (or culturally-relevant literature). In American contexts, the cornerstone of American fiction is often said to be *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; even if this is not the case,¹³⁹ it is at least understood to be a generally accepted assumption. One could argue that the character Huck, like the Homeric character Odysseus, exists outside the boundaries of the typical human existence and is, therefore, subjective in his views and understandings in a way entirely Other than the audiences who are examining him.¹⁴⁰ An examination of his judgments could,

¹³⁹ Will Harris, “Phillis Wheatley, Diaspora Subjectivity, and the African American Canon,” *MELUS* 33, no. 3 (2008): 27-9. There is a suggestion on the table that cornerstones of the “canon” could be better understood as cornerstones of “canons.” The philosophical question leaves us with the problem of canon unification or distinction based on the author’s social location. See also John Patrick Grace, “Tuition, Theory, Feminism, and the Canon,” *PMLA* 104, no. 3 (1989): 359-360.

¹⁴⁰ Patrick J. Deneen, “Was Huck Greek?: The ‘Odyssey’ of Mark Twain,” *Modern Language Studies* 32, no. 2 (2002): 36-7.

then (according to Gadamer's view of human Truth as emerging out of dynamic conversation with the Other), lead a reader to another understanding of the reality of the human condition—this reality as it is presented in the novel—which is an understanding useful in itself. Beyond this, however, the worth we glean from this examination finds its full manifestation in its application onto our own culture, or the mimesis readers experience after examining the descriptive language. As Huck examines and judges from a place of Otherness, so too is the reader led by the novel (and perhaps by those who assign it) to judge society through fresher eyes: through the eyes of the one who is wholly Other and therefore distinct from the reader, the one who is able to criticize society from outside the boundaries of society (a quality that was called worthy of development far before postmodernism). In summary, through an examination of Huck's character, the reader observes the tools with which s/he might examine his/her own context. If the assigning community wishes to keep *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in their "taught literature" arsenal, the community must first agree that this critical inclination is a desirable virtue, worthy of development in those who will perpetuate our own contexts.

Though Huck may certainly be worthy of imitation, the next category goes a bit farther than the first and is slightly more complicated, so Huck's inclusion or exclusion should not be assumed. While examination of descriptive language in the novel is certainly a less dangerous approach to understanding a character's action/position, imitation and mimesis imply that these actions and/or positions are judged morally/ethically good, sound, or in some way worthy and should therefore be reflected in the reader as they are drawn from the text, similar to Origen's examination and exhortation concerning the death and resuscitation of Lazarus, for example. Of course, it should be made clear that mimesis is distinct from duplication of action: if people read *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and decide that it might be a good decision to raft down the

nearest river, this is a poor societal development. Mimesis is a bit more nuanced and is meant in the sense that it first requires intelligent examination of descriptive language toward an understanding of the textual world as it is being communicated to the reader; only after a reader understands a character in her/his context can s/he know if that character is worthy of mimesis, or if there is any quality the character possesses that should be imitated at all in the context of the actual world of the reader. We have a different horizon than Mark Twain and live in a different world; thus, we will understand Jim and Huck's relationship differently than Twain's immediate audience: we have different assumptions and concerns about race and homosexuality, for example.¹⁴¹ Although the authorial stance comes from an entirely different horizon and social World than that of the contemporary interpreter, there is nothing to suggest that this text should be silent on issues outside its own scope as literature. The text may have been written in light of the particular concerns of one horizon, but it can absolutely be interpreted in light of other concerns that correspond to other horizons—these interpretations and their significances will all contribute to the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the assigned, authoritative text (in this instance, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*).

The *assigning* community, in its selection of what literature is worthy of inclusion in the “taught literature” category, makes a subtle argument within its context, an argument that (first) *there are* characters worthy of imitation (or, in some cases, anti-imitation), and (second) that those characters are presented in the canonical texts. For example, *The Catcher in the Rye*'s hero, Holden Caulfield, much like Huck Finn, is an outsider (and Other) trying to make sense of the world. This, in itself, might be a virtue worthy of development; however, unlike Huck, Holden develops his own worldview in which he exists, troubled and disillusioned, between two

¹⁴¹ Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987): 68.

extremes and opposites: the “nice” and the “phony.”¹⁴² This dualist sort of approach to understanding the world is ancient in origin and, if teased out to its full expression, it may be fundamentally flawed.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, an examination of Holden’s character as the text presents it will lead a reader to see him developing a worldview of his own that is located in the culture out of which he comes, a worldview distinct and isolated from his culture. This means that it is not Holden’s dualist worldview that is worthy of imitation; rather, it is *either* the act of creating one’s own way of viewing and being in the world, which is so necessary in becoming an individual, *or* relating one’s already existing worldview to the worldview of the wholly Other—which was the case with *Huck Finn*. In its including *The Catcher in the Rye* in the canon, the assigning community is making the argument that self-creation and self-definition, when they are accomplished in conversation with those outside the boundaries of normal and/or normative social existence, are virtues worthy of imitation, a mimetic dialogue that society needs in order to change and perpetuate itself through time. As Holden’s worldview is gradually realized, so too does the assigning community quietly exhort the reading community to mimic Holden in his revelation, discovering his/her own worldview through dialogue with the “Otherness” presented by the assigned text.

It is, therefore, not the general culture itself that assigns literature to be read by that same general culture, but an assigning community located within that culture, meaning literature that is deemed canonical and is subsequently taught (to either the entire population or a smaller portion of it) is literature selected by a group consisting of only a few individual assigners. Therefore, the

¹⁴² Warren G. French, “The Phony World and the Nice World,” *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, no. 4, no. 1 (1963): 21-24.

¹⁴³ John H. Simpson, “Toward a Theory of America: Religion and Structural Dualism,” *Secularization and Fundamentalism Reconsidered* (New York: Peragon House, 1989): 80-1.

positions, worldviews, presuppositions, social locations, and even personal histories of the individual assigners will contribute in the determination of canon status (and literature's inclusion in the canon) as time progresses. In illustration, if assigners are mostly white Protestant men, the "taught" authors will *not* necessarily be white, Protestant men, but the ethical implications of the taught literature's interpretation will most likely correspond to the ethical presuppositions of the assigning community, in this case, white and Protestant and male. As the assigning community grows in its diversity, like the culture and its writings already have, we can certainly expect the canon to reflect a wider diversity of social locations, cultural histories, and ethical presuppositions. For example, Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* seems to value radical human freedom above most things; this means freedom even from the culture in which a reader finds him/herself.¹⁴⁴ Should this novel be assigned, the assigning community might be making the argument that this kind of freedom is desirable while in the human condition (of course, one could contend that an assigner might argue the opposite), which might be absolutely correct in our context; however, it is less plausible that an assigning community in eighteenth century Britain would have felt comparably comfortable with this message. As the culture changes, so will its art and understandings; a canon, then, and all the texts that are taught from it (or from other canons), will likely reflect the nature of the culture while making an argument about what the culture is, how it might improve itself, and what it ought to become. Correlatively, each piece of taught literature within a society will passively create a community of that text (or a community of the discussable figures and features of that text); that is, the teaching of *Huck Finn* will create a community that has read the text and has either responded or has heard others

¹⁴⁴ George Dardess, "The Delicate Dynamics of Friendship: A Reconsideration of Kerouac's *On The Road*," *American Literature* 46, no. 2 (1974): 201-205.

respond to the text creatively, meaning that the interpretation of that text has been a part of the development of that person's consciousness.

Allegory and Mimetic Interpretation: A Mechanism for *Anwendung*?

Thus far in my discussion of reference, mimesis, and the issue of canon, allegory and its rehabilitation in the interpretive process have not been directly addressed, but the topic is worth substantial attention. Given the vigorous postmodern interests of self, becoming, and interpreting oneself through the Other,¹⁴⁵ it seems that the tendency to see, to find, or to disclose the self through dialogue with a constructed narrative, or understanding descriptive reference and the mimetic action it generates, indicates a hermeneutical goal of self-discovery (or self-creation, if we accept Gadamer's vision of Fusion of horizons) located outside the other and, therefore, personal and artistic. If it is true that these things are exempt from empirical methodology (and Gadamer posits that they should be), there is no reason to preclude allegorical interpretation's assistance in the interpretation of self, identity, and so on, especially as it relates to descriptive reference and generated mimetic action inspired by assigned texts. Furthermore, it seems that Walhout's explanation of reference and mimesis are in themselves intact and coherent, but they are incomplete as an explanation of truth and fiction; by this, I mean that a substantial connecting link between descriptive reference and mimetic action is, in his analysis, nearly absent to the detriment of his argument. For Origen and the Stoics preceding him, this link between referential description and mimetic action was allegory—that which creatively relates one story of a text to

¹⁴⁵ Thiselton, *Interpreting God*, 73-78. See also, Eric Rust, *Religion, Revelation, and Reason* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1981): 50-1. Rust describes dialogue with the Other as a quest toward self-awareness for the human person, and he frames this in terms of a disclosure via interpretation and dialogue. Disclosure language in regards to self is a bit passive for Gadamer, but the essence of dialogue will necessarily include some disclosure, whether that is concerning the self or the Other. It is significant that Rust engages the concept of disclosure as it relates to the more theological self-revelation of God, while Gadamer's vision of Truth as revelatory of human being is non-theological, though the ideas are (I would argue) not unrelated.

another story that exists in the actual and experienced world, connecting (for Origen and the Stoics, at least) the material and the spiritual. It seems that, in our postmodern context, allegory's reinvigoration in connection to reference and mimesis ought to include (at least) a consideration of allegory's usefulness to past hermeneutical giants, such as Origen or prolific Stoic philosopher-interpreters. It should, however, be noted that Origen (and those like him in ancient contexts) saw the text as a sort of authoritative riddle to be solved by a more objective interpreter rather than a mysterious and artistic revealer of subjective self—this is quite different from postmodern literary theorists and hermeneutical experts who are less likely to consider it possible of getting a “meaning right” at all and would likely say that such a venture, even if it were possible, would not be artistically valuable for a community.¹⁴⁶ An actualization of Gadamer's call for a postmodern reinvigoration of allegorical interpretation should not be attempted without due consideration of allegorical models from antiquity, when allegory was most popular, acceptable, and expected in interpretation; it is in Origen (and other capable allegorists) that we might find an acceptable historical precedent for allegorical reinvigoration when developing a more postmodern link between the descriptive references of our examined, assigned, and authoritative relevant texts and the mimesis that these texts cannot fail to generate within their reading communities and societies.

First, the existence of any allegorical authority requires (in Gadamer's mind) a tradition or convention upon which that allegory might ground itself. Joel Weinsheimer, in reference to this, writes:

¹⁴⁶ Burton L. Visotzky, “Jots and Tittles: On Scriptural Interpretation in Rabbinic and Patristic Literatures,” *Prooftexts* 8, no. 3 (September 1988): 260-261. “Origen holds the Scripture to be a kind of divine code which the exegete can solve. This notion is, of course, not new with Origen... The trouble with this (Origen's) exegetical point of view is that Scripture often taxes even the most fertile imagination to offer reasonable interpretation of its many cruxes. Even Origen, with all the tools of the allegorist at hand, seemed on occasion to despair of getting the meaning right.” See also Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002): 210-213.

In allegory the relation of the finite to the infinite is made possible only through convention, and that means not only through language but through rhetoric and dialogue. Allegorical conventions are not created immediately, moreover; they evolve through time, in dialogue with one's forebears as well as one's contemporaries. Tradition is the condition of allegorical representation; and to preserve tradition is one function of allegorical interpretation, of Homer or of Scripture.¹⁴⁷

Allegory and Tradition (or convention, as Weinsheimer designates) are, much in the same way as descriptive reference and mimesis, interdependent. The validity of an allegorical interpretation depends upon the conventions in which it is proposed: Origen, for instance, found himself in a context that overwhelmingly approved of allegory and expected it as the explanatory connecting link between the Scripture's literal and spiritual meanings. Much in the same way, Stoic allegoresis depended on a contextual audience prepared to hear the allegoresis as valid. In this sense, allegory depended on the society in which it was offered. The claim here that is not as readily accessible is the claim that there is an *interdependent* relationship between allegorical readings and tradition. However, if the actions inspired by a text were to be questioned by any outsider, an allegorical reading of a communally authoritative text could conceivably justify whatever action had been in question (at least for the one belonging to the community of that text), meaning that the one who acts could explain himself/herself (and thus explain an ethical tradition) through allegorical interpretation.

Whether interpreting Homer or Scripture, Weinsheimer argues that, in Gadamer's mind, allegory is a source of justification within the interdependent relationship between tradition and *action*. As it is potentially useful within this sphere, its rehabilitation within this same sphere should not necessarily be resisted within a postmodern context—contexts in which the distinction between symbol and allegory (though certain relative distinctions may still exist) is

¹⁴⁷ Joel Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985): 90.

unclear, if not entirely uncertain: “If during the nineteenth century the symbolic was opposed to the allegorical as art to non-art, the absoluteness of that dichotomy has now become dubious, and the distinction between symbol and allegory has become relative. Such a relativization does not leave intact the opposition of art to non-art.”¹⁴⁸ Art, again, involving pattern *and* recognition, does not exist as objectification without any relation to the actual world.¹⁴⁹ Rather, the dramatic patterns within art are meant to be interpreted as objectified correlations with dramatic experiences within the life of an interpreter: “Art is the *objectification of this purely experiential pattern*. Hence, art is not identical to this purely experiential pattern. Rather, art objectifies the opening up of a new horizon, the release out of the ready-made world, then feelings of wonder and awe.”¹⁵⁰ Allegoresis here is applicable to the relationship between the patterns existing within the artistic objectification itself and the life-patterns of the interpreter as they are revealed during the dynamic conversation-interpretation with the world and all its patterns. Allegory, as it did for the Stoics, Origen, and Gadamer, links the object and the subject, the physical and the spiritual, the description and the mimesis. Allegory (in its appropriate place) is therefore not in itself the product of introspection and reflection, but the vehicle for it; instead of being the meaningful solution to an interpretive problem, allegory is that which generates the meaningful solution, as meaning (for Gadamer) is not distinct from practical significance.¹⁵¹

Therefore, if there is no difference between meaning and practical significance, it is true that the appropriate function of allegory is to artistically reveal, not only the self, but also the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 91. This is in conflict with De Man’s view of the opposition between symbol and allegory and (it seems) a better reflection of Gadamer’s position on allegory.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 91. Art is also experience, and, like experience, it has the structure of excursion and return. And, too, art is a function of subjectivity...it is art conceived only as art that is insufficient.

¹⁵⁰ Rosenberg, *The Drama of Scripture*, 132.

¹⁵¹ Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason*, 68. See also Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity & Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993): 333-4.

practical significance of the fictional world, meaning the significance of the fictional world for the actual world of the reader. Allegory, in other words, has critical implications for self-understanding (or self-revelation), but it also has significant practical implications within the sphere of social criticism, and these are equally important, if the latter is not more important, since its scope is far larger:

Gadamer answers that a literary work of art ‘has in common with all other literary texts that it speaks to us in terms of the significance of its contents. Our understanding is not specifically concerned with the achievement of form that belongs to it as a work of art, but with what it says to us.’ The events of fiction cannot represent actual events. What can be represented in narrative fiction, however, is what is represented in all written texts—namely, the content, ‘what it says to us.’ The connection between the work of art and the real world, thus, is found in what is represented by means of the structure of the work.¹⁵²

According to Walhout’s interpretation of Gadamer, the events in a fictional narrative cannot stand for events in the actual world but, instead, are to be taken within the context of their fictional system. Walhout’s language here may be misleading. These systems that depend on referential language for their intelligibility as an organic whole (if they are to function as objectified revealers of personal and social truth in time, resulting in mimetic action) cannot stand *only* for one thing outside themselves, as this would limit the interpretation of the synthetic fictional system to a single horizon, perhaps even within the World of the text’s composition. This, as I have already discussed, is incompatible with Gadamer’s view of art. The relationship between fiction and its patterned systems of potential symbols and what these patterns refer to is sustained by the human interpreter, who interprets the text in light of her/his own concerns. For instance, if the relationship between Huck Finn and Jim is said to be commentary on the relationship of American people to the concepts of slavery and freedom as they permeate normal American life, this is *only* the case because the problem of slavery and freedom in America is

¹⁵² Lundin, et. al, *The Promise of Hermeneutics*, 111-112. At this point, Walhout is citing and interpreting those portions of *Truth and Method* that concern literature and its interpretation.

significant, and the text's patterns have been interpreted as having something intelligent to say about it that will be accessible through intelligent, artistic interpretation (including the use of allegory).¹⁵³ In this sense, an allegorical reading of *Huck Finn* would be extremely useful as a mechanism for social change, a methodology not uncommon to interpretation history. In summary, allegorical readings of texts that are relevant to particular communities have the potential to generate effective social criticism and action *as well as* reveal an individual self.

4. The Bible, African Americans, and Allegorical Interpretation

I have alluded to the rigorous (allegorical) interpretation of the "Other" as creator and/or revealer of self, and I have argued that allegorical interpretations of the texts in which we encounter the "Other" can function as mechanisms that generate mimetic action in the actual, social Worlds in which the allegoresis occurs, a concept drawn from Stoic interpretation of Homer and Hesiod and the biblical hermeneutics of Origen of Alexandria. However, I have said little (if anything) specifically about the use and function of allegorical interpretation of communally-authoritative texts (especially the Bible) within communities on social margins; that is, if allegoresis is a mechanism that can generate social effects, it seems reasonable to examine the uses and functions of allegorical interpretation within communities that would be most interested in social change. Interpretation within these communities, if it is not pointed, deliberate, and clear, will certainly deviate from the normative interpretive methodology (since these communities' social experience deviates from the "norm"). Even if allegory functions mechanically in the same way within these marginalized communities, it is probable that allegorical interpretations coming from these communities will seek generation of a mimetic

¹⁵³ Ibid, 114-115.

action that is distinct from the mimetic action(s) generated by the allegorical interpretation of other non-marginalized communities.¹⁵⁴ If a postmodern rehabilitation of allegorical interpretation is to be in any way successful, the rehabilitators cannot fail to include the voices of the marginalized, the voices of those who likely need this kind of interpretation most; without the inclusion of these voices, an examination of the validity of postmodern allegoresis is incomplete and unjust.

There likely is no better example of marginalized biblical interpretation than that of African Americans. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assess the philosophical status of allegory in the Bible's *Wirkungsgeschichte* specific to the African American interpretive tradition. Admittedly, this tradition is broad, diverse, and impossible to engage as a synthetic whole; however, within the narrow scope of allegory's function and social permissibility, it is possible to examine certain communities' approaches to allegoresis of the Bible, especially regarding mimesis toward the goal of social criticism and change. Vincent Wimbush, commenting on the intersections of the Bible and African American culture in general, such as the relation of a hip hop artist's life story to a biblical story, jazz-gospel music, street preachers who echo the language rhythm of biblical passages, etc., calls these correlations "points of cultural contact."¹⁵⁵ That is, the cultural points at which the descriptive language of the Bible influences the mimetic actions of people in the actual world are designated in this way. It is his argument that these points of cultural contact developed in a manner distinct from the development of cultural contact points in the dominant Euro-American interpretive culture and, therefore, the interpretive methodology is also distinct:

¹⁵⁴ Wimbush, *The Bible and African Americans*, 30-2.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

It [the Bible] quickly came to function as a language-world, the storehouse of rhetorics, images, and stories that, through a complex history of engagement, helped establish African Americans as *a circle of the biblical imaginary*. It helped them imagine themselves as something other, in another world, different from what their immediate situation reflected or demanded.¹⁵⁶

Rather than interpret the Bible (communally relevant literature) toward the goal of encountering the Other for the sake of individual, communal, or social development (as was the case with *Huck Finn*), it seems that early African American communities of the Bible engaged the text for the sake of *becoming* or understanding themselves *as* Other. The goal of the identity formation, according to Wimbush, though the concept of Otherness is implicit in the hermeneutical structure, was entirely different from the goal of the normative hermeneutical structure.

Otherness was something with which to be in dialogue for the purposes of a specific kind of revelation of True human being: the early African American participant in the language-world of the Bible participated for the sake of an identity formation that was alternative (and implicitly better) than the identity given to him/her by the dominant social structure. Therefore, within the context of postmodern allegorical rehabilitation, it is both prudent and necessary to include substantial consideration of the African American interpretive experience with the Bible as world source, as this interpretive tradition (one temporally closer to our own than Origen) reflects an experience in which the function of allegory was distinct from the normative, European interpretive tradition.

Interpretive Methodological Difference: Imagination, Community, and Society

To be enslaved meant, among a plethora of other things, to be cut off from one's culture of origin, one's language, and one's religion—in essence, the slave's way of being human was

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 4.

taken; therefore, engagement with a text capable of speaking to the foundational feeling of Otherness and exile was a resource and activity of immeasurable value,¹⁵⁷ and the engagement of the Bible was done in such a way that it ran counter to popular European interpretations (interpretations that often aided the European understanding of Africans as inferior).¹⁵⁸ These counter-interpretations often saw the God of the Bible as a power fighting on behalf of the oppressed even in times without war, a God who both affirms and embodies the subjective struggle of the oppressed racial-collective of individual (holy) selves, honoring (or even joining) the struggle of these poor and oppressed (economically and otherwise) by offering those who struggle the realization of their goal of liberation in the actual world.¹⁵⁹ These attributes and activities of this God interpreted from the Bible do not seem identical with those of the God Origen interpreted from the Bible, and many scholars are in agreement that both the interpretive methodology *and* interpretive goals of African Americans in the pre-Civil War United States were different from those of interpreters of European ancestry.¹⁶⁰ Hopkins notes that this early interpretive difference between African American and European American hermeneutics (with its immediate cause perhaps being class or some other sociological power) can essentially be broken down into two conflicting versions of Protestantism, accusing the European version of

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 8-11, 21-5.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 28-9. "The spirituals and other songs and forms of representation reflect an approach to biblical interpretation informed by trauma—both physical and psychosocial. Interpretation was in almost all cases not controlled by the literal words of the texts because the texts were, for a number of reasons, *heard* (and touched and otherwise experienced) more than simply *read*. They were engaged as stories that seized and freed the imagination. Rather than an end in itself, interpretation seemed actually to have been understood and experienced as the collective freed consciousness and imagination of the African slaves...as they heard the biblical stories and retold them to reflect their own actual social situations, as well as their visions for a different world order. Many of the biblical stories, themselves the product of ancient cultures with well-established oral traditions, functioned sometimes as allegory, as parable, or as veiled social criticism."

¹⁵⁹ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Down, Up, and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000): 170.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 13-25. See also Wimbush, *The Bible and African Americans*, 33-46.

irony, if not hypocrisy.¹⁶¹ It is indeed ironic that both of these interpretive communities reach their nearly opposite conclusions using the same authoritative text, though opposing and contradictory interpretations of the same piece of literature are hardly rare within interpretive traditions, and as the two interpretive communities are reading for entirely different goals, it is hardly shocking that they reach conclusions in tension with one another.

Needless to say, this dichotomy is obvious. On the one hand (and very generally speaking), a version of Protestant Christianity baptizes Africans and African Americans into chattel slavery. On the other hand (again, very generally), a second version proclaims liberation for the oppressed and knowledge of a God who fights alongside those who struggle for the realization of this goal. Hopkins is astute in his observation and interpretation, but it seems that the validity of his accusation of hypocrisy on the part of the European American biblical interpreters rests on the assumption that these interpreters understood their message to be one that was universally liberating in all metaphysical senses, which is debatable, at best. In fact, even from Hopkins' own evidence,¹⁶² many of these interpreters seem to have understood their brutal goal quite clearly as one without a universally liberating component (even if contemporary audiences find this archaic conclusion laughable). Either way, even though there is certainly a great deal of difference between these conclusions, Hopkins' analysis is missing something crucial. It seems that each of these categorically-generalized, early American interpretive traditions is substantially in relationship to the hermeneutical methodology of both Gadamer and

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 21-22. Hopkins' argument implies his understanding that a universal Protestant principle is experienced freedom (in all its metaphysical senses). Introducing Christianity to slaves as means of control and status-perpetuation is, therefore, ironic, if not hypocritical.

¹⁶² Ibid, 25. Especially the legal material concerning antebellum plantation law.

Origen of Alexandria (either for good or ill), an observation that could have lent itself to Hopkins' analysis of these two opposing interpretive camps.

African American Biblical Interpretation and Gadamer's Distinct Vision of Truth

First, and in relation to Gadamer, each interpretive community interprets its shared authoritative text, not from a place of objectivity, but always from the interpretive community's own social situation and in light of its own concerns.¹⁶³ To use a tangentially-related illustration, if a nineteenth century person interpreting *Huck Finn* for the purposes of the perpetuation of slavery (though the book was published long after abolition) were to assert that Huck's leadership skills on the raft, Jim's susceptibility to Huck's trickery, and the *Southern* direction of their journey on the Mississippi river were all instances of textual evidence going to support the assertion that African Americans (Jim) are inferior to European Americans (Huck), this would be an assertion made in light of the interpreter's interest in the perpetuation of slavery. The descriptive references within the text have been applied to their interpreted "appropriate" counterparts in the actual world and the social exhortation toward mimesis is given. Again, if a nineteenth century interpreter had wished to argue the opposite, s/he could find references and apply them accordingly, but any religious, legal, political, or other communal/social assertion made will be made with the interest of supporting the ideology of the interpretive community.

More broadly (and speaking more to Gadamer's vision of allegory in the case of Hopkins' two categories of Protestant interpretation), both interpretive communities (pro and anti-slavery) are using the *Bible* as the text through which the question of slavery might find its answer, and, of the several varieties of European American interpretations and applications of

¹⁶³ Lundin, *The Promise of Hermeneutics*, 73-4. See also Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics*, 67-9.

the Bible that are now available to us, few of them seem to have fought actively against slavery on the basis on (what Hopkins calls) “religious grounds,”¹⁶⁴ presumably meaning dogmatic reasons. These “religious grounds” and any dogmatic presuppositions *or* conclusions made by the European American interpretive community while in conversation with their authoritative text are hardly pithy assertions based on a few scarcely recollected aphorisms. Rather, they are the rigorously-acquired conclusions of an interpretive community that has made an attempt at understanding themselves comprehensively, communally, and synthetically within their own society and within dialogue with the text they hold as authoritative for the society in which they exist. Their conclusions, no matter how obscene contemporary audiences find them, were reached through a similar methodology as I have described above—the references in the Bible (to slaves and masters, for instance) were taken as symbols, standing for those slaves and masters in the actual world.¹⁶⁵ The metaphysical understanding of the social world through the eyes of the European American in dialogue with the Bible and the question of slavery gave primacy to the concept of *authority*, and all the arguments made in the support of slavery from this interpretive community will therefore give primary attention to the appropriate role of authority within a society informed by the culturally relevant text.¹⁶⁶ The entire social paradigm, therefore, within the imagination of the slaveholder (a person *with authority*), was seen through the social lens of *authority*, the lens that best aided those in authority to understand the text and their society in light of their problems and concerns.

¹⁶⁴ Hopkins, *Down, Up, and Over*, 34-5. Hopkins’ research indicates three normative European American interpretive positions, including those that supported slavery outright and openly, those that were silent on the issue and therefore supportive of slavery, and what he calls the “centrist” position, which amounts to a theological and sociological “it depends,” which he argues was perhaps the most popular among slaveholders, as its subtleties actually granted them the most authority.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 51-94.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 30-5. Hopkins’ supplies a list of classifications of European American interpretations and applications of the Bible onto the social and moral problem of slavery for a society that (in whatever regard) held the Bible to be somehow authoritative.

Just as the slave masters understood society through the metaphysics of authority while in conversation with their authoritative texts, early African American interpreters saw things in quite another fashion, as Hopkins comments:

[E]nslaved African Americans used the space and time from sundown to sunup to co-constitute themselves with divine intent into their own racial religious formation. They hoped for and pursued a liberated humanity. They forged themselves as a new African American people of faith embodied in an everyday practical knowledge anchored in their existential encounter with the Spirit of freedom and in their own hermeneutical reading of the biblical text. In a word, the liberating Spirit met them and worked with them both in material experience and in textual deciphering.¹⁶⁷

This action (from sundown to sunup) correctly assumes that African Americans were occupied between sunup and sundown with the identities assigned them by their European American oppressors. The nighttime, then, according to Hopkins, is a time in which African American slaves were able to create identities for themselves apart from those assigned them by those in authority, and these identities were received from (or co-constituted with, to use Hopkins' vocabulary) the Spirit of freedom, or the Spirit of liberation, as it is seen elsewhere—that is, God. Hoping and longing first for a liberated humanity (certainly including themselves, if not *first* including themselves), it seems that enslaved African Americans, at least according to Hopkins' argument, categories, and data, *also* interpreted the Bible in light of their own concerns and, therefore, they gave metaphysical primacy to the concept of liberation from oppression: understandably, the most immediate concern available.

This metaphysical primacy of liberation or emancipation in regard to theological inquiry is a concept coming out of the African American slave experience, but it has had lasting theological, social, and moral effect into the present. Through asking questions concerning the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 157.

activity of God in the actual world, Hopkins argues that enslaved African Americans came up with a radically different answer than European Americans, just as contemporary African American theology is particularly unique:

In contrast and in response [to a locking out of black humanity from resources], God works with the oppressed black community to co-constitute a new liberated, spiritual and material humanity. God is the Spirit of freedom for us... The fundamental act of God... is earthy emancipation for those in bondage, both spiritual and material, and this act operates in a co-constitutive fashion. The poor and brokenhearted are co-agents with divine intent to fashion a new emancipated human self. In a word, God works with us through the act of freedom as we constitute ourselves from oppression to a full reality of the highest potential of a liberated humanity. God liberates us totally and holistically.¹⁶⁸

The religious thought of Hopkins' "slave religion" is argued to be intimately connected even to contemporary African American theology, and Hopkins does make his point well, and a reading of his argument through Gadamer's hermeneutics is quite productive; in fact, if Gadamer is correct, there should be no surprise that there is a relationship between slave religion and African American theology, especially if the interpretations are attempted using similar methodology, since access to non-falsifiable Truth that is revelatory of human being is accomplished (in Gadamer's view) within a Tradition that grants the readings authority. Hopkins' argument here is that God is identical with the "Spirit of freedom" and that the formation of a person or community's identity as a liberated individual is accomplished by that person and his/her dialogue with the "Spirit of freedom" (something I would prefer to call the Will to freedom, since this seems clearer). Hopkins' implication here is that this version of reading the Bible in such a way that total emancipation from oppression and the "full reality of the highest potential of a liberated humanity" is achieved is a hermeneutical methodology unique to African Americans coming out of the slave experience in America, and (broadly speaking) he is correct; however, this implication has its limits. Though the details of the experience and the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 160.

corresponding terminology (slavery, liberation, etc.) are, of course, unique to the African American experience, there is a great deal of similarity between this methodology and that of the European American slave masters! The only substantive difference, it would *seem*, is the metaphysical primacy given to liberation in the African American interpretive community and the primacy of authority in the European American interpretive community. Each community is interpreting in light of its own social concerns, which is why I argue that a closer reading of this through Gadamer is indeed quite productive, especially in light of his vision of what Truth is. If human Truth is that which is discovered during an encounter with the “Other” that is revelatory of human being,¹⁶⁹ it seems as if the European American interpretive metaphysic (at least as it is presented by Hopkins), giving prime place to authority, concerns itself first and foremost with the proper place of authority as it is installed by God who is not manipulated by human imagination or authority. This is not so much revelatory of human being as it is revelatory of the European idea of social authority and its relationship to God. Conversely, it seems that the African American interpretive metaphysic (again, at least presented by Hopkins), concentrating on the holistic liberation of the human person, is almost exactly in line with Gadamer’s vision of hermeneutical understanding as the disclosure of Truth. It is an active dialogue with a co-creator, other than the self, that reconstitutes the self and reassigns identity in an ongoing interpretive process. Therefore, the actual substantive difference between Hopkins’ categories of European and African American interpretive communities when they are read through Gadamer is *not* their (lack of) brilliance in communicating American ideology of freedom and individual choice within a free market, but one’s capacity to reveal human Truth and the other’s lack of revelatory capacity on that level. This seems an unjustified and narrow-visioned generalization of European thought, as evidenced by my earlier discussion of Gadamer, but (given Hopkins’ evidence) this is

¹⁶⁹ Kiefer, *Hermeneutical Understanding*, 42-3.

a fair characterization of *some* popular opinions among Europeans and European Americans. Moreover, given his evidence, this is an excellent characterization of African American biblical hermeneutics. Regardless of nineteenth century European popular theology, the reading of African American theology and biblical interpretation through the hermeneutical philosophy of Gadamer is likely a productive and worthwhile endeavor.

The Rehabilitation of Allegory and African American Interpretation

Second, and in relation to Origen, these two interpretive philosophies, coming from two very distinct interpretive communities, require, not only understanding of the text with which they are engaged, but the application process of that text onto the community or society for which it is relevant *and* the interpretive methodology appropriate in reaching these conclusions meant for communal or social application through exhortation. The process is not one of relating a single proposition or maxim to a two-dimensional community or society, but a process of relating an immensely complex textual reality to an equally complex social fabric that is broad, dynamic, and changing. The social systems (and the texts to be applied to them) are experienced realities, stories, and relationships. These synthetic and comprehensive social systems (when understood in dialogue with a text) cannot be understood by the participant apart from the very basic interpretive tool of descriptive reference and mimetic action; however, when these issues are societal in scope (and not individual persons, snakes, rivers, etc.), it becomes more difficult to determine which referent in the *moving* text stands for which object or idea in the moving world without the interpretive link of allegory. That is, references and their mimetic correlations are best understood within the textual and/or societal systems in which they appear, just as allegories are best understood within their own allegorical systems in making the interpretive leap from the abstract textual to the concrete personal. This, of course, goes far beyond the

simpler and muted version of understanding a single story in the communally-relevant text or portion of a popular book as an allegory, and it is likely better applied to an understanding of the entire metanarrative of the collective textual whole as *meaningfully* connected (through symbol and reasonable synthetic relationships) to the actual world of human experience as it is experienced by human persons over time.¹⁷⁰

In the case of contemporary African American biblical interpretation, few worthwhile interpretations ignore the social position of the interpreter or interpreting community; in fact, according to Thomas Hoyt, Jr., any African American biblical interpretation that does justice to the categorization of “African American” will give appropriate consideration to the experience of the African American community and will consider that communal experience and its social effect as formative and authoritative in its engagement with the Bible and the social/communal applications that the interpretation produces.¹⁷¹ Hoyt, commenting on African American interpretation in general (as it stands in comparison to European interpretation in general), asserts:

It is almost axiomatic that in interpreting Scripture those who are marginalized and those who have more of a stake in the status quo would bring a different set of questions to the text...For blacks, Jesus is human and identifies with the poor by suffering on their behalf...This Jesus is presently in solidarity with those seeking to eradicate injustices and gives courage and motivation...By contrast, whites tend to stress the resurrection as the beginning of a triumphalist church tradition that protects the status quo.¹⁷²

This contrast, even if it seems to be a bit of an unfair and generalized characterization of European-informed Christianity, represents African American readings of Scripture *and* the

¹⁷⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 161-163. See also, Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, John B. Thompson, ed. and trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 60-69. See also, Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 45-50.

¹⁷¹ Cain Hope Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991): 24-7.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 29.

actual experienced world as read through the lens of the Jesus of the Bible, and it does so for the sake of interpreting Jesus' relationship to experienced liberation from an oppressive status quo. In other words, Hopkins is arguing that, within the African American community, biblical Christology functions socially in a way that expresses solidarity with those suffering injustices in the world and in need of liberation and freedom (what Hopkins argues to be God's primary action in the world). This African American methodological relationship between text and society (both of which are read in light of the reader's location and concerns) is paradigmatically similar to the allegorical methodology of Origen, who, developing a metaphysical system based on his community's sacred text, interprets both the world and the text primarily through the lens of Jesus' salvific effect. Put differently, the tendency of African American biblical interpreters to *read* the text in a socio-political, economic manner reflective of their own historically conditioned self-understanding (informed by community) is mirrored by their tendency to apply these readings to their interpretive communities in a socially critical way that is paradigmatically similar to the communal and social applications made by Origen.¹⁷³ Hopkins explains:

When the oppressed achieve a measure of freedom found in the newly co-constituted self accompanied by the Spirit with us, they enunciate very clearly, through resilient rituals, the dynamic interplay between the fruit of salvation and liberation. Jesus brings salvation along with earthly freedom. An evangelical spirit-filled soul parallels and dovetails with a spirit-induced social transformation. The fuller salvation and liberation manifest together, the fuller the presence of Jesus with us.¹⁷⁴

By "salvation and liberation," Hopkins means the activity of the spirit of Jesus both within a person's being and within a person's social World, respectively. One might characterize them as the centripetal and centrifugal effects of the spirit of Jesus. Compare this with the personal

¹⁷³ Felder, ed., *Stony the Road*, 82-3. See also, Vincent B. Leitch, *Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Post-structuralism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992): 84-90.

¹⁷⁴ Hopkins, *Down, Up, and Over*, 223. See also, Anthony Pinn, *The End of God-Talk: An African American Humanist Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 30-3.

exhortation of Origen for his congregation to imitate Lazarus awakening following his resurrection, or with Origen's encouragement of his congregation to be a part of the saving work of God in the social world, just as each part of the Church is as a board or plank in Noah's ark. Hopkins' vocabulary distinguishes between a personal and individual salvation and a more social liberation, whereas Origen (reading the Bible and society Soteriologically) might include both of these divine actions within his vision of salvation. The divine action of salvation in the thought processes of Origen and African American biblical interpreters includes both individual and social components, though this is not the only similarity, as African American interpretations are quick to include (and even celebrate) allegorical readings and identifications with the biblical text, considering this a perfectly acceptable and expected way in which to see a community's experience mirrored in that community's sacred text, and the conversation between the two stories will inform opinions and readings of both, enriching and revealing Truth about being human in a suffering community while in relationship with a sacred, communally relevant text. This, it seems, is the kind of allegorical interpretation that Gadamer sees as worthy of a contemporary revaluation, an allegory that rationally and meaningfully connects the textual World to the World of the reader in a way that informs both Worlds without compromising the integrity of either, a relationship best exemplified by Hopkins' explication of an African American spiritual that is theologically loaded:

My God is a rock in a weary land
 shelter in a time of storm...
 Stop let me tell you 'bout the Chapter One
 When the Lord God's work has jus' begun
 Stop and let me tell 'bout the Chapter Two
 When the Lord God's written his Bible through
 Stop and let me tell you 'bout the Chapter Three
 When the Lord God died on Calvary...
 Stop and let me tell you 'bout the Chapter Four
 Lord God visit 'mong the po'

Stop and let me tell you 'bout Chapter Five
 Lord God brought the dead alive
 Stop and let me tell you 'bout the Chapter Six
 He went in Jerusalem and healed the sick...
 Stop and let me tell you 'bout Chapter Seven
 Died and risen and went to Heaven
 Stop and let me tell you 'bout Chapter Eight
 John see Him standin' at the Golden Gate
 Stop and let me tell you 'bout Chapter Nine
 Lord God turned the water into wine
 Stop and let me tell you 'bout the Chapter Ten
 John says He's comin' in the world again.¹⁷⁵

Hopkins observes that this spiritual, essentially a synthetic, biblical theology, functions as a way African Americans understood the Bible primarily through the lens of their own experience, evidenced by the beginning, when God is equated with a rock in a weary land, but it is secondarily (or, I would argue, just as importantly) a way that the African American community of this song has theologized its own experience as a people enduring suffering at the hands of an "Other." According to Hopkins, every line of the song, though obviously about the Bible or some related theological topic, does not stop at a detailed abstraction of some imagined theological world; rather, the writers and singers have also been careful in choosing these particular abstractions in order to reflect some key aspect of the African American *personal* experience, with textual abstractions (either actual characters or anthropomorphized events) in the song taking on roles correspondent to actual persons and generalized social positions in the actual world of the African American experience, all understood from within the event-context of persecution, oppression, and slavery.¹⁷⁶ By understanding their own experience as a synthetic

¹⁷⁵ Hopkins, *Down, Up, and Over*, 231-2.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 233. "The crucifixion on Calvary denotes Jesus as the event that 'visit 'mong the po'" (the poor referenced in the tenth line of the above Negro spiritual). The spirit of total liberation dwells with and among the poor. Visitation imagery suggests conscious intent on the part of Jesus concerning where he chose and, today still, chooses to be... 'Lord God' Jesus becomes a doctor prescribing and administering medicinal remedies for the intangible soul and the visibly wounded among the community of the least." The "poor," for example, are identified

whole that stands in relation to another synthetic story, the African American audiences that engaged in spirituals such as these employed the philosophical tool of interpretive allegory, not just on the Bible, but on their own concrete lives as they stood in relation to textual abstractions represented in their communally-relevant and authoritative text, the Bible.

It is for this reason that the methodology of African American allegorical communities such as those who employed spirituals like the one above is similar to the methodology of Origen. The very same interpretive fulcrums that were prevalent in Origen's interpretation (of Noah's ark, for example) are utilized here in the African American theology represented in this spiritual. Origen is careful to relate the biblical text to his congregation by means of *identity* assignment and *event* correlation; if we recall, Origen was quite thorough in his assignment of identity from abstract textual referents onto their mimetic counterparts in the actual, concrete world of his experience.¹⁷⁷ Planks become teachers in the Church, animals on the varying levels of the ark become those Christians who, having been brought into the Church, are in need of protection by the planks, the storm and swells outside the ark become the attacks from those outside the Church seeking to destroy it, and (perhaps most importantly) Noah becomes Jesus, who has made plans assuring the integrity of the ark/Church. In the African American spiritual above, the "poor" whom Jesus visits, for whom he administers spiritual care, and in whose interest he has provided hope, are identified quite explicitly with the African American community in the actual world. The abstract idea, the text referent of "poor," which is plentiful across the entire Bible, is assigned a very personal and concrete mimetic correlation: the African American community that experiences oppression and persecution from those who are in

as the oppressed African American community, and the "comin' in the world again," of "Chapter 10," is identified as the hope mediated to this community through Jesus as he relates personally and situationally.

¹⁷⁷ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, 79-80.

positions of power or wealth. Again, Jesus' textual death and resurrection signify a victory over "the many layered masks of evil"¹⁷⁸ in the actual world, presumably assigned to those social forces in privilege that oppress communities and deny equality, liberation, regeneration, and acknowledgement of full humanity among the people. Although the identity assignments made here are entirely different from those identity assignments made by Origen (which is understandable, given the different Worlds), the methodology with respect to identity assignment is quite similar, if not identical. In both cases, the interpreting community synthetically assigns identities to personalities within societies, based on the characters or anthropomorphized things found in the text: they both use the Bible in the construction of a synthetic metaphysical system representative of their perception of (and experience with) reality.¹⁷⁹

Furthermore, these allegorical interpretations are both conditioned by the events in the lives of the interpreters and/or assigning communities that they find to be absolutely primary. However, there is one glaring difference: while Origen interprets the Noah story as a single (yet complex) event that is related allegorically to a single concrete reality, it seems that the example of the African American spiritual considers the communal-social predicament to be, not just a single event reducible to "oppression," "liberation," or some other abstraction. Rather, it is best expressed as a variety of inter-weaving events that present themselves to the individual and community as a great many events that cannot be reduced, for if they were, the result would do a great injustice to the experience of the community as rich, tragic, desperate, hopeful, and many other abstract, yet accurate, terms. Even so, the African American community that employs spirituals such as these clearly considers the experience of their community as primary in

¹⁷⁸ Hopkins, *Down, Up, and Over*, 233.

¹⁷⁹ Ramelli, "The Philosophical Stance," 341-2.

interpretation of sacred text, just as Origen considered it as such. This shared methodology, as it will take both identity and event into consideration, has a very great potential for utilization in the revelation of what it means to be human within a given context. That is, both identity and life-events are of immense importance to human beings, and this methodology is particularly useful in revealing what these things are, and therefore it is valuable, especially if we consider that Gadamer equates Truth with that which is revelatory of human being.

Prescriptive Allegory and African American Social Critique

Specifically regarding Marxist interpretation of texts and social history, and organizing his approach to a prescriptive allegorical reading of a text into succinct horizons of prescriptive interpretation, Vincent Leitch argues:

The result is that the second horizon [text as utterance of antagonistic dialogue] of interpretation is allegorical in a highly special, prescriptive sense. Analogously, the historical “intertextuality” of the artwork “must” “always” be rewritten in terms of the Marxian theory of successive and overlapping modes of production, rendering the third horizon of interpretation [the study of the text as conjecture and projection of history] an operation of equally prescriptive allegorizing.¹⁸⁰

The relationship between text and society here is intentionally described as prescriptive, partially because this is within the context of Marxism and Marxist interpretation, but the methodology, especially the categorization of prescriptive allegory as especially manifest in the second and third components of three distinct horizons of interpretation also characterizes the African American interaction with the Bible quite well. That is to say, Leitch is only utilizing Marxism as a catalyst through which his audience might understand his greater point: that reading anything at all (assuming the reader has any social concern at all) can be understood as something that he calls “allegorical rewriting.” The three horizons of interpretation and understanding are, he

¹⁸⁰ Leitch, *Cultural Criticism*, 122.

explains: 1) the text is primarily and foundationally understood as a symbolic act that “offers imaginary resolutions of real sociopolitical contradictions.”¹⁸¹ It is first a vessel reflecting social anxieties and crises at the reader in a world consisting purely of thought, a world other than the actual world. 2) “The text is understood as utterance of antagonistic dialogue.”¹⁸² That is, the text is understood secondarily as an active dialogue partner through which interpretations of the actual world might be achieved. 3) The third horizon characterizes the text as a “specific conjuncture that recalls and projects all the conflicting historical modes of production.”¹⁸³ Put differently, the third horizon of interpretation is that which understands the text as an affair that collects and bears history into the present as an interpreted and informative whole.

One of Leitch’s arguments is simply that the second and third of these horizons, requiring connection between the imagined World of the text and the actual, social World of the individual interpreter, requires prescriptive allegory in the making of this interpretive leap. If this is the case, and (if interpretation is understood as more than simply a knowledge of the text’s descriptive reference and inclusive of a mimetic action) it seems to be, it seems that a reading of African American biblical criticism using these three horizons of “allegorical rewriting” would be very productive.

In illustration of this, Hopkins offers an account of an African American former slave who interprets the Bible in light of the African American community’s concerns as a people having been drawn out of Africa (here, assumedly, identified as the more specific Ethiopia):

‘He says that Ethiopia shall yet stretch forth her hand and all nations shall bow unto her. I long to see the day that the Ethiopians shall all bow unto God as the One that we should

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 121.

¹⁸² Ibid, 121.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 121.

all bow unto, for it is to Him that we all owe our homage and to be very grateful to Him for our deliverance as a race. If we should fail to give him the honor due there would a curse come to us as a race, for we remember those of olden times were of the same descent of our people, and some of those that God honored most were of the Ethiopians, such as the Unica and Philop [sic], and even Moses, the law-giver, was of the same seed.¹⁸⁴

This very early example of a former slave's interpretation of Psalm 68 is only secondarily interesting in this context because of the theological content; it is primarily interesting because of the "allegorical rewriting," as Leitch would characterize it, coming through in the interpretation and application given to the listening audience. The Bible, to this former slave, has stretched beyond the first horizon of simple symbolic gesture in a barely connected textual world and has, instead, become an instrument by which connections between the textual world of descriptive reference and the actual world of mimetic action have been drawn allegorically and quite starkly. The exhortation that is most ominous, of course, is the admonition against failing to give God honor as a racial collective, an activity meant to be carried out in the actual World but based on evidence rooted in the World of the text. The connection between the two Worlds is more than connecting two dots; rather, it is a process of intimately connecting the social stories of two peoples as they experience the world, and the connection is, thus, an allegorical one. The writer, moreover, connects his people in the actual world to the textual Ethiopians, not just because of their common devotion to the same God, but also because of a shared racial ancestry; the points of social anxiety (correspondent to the second interpretive horizon) to which they are allegorically connected consist almost entirely in racial wellbeing as the result of submission and due homage to God. Beyond this, the writer's history (and the history of his/her people) is bound up and understood/informed through the collected and very present history of the textual Ethiopians, thus fulfilling the third horizon.

¹⁸⁴ Hopkins, *Down, Up, and Over*, 170.

As further illustration, Vincent Wimbush discusses the African American fascination with certain biblical passages that have been of key interest in history:

The preoccupation of many African American orators with the theme of Christian radical inclusion can be seen most strikingly in the engagement of one of the New Testament passages they found resonant and compelling. The key passage to Christian moral and social ethical thinking and practice was “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” ... This passage and other passages were used to level prophetic judgment against a society that thought of itself as biblical in its foundation and ethic.¹⁸⁵

The interpretive reality here seems to be methodologically similar, though not identical, to that of the former slave (though, admittedly, this is not a single instance but the description of a broad and general trend among African Americans and their interaction with this and other key passages). The key passage in question is argued to be the foundation of nineteenth century (European American) Christian ethics. Wimbush also asserts that this is also the foundational verse for African American Christian ethics in the nineteenth century, but it is so as a response and corrective to the use (or misuse) of this verse by the oppressive society. The interpretation of the passage is still allegorical, since the interpretation of the verse results in the relation of symbolic characters described in the text (Jews, Greeks, etc.) and mimetically assigns these identities to figures in the actual world; thereafter, the resulting action would include a way of being human that was (before the application of the text) unknown or unreachable. What is also unique about the African American interaction with this passage is the manner in which it is engaged with a vision toward social critique *and* critique of the misuse of this very passage. The second and third interpretive horizons are satisfied by African American sociopolitical dissatisfaction as it is understood through this verse and by the allegorical application of this verse onto society in a corrective and distinctly African American sense. The utilization of allegory in the African American community thus exists to express both communal solidarity

¹⁸⁵ Wimbush, *The Bible and African Americans*, 37-8.

and a will toward social critique. This methodology is of very great value, especially for the oppressed, and it should be rehabilitated and re-appropriated wherever possible, as it is especially useful in revealing human being in community and in working toward the liberation of persons in societies that are oppressive.

Conclusion

It has been a focus of this essay to trace, not only the connections and similarities between Gadamer, Origen, African American theology, and the relationship between fiction and ethics, but also to show how these topics thematically permeate one another. The primary intention of this essay, however, has been to review and analyze Gadamer's notion that allegorical interpretation of artwork has been undervalued for too long and that, within postmodern contexts, certain forms of allegorical interpretation deserve revaluation and rehabilitation. This newly revitalized allegorical interpretation, far from being dryly dogmatic, will assist the reader or interpreter in bridging the interpretive gap between the descriptive reference of the textual world and the actual world of human experience and can serve as a socially and personally liberating interpretive tool connecting the centripetal and centrifugal functions of a communally relevant text, between the text references and the mimetic actions.

The process of discovering Truth, that which reveals human being through the personal and active interpretation of the Other (as Gadamer defines it), as in the case of the grieving child, might be simple and have a clear and obvious connection to one's experience. The connection might be as simple as understanding yourself and your community as racially connected to an obscure people group that is represented in the text. On the other hand, arriving at a meaningful allegory can easily be complicated and troubling. Either way, interpretive allegory has the capacity to reveal Truth through meaningful and rational contemplation and dialogue with that which is Other, through conversation with that which (even while being Other) has the capacity

to inform the life of the interpreter. Far from necessarily being the dryly rational and overly dogmatic tool by which an authority proselytizes an audience into humble submission, the revaluation of allegory in the postmodern world is in reference to the personal and necessary dialogical tool in the discourse between interpreter and the text. I have attempted to show that allegory, far from being non-artistic, is necessary in the interpretive process and should be revalued as a tool through which human beings come to know Truth about themselves, their community, their society, and how they might critique any of these. Allegory in its postmodern rehabilitation (if that is to take place) unites the text World and actual World; it is a crucial philosophical tool of the interpreter who seeks to connect the imagined World of the text to the actual World that we inhabit—the invaluable tool that bridges the gap between reference and mimesis, between the centripetal and centrifugal, between a thought and an action.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Perseus Books, 1981.

Anderson, Earl R. "Defining the Canon." *PMLA*. 116, no. 5 (2001): 1442-3.

Baynes, Leslie. "Revelation 5:1 and 10:2a, 8-10 in the Earliest Greek Tradition: A Response to Richard Bauckham." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 801-816.

Becker, William H. "The 1960s and Today's Vision of America." *Christian Century*. 102, no. 19 (1985): 558-562.

Brennan, Tad. *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, & Fate*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.

Brown, Delwin. "Limitation and Ingenuity: Radical Historicism and the Nature of Tradition." *Tradition and Tradition Theories*. 213-228. Münster: Lit Verlag, 2006.

Chin, Catherine M. "Through the Looking Glass Darkly: Jerome Inside the Book," In *The Early Christian Book*, edited by William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran, 101-116. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007.

Crouch, James E. "Augustine and Gadamer: an Essay on Wirkungsgeschichte." *Encounter* 68, no. 4 (September 1, 2007) 1-14.

Dardess, George. "The Delicate Dynamics of Friendship: A Reconsideration of Kerouac's *On The Road*." *American Literature*. 46, no. 2 (1974): 200-206.

Decock, Paul B. "Origen of Alexandria: The Study of the Scriptures as Transformation of the Readers into Images of the God of Love." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 67, no. 1 (March 2011): 1-8.

Demirezin, Ismail. "Gadamer's Hermeneutics as a Possibility for Interreligious Dialogue." *Ekev Academic Review* 15, no. 47 (March 2011): 113-130.

Deneen, Patrick J. "Was Huck Greek?: The 'Odyssey' of Mark Twain." *Modern Language Studies*. 32, no. 2 (2002): 35-44.

Felder, Cain Hope, ed. *Stony The Road We Trod*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

French, Warren G. "The Phony World and the Nice World." *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*. 4, no. 1 (1963): 21-30.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. 2nd Revised Edition trans. revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 1994.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, Dieter Misgeld, and Graeme Nicholson. *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*. n.p.: State University of New York Press, 1992.

Goldman, Alan. "Huckleberry Finn and Moral Motivation." *Philosophy and Literature* 34, no. 1 (2010): 1-16.

Grace, John Patrick. "Tuition, Theory, Feminism, and the Canon." *PMLA*. 104, no. 3 (1989): 359-360.

Grondin, Jean. *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Grondin, Jean and Kathryn Plant. *The Philosophy of Gadamer*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003.

Harris, Will. "Phillis Wheatley, Diaspora Subjectivity, and the African American Canon." *MELUS* 33, no. 3 (2008): 27-43.

Heine, Ronald E. "Origen and a Hermeneutic for Spirituality." *Stone-Campbell Journal* 14, no. 1 (March 1, 2011): 67-79.

Inwood, Brad, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Irvine, William B. *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Jacobsen, Anders-Christian. "Allegorical Interpretation of Geography in Origen's Homilies on the Book of Joshua." *Religion & Theology* 17, no. 3/4 (September 2010): 289-301.

Joshi, Vijaya Narendra. "Relationship Between Huck and Jim in the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." *Indian Streams Journal* 2, no. 1 (February 2012): 26-30.

- Kasper, Walter. *The God of Jesus Christ*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1986.
- Kiefer, Thomas. "Hermeneutical Understanding as the Disclosure of Truth: Hans-Georg Gadamer's Distinctive Understanding of Truth." *Philosophy Today* 57, no. 1 (2013).
- Kleist, Chad. "Huck Finn and the Inverse Akratic: Empathy and Justice." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 12, no. 3 (2009): 257-266.
- Knott Jr., Richard O. "Bridging the Chasm: The Philosophical Hermeneutic of Origen and Its Validity in the Present Hermeneutical Debate." *Theological Research Exchange Network (TREN): Theses and Dissertations*. (January 2002): 1-230.
- Krajewski, Bruce. *Gadamer's Repercussions: Reconsidering Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. *God For Us: The Trinity & Christian Life*. Chicago, IL: Claretian Publications, 1973.
- Lammi, Walter. *Gadamer and the Question of the Divine*. n.p.: Continuum, 2008.
- Lauter, Paul. "History and the Canon." *Social Text*. 12 (1985): 94-101.
- Leitch, Vincent B. *Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Poststructuralism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.
- Leonard, James Wharton. "The View From the Raft: Huck Finn's Authentically Nietzschean Perspective." *American Literary Realism* no. 1 (2013): 76-85.

- Ludlow, Morwenna. "Theology and Allegory: Origen and Gregory of Nyssa on the Unity and Diversity of Scripture." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4, no. 1 (2002): 45-67.
- Lundin, Roger, Clarence Walhout, and Anthony C. Thiselton. *The Promise of Hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.
- Malcolm, Douglas. "'Jazz America': Jazz and African American Culture in Jack Kerouac's 'On The Road.'" *Contemporary Literature* 40, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 85-110.
- McEvenue, Sean E., and Ben F. Meyer, ed. *Lonergan's Hermeneutics: Its Development and Application*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989.
- Mitchell, Margaret M. "Christian Martyrdom and the Dialect of the Holy Scriptures: the Literal, the Allegorical, the Martyrological." *Biblical Interpretation* 17, no. 1 (January 2009): 177-206.
- Montmarquet, James. "Huck Finn, Aristotle, and Anti-Intellectualism in Moral Psychology." *Philosophy* no. 339 (2012): 51-63.
- Mujica, Barbara. "Teaching Literature: Canon, Controversy, and the Literary Anthology." *Hispania*. 80, no. 2 (1997): 203-215.
- Nash, Ronald H. *Christianity and the Hellenistic World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984.
- O'Leary, Peter. "Apocalypticism: A Way Forward for Poetry." *Chicago Review* 55, no. 3/4 (Winter 2011): 84-99.

O'Reilly, Kevin E. "Transcending Gadamer: Towards a Participatory Hermeneutics." *The Review of Metaphysics* no. 4 (2012): 841-861.

Origen. *Homilies on Joshua*. Translated by Barbera J. Bruce. Edited by Cynthia White. Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002.

Origen. *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*. Translated by Ronald E. Heine. *The Fathers of the Church*. Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981.

Origen. *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*. Translated by Ronald E. Heine, *The Fathers of the Church*. Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989.

Origen. *On First Principles*. Grand Rapids: Calvin College Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005. Accessed March 14, 2014.
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.vi.v.v.ii.html>.

Ramelli, Ilaria. "Origen and the Stoic Allegorical Tradition: Continuity and Innovation." *Invigilata Lucernis* 28 (2006): 195-226.

Ramelli, Ilaria. "Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism: Rethinking the Christianisation of Hellenism." *Vigiliae Christianae* 63, no. 3 (July 2009): 217-263.

Ramelli, Ilaria. "The Philosophical Stance of Allegory in Stoicism and its Reception in Platonism, Pagan and Christian: Origen in Dialogue with the Stoics and Plato." *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 18, no. 3 (September 2011): 335-371.

Rasimus, Tuomas, Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Ismo Dunderberg. *Stoicism in Early Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

- Ricoeur, Paul. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. Edited and Translated by John B. Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Rosenberg, Randall S. "The Drama of Scripture: Reading Patristic Biblical Hermeneutics through Lonergan's Reflection on Art." *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 126-148.
- Rust, Eric. *Religion, Revelation, and Reason*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1981.
- Schinkel, Anders. "Huck Finn, Moral Language and Moral Education." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 45, no. 3 (August 2011): 511-525.
- Schmidt, Stephen A. "Experience as Canon: Lutheranism in North America." *Religious Education* 92, no. 3 (1997): 406-415.
- Sharples, R.W. *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Simpson, John H. "Toward a Theory of America: Religion and Structural Dualism." *Secularization and Fundamentalism Reconsidered*. 78-90. New York: Peragon House, 1989.
- Singleton, Charles S., ed. *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969.
- Steinmetz, David C. "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis." *Ex Auditu* 1 (January, 1985): 74-82.

- Tate, Daniel L. "In the Fullness of Time: Gadamer on the Temporal Dimension of the Work of Art." *Research in Phenomenology* no. 1 (2012): 92-113.
- Taylor, Craig. "Huck Finn, Moral Reasons and Sympathy. (The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn)." *Philosophy* no. 342 (2012): 583-593.
- Theado, Matt. *The Beats: A Literary Reference*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2001.
- Thiselton, Anthony. *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.
- Thiselton, Anthony. *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980.
- Torrance, Thomas F. "Kerygmatic Proclamation of the Gospel: The Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching of Irenaios of Lyons." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 37, no. 1-4 (March 1, 1992): 105-121.
- Trostyanskiy, Sergey. "Reading Origen of Alexandria from the Perspective of Contemporary Semantics." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 63, no. 3-4 (January 1, 2012): 34-43.
- Valkeakari, Tuire. "Huck, Twain, and the Freedman's Shackles: Struggling with Huckleberry Finn Today." *Atlantis, Revista De La Asociacion Espanola De Estudios Anglos-Norteamericanos* no. 2 (2006): 29-43.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002.

- Vedder, Ben. "On the Meaning of Metaphor in Gadamer's Hermeneutics." *Research in Phenomenology* 32 (2002): 196-209.
- Visotzky, Burton L. "Jots and Tittles: On Scriptural Interpretation in Rabbinic and Patristic Literatures." *Prooftexts* 8, no. 3 (September 1988): 257-269.
- Watson, Stephen H. "Gadamer, Aesthetic Modernism, and the Rehabilitation of Allegory: The Relevance of Paul Klee." *Research in Phenomenology* 34 (September 2004): 45-72.
- Warnke, Georgia. *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987.
- Warnke, Georgia. "Solidarity and Tradition in Gadamer's Hermeneutics." *History and Theory* no. 4 (2012): 6-22.
- Weinsheimer, Joel. *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Weinsheimer, Joel. "Gadamer's Metaphorical Hermeneutics." *Journal of Literary Semantics* 19, no. 2 (1990): 95-115.
- Weinsheimer, Joel. "Teaching and/or Research: Gadamerian Reflections on a Pseudo-Dilemma." *Renascence* 56, no. 4 (Summer 2004): 274-285.
- Whitman, Jon, ed. *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period*. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
- Wimbush, Vincent. *The Bible and African Americans*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

Youmans, Peter J. "The Hermeneutical Method of Origen: The Influences Upon Him and the View of Inspiration He Developed." *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 14, no. 43 (2010): 7-20.

Young, Francis. *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002.

Young, Francis and Lewis Ayres, ed. *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.