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The possibility of unconcealing in literature according to Martin Heidegger and Michael Oakeshott

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Thesis

**THE POSSIBILITY OF UNCONCEALING IN LITERATURE
ACCORDING TO
MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND MICHAEL OAKESHOTT**

by

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For Emily, Thomas, and Daniel.

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THE POSSIBILITY OF UNCONCEALING IN LITERATURE

ACCORDING TO

MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND MICHAEL OAKESHOTT

(Order No.)

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Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2013

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ABSTRACT

In the following thesis, I draw on parallel ideas in works of Heidegger and Oakeshott, in order to develop two contrasting frameworks termed “the meditative idiom” and “the calculative idiom.” My aim is to establish how these idioms can signal sweeping and mutually exclusive frameworks or mindsets by means of which human beings approach projects generally and literary projects in particular. Heidegger and Oakeshott present their accounts of various types of thinking and idioms in reference to the experience of literature in the context of living. This thesis focuses on what occurs when a person interacts with literature through the meditative or the calculative idioms. Drawing on Susan Sontag’s essay “Against Interpretation,” I argue that when someone approaches literature with the aim of interpretation, they are working within the calculative idiom. This approach contrasts with the way events unfold in the meditative idiom or, better, the way this approach allows them to unfold and reveal themselves *of themselves*. Allowing as much is inherent to Heidegger’s concept of *aletheia* as an

“unconcealing.” In this connection I claim that the meditative idiom prevents literature from becoming vitiated through interpretation. Along with consulting Heidegger, Oakeshott and Sontag, I draw upon other philosophers in an attempt to elucidate what occurs during an interaction with literature.

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1. Introduction

Although Michael Oakeshott does not quote Martin Heidegger in his essay “The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind,” the parallels between their ideas are obvious. Indeed, the poetic idiom discussed by Oakeshott in the essay appears to draw on Heidegger’s account of meditative thinking in his “Memorial Address.” Oakeshott’s practical and *scientia* idioms also present strong similarities to Heidegger’s calculative thinking, which is also developed in his “Memorial Address.” In the following thesis, I draw on these parallel ideas in works of Heidegger and Oakeshott, in order to develop two contrasting frameworks termed “the meditative idiom” and “the calculative idiom.” My aim is to establish how these idioms can signal sweeping and mutually exclusive frameworks or mindsets by means of which human beings approach projects generally and literary projects in particular.

Heidegger and Oakeshott present their accounts of various types of thinking and idioms in reference to the experience of literature in the context of living. My efforts to combine their frameworks continue in this same vein. This thesis focuses on what occurs when a person interacts with literature through the meditative or the calculative idioms. Drawing on Susan Sontag’s essay “Against Interpretation,” I argue that when someone approaches literature with the aim of interpretation, they are working within the calculative idiom. This approach contrasts with the way events unfold in the meditative idiom or, better, the way this approach allows them to unfold and reveal themselves *of themselves*. Allowing as much is inherent to Heidegger’s concept of *aletheia* as an

“unconcealing.” In this connection I claim that the meditative idiom prevents literature from becoming vitiated through interpretation.

Along with consulting Heidegger, Oakeshott and Sontag, I draw upon other philosophers in attempt to elucidate what occurs during an interaction with literature. Noel Carroll and Jerrold Levinson’s claims about interpretative theory are presented as being fundamentally calculative. By contrast, Heidegger and Oakeshott envision interactions with literature to be meditative in order for unconcealing to be possible. It is important to remember, however, that these idioms are not only applicable to the reader’s interaction with the literature. The relation between the author and his work is also discussed. Here, too, I argue that the possibility of unconcealing requires that an author take up his writing from within the meditative idiom. This argument completes the circle between author, work, and reader, setting the stage for the conclusion. That conclusion can be stated in preliminary fashion as follows. Only by approaching literature through the meditative idiom is the *aletheic* dimension of literature possible, i.e., the dimension in which literature is revealing.

2. Analysis of: Heidegger’s meditative and calculative thinking, and Oakeshott’s poetic, practical, and *scientia* idioms

i. Heidegger’s calculative and meditative thinking in the “Memorial Address”

Poetry is often revered as an art form. Some thinkers have gone further to say that “The essence of art is poetry.”¹ But what about short stories, novels, novellas, children’s books and other types of literature, are these, too, superior to other, non-literary forms of art? Is a film a subsidiary of a novel, is sculpture a transformed children’s book? Heidegger seems to suggest in the “Memorial Address,” “Origin of the Work of Art,” and other works that the way we think about these things affects the possibility of understanding the truths disclosed by them or becoming bogged down instead in an occupation with the ends.

Before an analysis of what results from applying meditative or calculative thinking to literature, there must be a precise understanding of calculative and meditative thinking. After considering Heidegger’s dichotomy of thinking, Michael Oakeshott’s idioms in the conversation of mankind will be analyzed as well as similarities’ between the two thinkers. With a better understanding of each thinker’s claims, a move will be made to combine their similarities into two hybrid approaches. How each approach interacts with literature will be investigated in the following chapters.

In the “Memorial Address,” Heidegger begins to express a fear that humanity is witnessing the diminishing of an innate and vital part of human nature due to the rise of what he terms calculative thinking. Heidegger sees the infusion and proliferation of

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 199.

technology as a result of this calculative thinking. Heidegger describes calculative thinking as

...the calculated intention of their serving specific purposes. Thus we can count on definite results. This calculation is the mark of all thinking that plans and investigates. Such thinking remains calculation even if it neither works with numbers nor uses an adding machine or computer. Calculative thinking computes.²

For Heidegger, calculative thinking is any act that has been planned in some way. It is important to realize that the results of an act may not be the results intended, the results can be unforeseen. Examples of the latter are a scientist inventing a new deadly bird flu strand, or Dom Perignon creating champagne instead of white wine. Their ‘discoveries’ were still calculative in nature according to Heidegger because the original project was begun with a specific intention; there was a goal dominating the project. The fact that the actions led to a spontaneous result does not affect whether or not the project was enacted due to someone’s conjecturable thinking.

This is the crux of calculative thinking. It may best be understood as thought motivated by conjecture, a statement, or viewpoint that one holds to be true based on past evidence or evidence to be gathered. An act is engendered with a certain end in mind, whether or not the end that was originally intended comes to fruition is irrelevant. What is significant is that when a person began pondering a topic they did so in order to accomplish something. It is important to realize that Heidegger often attempts to point out technologies’ evil, especially contrasted to the greatness of Kreutzer³ in his speech.

² Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), 46.

³ Kreutzer was a German composer who lived from 1780-1849. Heidegger delivered the “Memorial Address” in celebration of the 100th anniversary of his death.

Heidegger returns again and again to the idea that Kreutzer, when creating, was enacting his humanity. Such enactment is the direct opposite of acting in what Heidegger describes as a calculative way.

This could be viewed as a twist on Machiavelli's question of whether or not the ends justify the means. According to Heidegger, if the means exist solely for an end then the action or thought process is calculative in nature. For example, consider something like representational art. Heidegger discusses how an artist imitating another by attempting to reproduce a masterwork, such as the "Last Supper," has failed to create a strife of earth and world. Instead, because the painting of the duplicate was intended simply to sell to a collector, or maybe to present at a home, then the piece was created calculatively and fails to be great artwork that the DaVinci's Last Supper is.

Richard Palmer in his influential book *Hermeneutics* discusses the idea of calculative thinking in Heidegger, along with his influence on, and similarities with other philosophers. Palmer's book is an attempt to outline a more precise definition of hermeneutics, specifically what is meant by understanding through hermeneutics. In doing this he often discusses an object-subject schema. Palmer claims that this object-subject schema is challenged by the influential hermeneutics contributors including Heidegger, Dilthey, and Gadamer. Dilthey and Gadamer's similar approach to the object-subject schema may help provide a better understanding of Heidegger's calculative and meditative thinking.

As stated, Heidegger sees calculative thinking as a mindset by which a person approaches a project motivated by an end. This becomes problematic because such an

approach vitiates a person's ability to unconceal, or, better, detect and respond to the unconcealing of the truth.⁴ Palmer discusses Gadamer's similar sentiment when he considers his work *Truth and Method*. Palmer writes "...the title of Gadamer's book contains an irony: method is not the way to truth. On the contrary, truth eludes the methodical man."⁵ Gadamer and Palmer are sharing Heidegger's worry. The methodical man, Palmer goes on to explain, fails to experience being because of his subjective approach. Similar to Heidegger, Palmer takes Gadamer to be saying that if a person measures a situation then he cannot understand the experience. What Heidegger's meditative thinking represents, Palmer sees as hermeneutical understanding. Both describe ways of experiencing an unconcealing of being.

In the "Memorial Address" Heidegger fails to give an explicit definition of meditative thinking. However, his articulate definition of calculative thinking suggests that meditative thinking is not characterized by any of those qualities. As Heidegger ends his speech he gives evidence for this inference, while also conferring the unique characteristic of humanity. Heidegger remarks

... the approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle, and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced *as the only* way of thinking... And then? Then man would have denied and thrown away his own special nature - that he is a meditative being.⁶

First, Heidegger claims that a collapse of human's "special nature" into calculative thinking would dispose of humanity's nature, its meditateness. This assertion, "...calculative thinking may some day be accepted and practiced as *the only way* of

⁴ Truth here should be understood as aletheic unconcealing.

⁵ Richard Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 163.

⁶ Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 56.

thinking...man would have denied and thrown away his... meditative being”⁷ indicates that if something qualifies as calculative thinking, it is disqualified as meditative thinking. Or, if something⁸ is meditative thinking, then it cannot be calculative thinking. Heidegger’s wording implies that calculative thinking and meditative thinking are mutually exclusive, and all encompassing.⁹ Hence, when he says that meditative thinking would be lost if calculative thinking becomes the only way of thinking, he does not mention any other type of thinking that would be missed.

The second idea Heidegger shares is his belief of the uniqueness of human nature. Most important about his uniqueness claim, is his stating that this distinctive nature is interlinked with meditative thinking. In light of Heidegger’s claim that meditative thinking is the distinguishing attribute of humanity, it may prove helpful to consider other texts where he discusses the distinctness of humanity and to use this information to understand meditative thinking. Palmer discusses some of Heidegger’s dialogue of humanity’s uniqueness in the “Introduction to Metaphysics.” Palmer writes: “The essence of man’s being-in-the world is precisely the hermeneutical process of questioning, a kind of questioning which in its true form reaches into unmanifest

⁷ Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 56.

⁸ The word ‘something,’ should be understood as encapsulating both projects and more importantly the framework, outlook, *gestalt*, or worldview that a person approaches their project. This framework, outlook, *gestalt*, or worldview will be an important aspect of being able to differentiate meditative from calculative.

⁹ By mutually exclusive and all encompassing I mean that ‘thinking’ can either be calculative or meditative in nature and that there are only these two options. I also understand Heidegger to be saying that if ‘thinking’ is meditative it cannot be calculative, and if ‘thinking’ is calculative it can not be construed as meditative.

being...”¹⁰ Palmer here gives a clue as to what meditative thinking may result in, namely, access to unmanifest being. Palmer’s use of questioning, also will help shape the understanding of meditative thinking.

As Heidegger’s first discussed quote (1966, 46) suggests, and buttressed by his second discussed quote (1966, 56), meditative thinking appears to be defined negatively in the “Memorial Address.” From the “Memorial Address” it is clear that meditative thinking should be construed as thinking absent of planning and investigating. It is characterized by an openness to events. Meditative thinking does not plan a project in hopes of causing certain reactions; instead it should be understood as a responsive openness. Palmer draws a similar conclusion concerning Heidegger’s thought:

Yet the impact of technological thinking is more subtle and pervasive than this, for gradually we have come to consider thinking itself in terms of mastery.

Thought becomes technological, shaped to the requirements of concepts and ideas that will give control over objects and experience. Thinking is no longer a matter of open responsiveness to the world but of restless efforts to master it.¹¹

Meditative thinking, human’s unique nature, is an ability to be open to an unconcealing.

Calculative thinking—or methodical according to Gadamer, technological thinking in Palmer’s words—is a threat to this distinctly human ability. In Heidegger’s discussion of art he provides palpable evidence of this distinction and the effects losing it may have.

ii. Meditative thinking’s relation to unconcealing in artwork

In “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger discusses a few examples of what he considers to be great art. These examples of great art also serve as outlines of what it

¹⁰ Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 150.

¹¹ Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 146.

is to think meditatively about an object. One example discussed by Heidegger is a Van Gogh painting of peasant shoes. Using Van Gogh's painting, Heidegger first points out that the power of great art does not come from being an accurate, realistic representation of an object. Instead, Heidegger claims, "The picture that shows the peasant shoes, the poem that says the Roman fountain, do not simply make manifest what these isolated beings as such are – if indeed they manifest anything at all; rather, they make unconcealment as such happen in regard to beings as a whole."¹² Heidegger here and in the following sections claims that Van Gogh's painting does not represent a pair of shoes, but rather reveals the Being exhibited by those shoes to other beings through the painting's evocation of world.¹³ This insight is dependent on Heidegger's use of the term 'unconcealment.'

Heidegger finds that artwork explicates Being in three ways. One example of artwork illuminating Being is through the presentation of world, but presentation, does not capture the event Heidegger aims to describe. This may be why Heidegger uses the word "unconcealment." For Heidegger, a great artwork is able to elicit an unconcealment of a world. Lee Braver writes: "Van Gogh's painting is an occurrence of truth or, as Heidegger likes to translate the Greek work '*aletheia*,' unconcealment, by revealing a particular being in its mode of Being, i.e. the way it is."¹⁴ This unconcealment of Being, is only possible through an approach founded in meditative thinking. Returning to the

¹² Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 181.

¹³ 'Being' here should be understood in light of Heideggerian terminology intimately related to a *dasein*'s being-in-the-world, and world.

¹⁴ Lee Braver, *Heidegger's Later Writings* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Press, 2009), 45.

“Memorial Address,” if Kreutzer were to take a calculative approach then he would not have relayed an unconcealing. Instead he would have been communicating facts about an experience. This holds true for Van Gogh as well. The fact that he is allowing, instead of relaying is critical.

Consider the distinction between great art and representational art for Heidegger. Heidegger holds that representational art is calculative art. It is made according to a plan; it aims to spark a certain reaction. Great art, however, relies on a meditative openness for its creation and convection, the artist wants to express, but he is not trying to express.

Heidegger writes:

But the artist’s most peculiar intention already aims in this direction. The work is to be released by the artist to its pure self-subsistence. It is precisely in great art...that the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge.¹⁵

The artist does not venture to create a message, but instead the artist simply initiates, he opens. For unconcealment of Being in art, the viewer must take this same meditative approach. The viewer must have an openness, he cannot partake calculatedly, the viewer must not try to plan or educe in himself a reaction. With this meditative openness, the viewer then has the opportunity to become apart of the unconcealment, and partake in the portrayed being’s Being. Palmer reads Heidegger in this same vein. Palmer writes:

“Interpretation of a great work is not an antiquarian exercise, nor is it the effort...to take the Greeks as a model of how to live. It is, rather, a repetition and retrieval of the original event of disclosure.”¹⁶ Similarly, he adds: “The essence of art, then, lies not in mere

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 165-166.

¹⁶ Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 147.

craftsmanship but in disclosure.”¹⁷ It is this dynamic that must be considered, and extended to a reader’s experience with literature; a dynamic also found in the work of Michael Oakeshott.

iii. Michael Oakeshott’s poetic, practical, and *scientia* idioms from “The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind.”

In his essay “The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind,” Michael Oakeshott introduces some of his aesthetic views, utilizing the conversation as a framework. Oakeshott presents the conversation of mankind as consisting of three unique idioms, practical, *scientia*, and poetic. Oakeshott’s poetic idiom closely parallels Heidegger’s meditative thinking and its leading to an unconcealment. Oakeshott’s *scientia* and poetic idioms on the other end recall Heidegger’s calculative thinking.

Oakeshott’s inclusion of the words “Conversation of Mankind” in the essay title, along with other key statements, focuses the importance that the idioms should be interpreted in terms of a conversation. Oakeshott writes: “In a conversation the participants are not engaged in an inquiry or debate...Conversation is not an enterprise designed to yield an extrinsic profit...it is an unrehearsed intellectual adventure.”¹⁸ These words seem to echo Heidegger in his “Memorial Address.” Oakeshott states, “... the participants are not engaged in an inquiry or debate...” an ideal that strongly resembles Heidegger’s forewarned avoidance of calculative thinking, which he claimed was

¹⁷ Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 160.

¹⁸ Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and other essays* (New York: Liberty Fund, 1962), 489-490.

characterized by planning or investigating. However, unlike Heidegger, Oakeshott does not explicitly state that he is suspicious of such thought.

Oakeshott instead categorizes activities spurring from calculative thinking into his *scientia* and practical idioms. Oakeshott writes: “As I understand it, the excellence of this conversation springs from a tension between seriousness and playfulness. . . . As with children, who are great conversationalists, the playfulness is serious and the seriousness in the end is only play.”¹⁹ This quote, which aggrandizes children’s conversations to the level of exemplar, hints that a conversation should not be aiming towards a goal, or an end, as children’s conversations rarely do. Instead, a conversation with a child is stimulated by perpetual perplexity. The child is always open to the world, always eager to ask: why? The child (understood as the paradigmatic conversationalist) again recalls Heidegger’s “Memorial Address,” specifically the openness of meditative thinking.

Elizabeth Campbell Corey has written an interesting book titled, Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics. In her book Corey takes a closer look at Oakeshott’s work and she is perspicacious in the development in some of his ideas. As she considers Oakeshott’s essay “The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind,” Corey also sees Oakeshott as belittling calculative thought, or in Oakeshott’s terms, the practical and *scientia* idioms. Corey holds

In short, Oakeshott’s view is this: that practice is unavoidably dominant in human life, for we cannot help but be concerned with our survival and happiness in a mortal world. But the dominance of practice does not prove its superiority, for

¹⁹ Ibid., 493.

there are activities that supersede practice and promise a sense of completeness that practice cannot.²⁰

In her understanding of Oakeshott, Corey reads Oakeshott as claiming that the practical idiom, although at times more prominent, is not the idiom or worldview that humans should take. Corey continues, “What are these things that stand opposite practice? They are activities pursued for no extrinsic purpose, ‘ends in themselves,’ things that possess self-sufficiency and a kind of permanence.”²¹ These activities that Corey sees as standing opposite to practice occur through the poetic idiom.

It is clear that Oakeshott emphatically differentiates the poetic idiom from his idioms of *scientia* and practical. One of the largest differences he points out is that the poetic idiom does not partake in the world of facticity. That is, the poetic idiom is supposed to be a kind of openness, one that does not depend on materiality for its meaning. Oakeshott writes:

... in poetry there is no room for stereotypical images. ... The enemies of poetic imagining in music and dancing are symbolic sounds and movements; the plastic arts emerge only when the symbolism of shapes is forgotten; and the symbolic language of practical activity offers a strong and continuous resistance to the appearance of poetry.²²

For Oakeshott, symbolism is a mark of infatuation with fact and non-fact. He is adamant that such things are not a component of the poetic voice. Instead, he proposes the poetic idiom to speak through images, a contemplation or delight in images.

Oakeshott holds that these images should inspire an individual wonder, but he is careful to distinguish contemplative wonder from the curiosity of *scientia*. His defense of

²⁰ Elizabeth Campbell Corey, *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 59.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

²² Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 528- 529.

the difference again resembles Heidegger's observations. *Scientia's* curiosity, he explains, immediately turns to investigating, augmented through symbolic meaning. Contemplative wonder, however, is only possible through an openness to the images; by the viewer not attempting to extract a meaning from them. Oakeshott explains that "...poetry appears when imagining is contemplative imagining; that is, when images are not recognized either as fact or as non-fact, when they do not provoke either moral approval or disapproval, when they are not read as symbols, or as causes, effects, or means to ulterior ends..."²³ Oakeshott and Heidegger's use of synonyms, meditative and contemplative, when describing their views is more evidence for the commonalities. The quote specifically recalls the unconcealment that can occur through the meditative approach.

Corey spends a large portion of her book discussing this essay. She sees it as a vital piece in fully understanding Oakeshott's overarching ideas. When she reviews Oakeshott's remarks on contemplating or delighting, she explains that for Oakeshott "The image that provokes contemplation is not to be 'used,' but apprehended. And in apprehending an image, a self takes no thought for what has come before or what will come after."²⁴ This explanation of contemplating through the poetic idiom could be similarly used as an outline for meditative thinking. Corey's language of apprehending an image, by a self who heeds no thought to the future or from the past would seem to fit perfectly into Heidegger's idea of the unconcealing resulting from meditative thinking.

²³ Ibid., 517.

²⁴ Corey, *Michael Oakeshott*, 115.

iv. Similarities between Oakeshott's poetic idiom and Heidegger's meditative thinking

As Oakeshott concludes his essay, he elaborates on the poetic voice where the parallels to Heidegger continue to materialize. For example, "But, as I understand it, a poetic utterance (a work of art) is not the 'expression' of an experience, it *is* the experience and the only one there is."²⁵ Oakeshott berates that the poet does not plan out an experience, but instead just opens. He is obstinate in his belief that the poet does not express himself, but rather "... imagines poetically."²⁶ This imagining poetically goes back to his idea of poetry via contemplation. Oakeshott is portraying that the poet does not imbue his work with symbolism, symbolism here indicating an entrance to the world of facts and non-facts. Instead, the poet opens, his poetic work is his experience, in Heidegger's terminology, it is his and only his world.

As the poet transcribes his experience, his world, onto his poetic canvas, the viewer must then approach the work within the poetic idiom, or for Heidegger, by thinking meditatively. If the viewer fails to do this, then he misses the poetic image, and instead is absorbed into the practical or *scientia* idioms. Oakeshott explains:

Shakespeare's 'view of life' may appear to us profound,... we seem, by considering it, to have drawn the voice of poetry into the conversation and given it a place it would otherwise be without. But it is an illusion; we have caught merely what is unpoetic...the poetic image itself has slipped through our net and escaped into its proper element.²⁷

The ambiguous nature of this quote has allowed for a general misunderstanding of

Oakeshott's view.²⁸ The misinterpretation is due to the ambiguous term "view of life."

²⁵ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 525.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 525.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 536.

Based on the surrounding text, what Oakeshott should be read as saying is that if one reads Shakespeare's work as a planned memorandum from him, then one has committed the error that Oakeshott discusses above. Shakespeare is not giving an "expression" to elucidate his "view of life." Rather, Shakespeare is offering his experience²⁹, or in Heidegger's term, his world. Shakespeare's plays, if approached within the poetic idiom or through meditative thinking allows for unconcealment of his world, just as Van Gogh's peasant shoes revealed the world of the peasant. Heidegger's Being is what Oakeshott finds at the center of poetry.

Consider again his statement "But, as I understand it, a poetic utterance (a work of art) is not the 'expression' of an experience, it *is* the experience and the only one there is."³⁰ David Halliburton sees Heidegger as making a similar claim in his understanding of Greek Tragedy. In Halliburton's book *Poetic Thinking* he explores Heidegger's idea "Art as Origin" in his second chapter. Halliburton remarks, "What happens in Greek tragedy is not the representation of a struggle but an actual struggle: it is a people acting

²⁸ Corey agrees that Oakeshott is not always read generously. She writes in her introduction:

...I am concerned with relating text to "context," which is the whole of Oakeshott's thought...[since] to neglect context is at least partially to misunderstand Oakeshott.... Most of the commentators I quoted at the beginning of this introduction have done precisely this. Their interpretations of Oakeshott are partial, incomplete, and sometimes blatantly biased.... (Corey, *Michael Oakeshott*, 7).

²⁹ The word 'experience' should not be taken to refer to Shakespeare's literal experience. What is meant by 'experience' is his understanding and encounters of life, akin to Heidegger's world of a Dasein. Oakeshott demarcates this differentiation in his essay with italicizing and well-placed emphasis. For example: "But, as I understand it, a poetic utterance (a work of art) is not the 'expression' of an experience, it *is* the experience and the only one there is" (Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 525).

³⁰ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 525.

through the capacitation of saying and through the mode of preserving that the work in words enables.”³¹ Oakeshott’s understanding of Shakespeare’s work through poetic idiom as being his actual experience, his world, aligns with Heidegger’s account of the strife of world and earth, caused by a meditative approach to art, and, hence, too, with Halliburton’s example of Greek tragedy.

A careful reader may feel a distinction between the two ideas. Heidegger claims that the artwork’s world is what allows for unconcealment into Being, while Oakeshott is saying Being is in the poetry. However, it is important to notice Oakeshott’s use of the term ‘poetic utterance’ and his description of a poetic voice in the conversation of mankind. One should also remember his reference to children as great conversationalists. In fact, Oakeshott elaborates on this point later in his essay.

And again, the recollections of childhood may constitute the connection sought. Everybody’s young days are a dream, a delightful insanity, a miraculous confusion of poetry and practical activity... “Fact’ and ‘not-fact’ are still indistinct. ... And to speak is to make images. ... And however immersed we may become in practical or scientific enterprise, anybody who recollects the confusion it was to be young will have a ready ear for the voice of poetry.³²

From this quote and the quintessential character of the child’s conversation, it seems clear that it is the delightful openness that a child embodies that Oakeshott is after. Oakeshott is attempting to emphasize their openness, the child’s ability to take in the other’s voice, to take in their Being. From the fact that the poetry is only possible in conversation, via the poetic voice, it becomes clear that Oakeshott too sees art as a communication of a being’s Being to another. Oakeshott concludes his essay with just this sentiment: “To

³¹ David Halliburton, *Poetic Thinking An Approach to Heidegger* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 55.

³² Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 539.

listen to the voice of poetry is to enjoy, not a victory, but a momentary release, a brief enchantment.”³³ This release where a being’s experience as it *is*, is taken in by another, is what a reader should be after when engaging literature in general, not just poetry.

With the help of Heidegger and Oakeshott, it has been shown that poetry, or works of art, rely on humanity’s openness. For Heidegger, this occurs through the unconcealment of Being through a world. Heidegger stresses the importance (“Origin of the Work of Art,” Memorial Address”) that the unconcealment is only possible through a meditative approach from both the viewer, and artist. If the artist does not create meditatively, the artwork will not be artwork, but instead representational art or another type of calculative announcement. The viewer too must absorb the art with a meditative openness or risk succumbing to calculative thought. In Oakeshottian language, talking in the poetic idiom is an expression of the experience of the artist. However, here, too, the artist must not try to express himself, but instead he must simply open himself up to things. As the poetic remark becomes a part of the conversation, a poetic utterance in the poetic idiom, there becomes a revelatory communication of the poet’s *existence*, of his Being. Again the interlocutor must be open to the poetic idiom, or risk interpreting the poetic utterance as a message of experience, as a practical or *scientia* communication.

With a basic outline of Heidegger’s two types of thinking, and Oakeshott’s three idioms, it is now possible to begin to simplify them into two different outlooks. One of these outlooks will be categorized with attributes from Heidegger’s calculative thinking and Oakeshott’s practical and *scientia* idioms. The opposing one will be a hybrid of

³³ Ibid., 541.

Heidegger's meditative thinking and Oakeshott's poetic idiom. For ease of reference our first outlook will be denoted the calculative idiom, while the second will be the meditative idiom.³⁴ The following two chapters will present each hybrid idiom along with the result of its employment when approaching literature.

³⁴ These terms have been chosen straightforwardly, but it should be recognized that the fact that they are idioms should not imply that I am accepting Oakeshott's conversation. Instead, the calculative idiom and meditative idiom should be seen as the framework, outlook, *gestalt*, or worldview mentioned in footnote 3. In simplest terms, they are two differing states a person can maintain which will affect their thought processes.

3. The Calculative Idiom and Its Effect on Reading Literature

i. Introduction to the calculative idiom

Michael Oakeshott's practical and *scientia idioms* and Martin Heidegger's calculative thinking have been shown to have considerable similarities. These ideas can be combined into what I dub "the calculative idiom." Drawing on Oakeshott's imagery of human life as conversation, I understand the calculative idiom as the frame of mind, or worldview, with which a person attends a conversation. However, the calculative idiom should not be understood as something used only in communicative interactions with others. The calculative idiom should be recognized as the frame of mind that a person brings to any activity. When a person is partaking in the calculative idiom their framework is goal-oriented.

This worldview is applicable to all human tasks, not just a conversation or an approach to an artwork. As Heidegger states,

This calculation is the mark of all thinking that plans and investigates. Such thinking remains calculation even if it neither works with numbers nor uses an adding machine or computer. Calculative thinking computes.³⁵

A person will know they are within the calculative idiom when the projects they undertake are focused on the end result. Again consider Heidegger's observation that this sort of thinking takes conditions into account with "...the calculated intention of their serving specific purposes. Thus we can count on definite results."³⁶ For an elementary example, consider a person who goes for a run. If the person prepares for their run by

³⁵ Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 46.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

planning a route, estimating how long their course will take, and projecting a goal speed to maintain, their run has become a project resulting from the calculative idiom.

This may seem like a trivial task, but the contrast between a training run and a run for running's sake is palpable. A training run takes planning, there exists a goal the person is aiming for, they have an end in mind; perhaps they are training for a marathon. No matter what the goal, they will have definite results at the conclusion of their run. Another person may simply roll out of bed and decide, "I want to go for a jog." While the person who has a specific time to be under may be angry at the woman walking her dog too slowly as they block the sidewalk, the runner who runs for running's sake may acknowledge the woman, or admire her dog. This elementary example provides a foundation for grasping the difference between the calculative idiom and meditative idiom. The calculative idiom represents a focused undertaking, a project enacted according to a framework. The meditative idiom, however, is understood as a mindset in which a project is begun with no end in mind. The person then is open throughout the happening of the project.

ii. Development of the calculative idiom

Drawing from the jogger example, it is clear that partaking in the calculative idiom signifies a mindset, worldview, framework or outlook.³⁷ That the calculative

³⁷ The terms mindset, worldview, framework or outlook should be understood as referencing a frame of mind. These terms should be read in the same light as framework, outlook, *gestalt*, or worldview in the previous chapter and discussed in footnotes three and eight. An analogy to help illustrate what is meant can be developed from Cartesian coordinates, polar coordinators, and spherical coordinate systems. Depending on the

idiom is a mindset, is the first of four fundamental aspects of the calculative idiom. The most important part of this first characteristic is that if a person is within the calculative idiom, they judge their past actions and decide their future actions by considering the results and anticipated results. A person who acts within the calculative idiom is not letting their actions free-flow. Instead, they will contemplate, measure, compute, gauge, and then decide their next action. All of this thought that goes into a person's next action, whether the thought is as simple as planning a jogging route, or as complicated as trying to decide why Mozart used a b flat instead of a c sharp in a particular measure, indicates the person is working inside the complex of measuring their actions in terms of reaching an anticipated outcome.

The second characteristic of the calculative idiom is connected to, but subtly different from the first qualification. The first characteristic of the calculative idiom identifies a person as being in a computing mindset, acting in such a way that the person's actions, no matter how trivial or complex, convoluted or straightforward, are being enacted in hopes of provoking a certain tangible result. It is important to understand, however, that the calculative idiom provides not only a result, but a result that is constantly measured against the original goal.³⁸ It is clear that it would be impossible for a human to act without some intention. Even the jogger who rolls out of

coordinate system one performs mathematical calculations in will affect the approach and answer to a problem. The framework, outlook, *gestalt*, or worldview would be analogous to the coordinate system a mathematician is operating in.

³⁸ This becomes important, as the counter argument could be made that the meditative idiom also has a result. The difference, however, is that the calculative idiom measures its result in terms of the calculative world. The meditative, however, results in a disclosing, an unconcealing of truth, which is immeasurable.

bed and decides to run must have made that decision to run based on some motivation. However, having a motivation does not mean he is running calculatively. Rather, the person who partakes in the calculative idiom acts in such a way that they are constantly measuring each iteration of time against their goal outcome. As they are doing these computations they may adjust their course of action, or their goal. But, nonetheless, the means by which they hope to achieve their goal are catered in hopes of this end and adjusted throughout the project according to these hopes.

Building on the first and second qualifications, the third property of calculative thinking concentrates on the actions and result. As the second indicator of the calculative idiom makes clear, actions are measured in terms of the result. It is important to understand that the fact that a result from certain actions may be unexpected does not mean one has left the calculative idiom. By simply making an analysis that issues in the conclusion “this was unexpected,” it is clear that the person is still thinking calculatively. They are measuring their actions against the originally envisioned result, and putting their project in a new context, but still a computational context. Spontaneous results do not indicate a project in the meditative idiom. Instead, the realization that results were unexpected, and the fact that the original project was engendered with a certain goal in mind make clear that the person’s frame of mind remained in the calculative idiom.

These three aspects of the calculative idiom elucidate the fourth significant facet of the calculative idiom. This final piece is the inability for a person partaking in the calculative idiom to absorb the *aletheic* dimension of art, and life. As described above, the calculative idiom involves a somewhat tunneled view. When a person is focused on

the end of their project, and methodically enacting the means to reach their end, they miss the opportunity to absorb or in Corey's terms, "apprehend." Each action taken by someone within the calculative idiom is focused on the next action so that they can eventually reach their result. But even when they do reach their results, there is only qualified disclosing.³⁹ The qualified disclosure results out of two reasons. First, they have completed their project with a focused view leading them to only have taken in those matters that were pertinent to the means of achieving their goal. *Aletheia* is not specific to a cause, instead it is a disclosing of Being. Being cannot be an end, nor is it a means. Therefore, when the person reaches their calculated end, they may grow, but their growth will be an expected growth. It would necessarily be a growth they perceived, or had desired. Their growth is not due to disclosure of a world. The second reason for qualified disclosure is that they are stuck in their own world. *Aletheia* occurs through a conversion of world, of Being. Moreover, the Being that is communicated affects a person's being-in-the-world. When a person is measuring each action in order to achieve, they reach a pseudo-truth⁴⁰. They do not achieve truth.

It seems to be the case that when a person picks up a piece of literature, whether it be a novel, short story collection, poem, or play, there is a strong tendency to take the piece in through the calculative idiom. This could possibly be traced back to childhood

³⁹ Qualified disclosing embodies the idea that the disclosing from calculative projects is predetermined as explained in the following lines. Any disclosure that may occur outside of the predetermined is discounted, ignored, or missed.

⁴⁰ The term 'pseudo-truth' is meant to embody the idea that the person has reached what they believe to be a meaningful ending to their project. However, there is no disclosure, there is no truth, nothing arises that will affect their being-in-the-world. Instead, their achievement provides them with a momentary fulfillment, but only in terms of their project. The result is unsubstantial to their being-in-the-world.

where one is generally taught cultural customs through stories. Teachers often ask their elementary students, “What was the moral of the story?” Even up into high school English teachers ask students to write papers on what they take as a book, story, or poem’s theme, where the theme is generally understood as the author’s view of the world. However, going back to the interpretive error discussed in the previous chapter in regards to Oakeshott’s discussion of Shakespeare, here too the theme is often understood calculatively. Instead of students being asked what they understand the piece of work communicating, they are asked what agenda they see the author attempting to inform them of.

This tendency, to find a moral of the story, is also evident in literary criticism, advanced learning literature classes and some philosophy of literature classes. The focus of persons in these fields often revolves around a certain interpretation of a work. However, many of these critics, professors, and philosophers fail to recognize that by searching for an interpretation they have vitiated the piece of literature. Susan Sontag in her essay “Against Interpretation” discusses this shift in the approach to art in general, along with literature.

iii. Susan Sontag’s criticism of interpretation and its influence on interpretation as a calculative project

Sontag understands art to be made up of two components, content and form. Sontag contends that art in her time is no longer understood as both of these, instead she sees an emphasis placed on content. This emphasis on content, she claims, is evident

through the supposed importance and requirement of interpretation. Sontag writes, “What the overemphasis on the idea of content entails is the perennial, never consummated project of interpretation.”⁴¹ She later continues, “By interpretation, I mean here a conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, certain ‘rules’ of interpretation.”⁴² Sontag’s phrasing of how she views interpretation strongly resembles the sort of calculative project that I described above. Her understanding of interpretation as being a conscious goal-oriented act of the mind, following certain rules, is another way of saying interpretation is a project undertaken within the calculative idiom as the person concentrates on their desired end, taking close care to mind their means.

Sontag’s essay continues on this point and attempts to subvert the reverence for interpretation. Her assailment serves as a prime illustration of the proliferation of the calculative idiom in the field of art, and specifically literature. Much of Sontag’s essay draws strong parallels to Heidegger, including her use of the word ‘world.’ Sontag writes “To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world—in order to set up a shadow world of ‘meanings.’ It is to turn *the* world into *this* world.”⁴³ Sontag’s use of world, however, is more closely related to the idea of a sensory world. What Sontag claims is that interpretation places pieces of art, specifically fiction and drama,⁴⁴ into a world where their content becomes a commodity. This commoditization results in a vitiating of

⁴¹ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: H. Wolff, 1969), 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁴ “Interpretation runs rampant here in those arts with a feeble and negligible avant-garde: fiction and the drama” (Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 10).

their possible artistic identity. “Interpretation, based on the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content, violates art. It makes art into an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories.”⁴⁵ Sontag is claiming that interpretation of literature, and art in general, is a project from within the calculative idiom.

Sontag goes on to provide a basic outline for the argument that interpretation of literature vitiates the artistic element that it should be understood as possessing. It is worth noting that my goal in this thesis is to show that literature should be approached through the meditative idiom. More importantly, that unconcealing of being will only occur if the meditative idiom is the de facto framework that a person reading a piece of literature takes. We started this paper by questioning why poetry is often understood in the meditative idiom while other forms of literature are not. Sontag makes a similar point when she writes about the extent to which “...novels and plays (in America), unlike poetry and painting and music ... remain prone to assault by interpretation.”⁴⁶ Sontag and I are not claiming that approaching a project through the calculative idiom signifies a useless project. As Sontag hints at, and as discussed above, the calculative idiom does not disallow the possibility of learning or experiencing, or thinking. Instead, the claim is that reading through the calculative idiom results in a measured expected experience, a qualified disclosure. It does not allow for an unconcealing of truth, or placate the impulse to wonder why. This *aletheic* dimension, recognized in other art forms, can be seen in literature other than poetry, if the meditative idiom is utilized.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 11.

iv. How interpretation theories are inherently within the calculative idiom

Sontag's view may be an unfair treatment of interpretation. Gary Iseminger has put together *Intention and Interpretation*, a collection of essays that asks what it means to interpret while also explicating theories of interpretation. In the collection two essays stand out as being most applicable to the present issue. The first is Noel Carroll's "Art, Intention and Conversation," and the second is Jerrold Levinson's "Intention and Interpretation: A Last Look." Carroll attempts to answer the question of how much of an effect an author's intention should have on the understanding of a piece of work. Levinson's essay highlights and elucidates what he feels are the strongest arguments presented in the rest of the work, which he then forms into what he calls "hypothetical intentionalism."

Noel Carroll's essay, "Art, Intention, and Conversation" aims to undermine anti-intentionalist arguments. Carroll begins by explaining that an intentionalist understands the meaning of a piece of literature to be strictly dependent on what the author had intended to convey. In other words, when reading a piece of literature, a person only interprets correctly if the meaning he draws from the work is the meaning the author had intended to convey. This strict intentionalist approach to literature aligns with Sontag's view of interpretation. The intentionalist sees literature as a medium of communication between the author and the reader. Or in Sontag's language, the author plans to convey a content, the reader reads in hopes of receiving this content. It becomes unequivocal that strict intentionalism is a calculative approach to literature. An author writes because he

has the goal of spreading a message, while a reader reads, in order to consume the message. However, the intentionalism that Carroll suggests is not strict intentionalism.

Unlike strict intentionalists, Carroll believes an author's biographical information—upbringing, personal experiences, education, etc.—are useful tools to help interpret a piece of literature. Where Carroll breaks from stricter forms of intentionalism is his feeling that a reader should contribute her own knowledge in order to extract an author's intention from a piece of literature or work of art. This leads Carroll to view interpretation as a kind of conversation. For Carroll, the purpose of literature and artwork is to allow for an aesthetic experience.

The term 'aesthetic experience' may seem to imbue a meditative tone in Carroll's claim. However, instead Carroll falls prey to a trap Oakeshott had forewarned about. Carroll's conversation is what Oakeshott would describe as the practical idiom, earmarking the more general calculative idiom. Carroll writes:

But aesthetic satisfaction is not the only major source of value that we have in interacting with artworks; the interaction is also a matter of a conversation between the artist and us—a human encounter—in which we have a desire to know what the artist intends, not only out of respect for the artist, but also because we have a personal interest in being a capable respondent.⁴⁷

Earlier in the chapter Carroll maintains that anti-intentionalists claim that when taking in an artwork or piece of literature the person should concentrate on an aesthetic satisfaction. However, he does little to illuminate what is meant by this term, and in fact claims that the anti-intentionalists, too, do not elucidate what they understand aesthetic experience to mean. Carroll then goes on to argue that this aesthetic satisfaction should

⁴⁷ Gary Iseminger, *Intention & Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 122.

be superseded by a conversation like aesthetic experience. Carroll believes that when reading a piece of literature or taking in a film, the viewer should use his own knowledge and some of his experience to help interpret the author's work.

Carroll is claiming, as reflected in the quote above, that the aesthetic experience reaches its apex when the reader is able to engage the author in a knowledgeable conversation. This type of experience, although bearing descriptions such as encounter, conversation, and interaction, is still a project performed through the calculative idiom. To help disambiguate the distinction, consider Oakeshott as he writes, "In the common relationships of practical activity—those of producer and consumer, master and servant, principal and assistant—each participant seeks some service or recompense for service..."⁴⁸ As Oakeshott observes, the calculative idiom contains those relationships that are formed in order to achieve a goal, a means to accomplish a service. In light of this observation, consider Carroll's remark that "...the *interaction* is also a matter of a conversation between the artist and us...we have a *desire to know* what the artist *intends*, not only out of respect for the artist, but also because *we have a personal interest* in being a *capable respondent*" (emphasis added). In this remark, Carroll appears to have just this type of calculated bartering partnership in mind. In Sontag's terms, Carroll's interpretation theory claims that the content of the literature is supposed to be the focus of the reader, even if the reader is expected to have a knowledge or response to the content.

It is important to note that although Carroll has attempted to move away from a strict intentionalist approach—an approach where the reader has the undeniably

⁴⁸ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 537.

calculative responsibility to evaluate and extract the author's intention from a work—his aesthetic experience is still a project within the calculative idiom. Carroll sees interpretation not as unearthing the author's intention, but rather being able to understand and respond to the author's intention or what he intended his intention to be.⁴⁹ Now that it has been shown that Carroll's intentionalist interpretation is within the calculative idiom, let us turn to Jerrold Levinson's hypothetical intentionalism and see if his theory of interpretation distinguishes itself from Sontag's portrait of interpretation as focusing on content and disregarding form.

In Jerrold Levinson's essay, "Intention and Interpretation: A Last Look," Levinson presents an overview of the book's preceding essays. In the midst of presenting this overview, Levinson also develops his own view on interpretation theory. Levinson attempts to synthesize what he sees as the strong points from intentionalism and anti-intentionalism into his hypothetical intentionalism. Levinson's theory, due to its hybrid nature, will allow for a final judgment on whether or not Sontag's view, that interpretation theory is marred by the calculative idiom, is true.

Levinson begins his essay explaining that hypothetical intentionalism differs more so from intentionalism than anti-intentionalist theories. Levinson describes hypothetical intentionalism as "... logically and importantly different from the actual intentionalism... while distinct from the sort of anti-intentionalism that Nathan is a

⁴⁹ The addition of 'the intention the author intended to intend' is necessary because Carroll does not claim that the piece of literature the author creates always contains the author's entire intention. Instead, Carroll sees the biographical information of the author as an important supplement to understanding an author's intention. Still, the reader according to this method of interpretation is partaking in the calculative idiom even though he is synthesizing his background knowledge with the piece of work.

proponent—though approaching the latter taken at its most comprehensively contextual.”⁵⁰ The main cause for the distinction from intentionalism, both strict and Carroll’s more relaxed intentionalism, is that the meaning of a text is not strictly dependent on an author’s intention or what the author may have subconsciously intended. Levinson believes that biographical information, an author’s additional works, the historic time frame it was written, along with the reader’s own position in the world affect the meaning of a work.

Hypothetical intentionalism’s belief that a reader can imbue a piece of literature with meaning other than what the author intends is a fundamental break from intentionalism; a fracture which develops out of anti-intentionalist theories. Levinson explains:

Let us assume that the core meaning of a literary work is...what a text says in an author-specific context of presentation to an appropriate, or suitable backgrounded, reader. Even if we agree that such meaning is given by a reader’s best projection-in-context of what its author intended to mean, this still seems to leave aspects...of what is said in a work...beyond that. There are, it can be fairly held, unenvisaged and not plausibly envisageable implications, ... and the like, of a given text, which are yet properly comprised in literary meaning as just defined. These can seem part of what is conveyed literarily even while not reasonably attributable to the author as we have hypothesized him on the basis of our relevantly engaged background knowledge.⁵¹

Levinson’s use of the terms “author-specific context,” “suitable backgrounded reader,” and “best projection-in-context” helps illuminate that hypothetical intentionalism allows for meaning in literature to spawn from places beyond the author’s intention. The suitable backgrounded reader breaks from the intentionalist theory by allowing the reader to provide additional information to the piece of literature such as knowledge about the

⁵⁰ Iseminger, *Intention & Interpretation*, 221.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

author's upbringing, political movements he may have been a part of, other works written by the author, and other pertinent information.

This appears to be a similar, but more liberal use of information when interpreting the author's meaning than Carroll anticipates in his version of intentionalism. However, this is not the only divergence Levinson makes with intentionalism. Levinson's use of the term "projection-in-context" indicates his belief that the reader can imbue meaning into the work from his reception of the work. This is another fundamental difference from intentionalism. Where intentionalists maintain that the interpretation of meaning should come strictly from the text reflecting the author's intention—though Carroll does allow that the interpreter can include biographical information to supplement the interpretation of the text—Levinson holds that the reader can also contribute to the meaning of the text through the reader's experience permeating into the text.

The third term "author-specific context" is meant to flag Levinson's break from anti-intentionalism. Levinson finds that an anti-intentionalist approach to interpretation fails to give a way of deciphering the difference between two identical texts that were penned by different authors; hence, the author-specific context. Specifically, Levinson envisions situations where a piece of literature has been written with racist, sexist, or other bias intentions. If the reader fails to take into account who the author is, the reader will not understand the meaning of the piece of work. Levinson explains,

Two writers writing the same texts in the same public language at a given time and place may still end up saying different things, in virtue of their national identities, what they have done in the world, what circles they belong to, what

their other works are like, etc. all of which are relevantly brought to bear by potential readers.⁵²

Levinson points out that in a situation where there are two identical texts, text A and text B, an anti-intentionalist will be unable to appreciate a possible difference of meanings behind the texts. That is, the anti-intentionalist would have to read the same meaning for each text. However, when one takes the author's *oeuvre* into account, text A may be an allusion to the supremacy of a certain race, sex, or other group, while text B is an innocent recounting of a childhood experience. This scenario forces Levinson to diverge from anti-intentionalism and include the idea of author-specific context in his theory. Because of these holes in intentionalism and anti-intentionalism, Levinson proposes his own hypothetical intentionalism as the proper way to interpret pieces of literature.

For Levinson then, interpretation is dependent on the reader being able to read via his projection-in-context. The reader is primarily responsible for understanding the meaning of the piece by incorporating his own experiences. But, while including his own experience in his interpretation, the reader must remember to be a backgrounded reader and be conscious of author-specific context. This would indicate that the reader must take care to consider an author's *oeuvre*, biographical information, the historical political location he is writing from, and other information when evaluating information.

Levinson's example of how hypothetical intentionalism should work to understand a piece of literature will provide a tangible example of what is meant by these terms. Levinson considers the short story "The Country Doctor" by Franz Kafka to illustrate his theory. According to Levinson, the hypothetical intentionalist should be a

⁵² Ibid., 247.

backgrounded reader when he approaches the story. He should consider possible meanings for the story while considering some of the author's other works, and biographical information. Then by considering author-specific context he can compile a list of possible meanings. Levinson explains

Given that as background, and given the intrinsic matter of the text, one might readily come up with this interpretation: *A Country Doctor* is a stylized dream report...Still, we might just find out...that Kafka's immediate, explicit intent in writing *A Country Doctor* was in fact to critique rural medical practices...Our best construction, in a dual sense, of what Kafka the writer is communicating in *A Country Doctor* would trump our discovery of what Kafka the person might oddly have been intending to mean on the occasion of penning the story.⁵³

It is important to notice three things about Levinson's method of interpretation. First, it is important to register what the idea "Our best construction, in a dual sense..." indicates about his theory of interpretation. Levinson stresses in a footnote, that hypothetical intentionalism is the theory that puts the reader into a position to hypothesize of what the author's intention was. This hypothesis is based on the terms discussed above.

Levinson's dual sense is the hypothesized intention that the reader puts forth, and the actual author's intention. Hence the need to reconsider the meaning of *A Country Doctor* if new information about Kafka or his intentions were discovered. What is most important for this argument, however, is that each reader may find a similar, but different meaning within *A Country Doctor*. This occurs due to each reader's own projection-in-context, and is reiterated in the quote above as Levinson writes "...one might readily

⁵³ Ibid., 230.

come up with this interpretation...”⁵⁴ This dependence on experience as stated above is cause for the divergence from intentionalist theories.

Second, note Levinson’s reliance on supplemental information to the text. He is so endeared to the use of backgrounded information that he finds it appropriate to reinterpret, or find new meaning in a text when supplemental information becomes available. Expanding the quote above, Levinson writes, “Still, we might just find out—from Kafka’s secret diary, say, or a close informant, or even advanced aliens who were scanning Kafka’s thought processes at the time—that Kafka’s immediate, explicit intent in writing *A Country Doctor* was...”⁵⁵ This ability to reinterpret due to new evidence is something an anti-intentionalist would judge impermissible, especially if the reinterpretation was dependent on a discovery of an *oeuvre*, or something else outside the work.

Third, and most importantly, even though Levinson breaks from both sides of interpretation theory, his hypothetical intentionalism—along with all theories of interpretation—still falls victim to the objections Sontag raises. Levinson, even though he makes room for reader experience affecting interpretation, is still focused on the meaning of a work. Levinson writes “The work, if any good, will stand on its own, without the author on hand to explain regularly what he meant, but only if taken as the work of that specific author, with all that entails.”⁵⁶ Although Levinson appears to be

⁵⁴ Ibid., 230.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 230.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 248.

encouraging interaction with a piece of literature, he still is focused on the meaning the author intended.

It is now clear that Sontag's objection that interpretation has become fixated on the content of art and literature is germane to theories of interpretation. Consider another claim of Levinson's, "Literary meaning is generated out of knowledge shared between an author and his or her readers..."⁵⁷ His emphasis that the meaning of literature is reliant on a communication between reader and author expounds the fact that interpreting a piece of work is a project begun with a goal in mind. It is a project that is performed through the calculative idiom.

As it becomes clear that interpretative theories of literature and art are calculative in mind, it would be useful to recapitulate the work done so far. The second chapter and beginning of this chapter have shown that the calculative idiom does allow for growth, learning, or developmental experience. But, it has also been argued that the calculative idiom only allows for certain types of knowledge or experience, calculative knowledge or calculative experience. According to both Heidegger and Oakeshott, this type of calculative knowledge is not innate to human nature. Most importantly, in keeping with the focus of this thesis, it has been argued that the calculative idiom when used with art, and specifically literature, vitiates the work as an art object. A reader cannot have an *aletheic* experience if she is approaching a piece of work from the calculative idiom. This chapter, with the help of Susan Sontag's insight, has made the claim that all theories of interpretation are within the calculative idiom. Therefore, when one attempts to

⁵⁷ Ibid., 248.

interpret a piece of work they eradicate any possibility of *aletheia* or contemplation. For the reader to be able to absorb a disclosing through a piece of literature, she must approach it through the meditative idiom.

4. The Meditative Idiom and its effect on reading literature

i. Development of the meditative idiom

The calculative idiom has been shown to be a worldview that many people may take up without realizing it. As Sontag claims, and as the evaluation of Levinson and Carroll's theories of interpretation substantiates, the calculative idiom has so suffused and vitiated the desultory activity of reading, that it has become accepted as the only approach to reading.⁵⁸ But what about poetry and art? Are they automatically looked at interpretively? It seems that there generally exists a more liberal approach to poetry and art than the interpretive approach to literature. Susan Sontag argues that at one time interpretation was not the default interaction with literature and artwork. Heidegger argues for something similar as he understands art's true function as only possible through a non-calculative approach, and Oakeshott understands the approach to poetry as fundamentally different from literature. All three are attempting to describe the meditative idiom as they discuss their preferred interactions with literature or artwork. This chapter will begin with an in-depth look at the meditative idiom. After distinguishing the meditative idiom from the calculative, it will be shown that *aletheic* unconcealing, as discussed by Heidegger, is only possible through the meditative idiom. The chapter will conclude with consideration of three examples of literature and one example of film, and the contrasting results from each idiom.

⁵⁸ For purposes of the thesis, I equate the calculative idiom with interpretation, though it is clear that many advocates of the latter would deny that their interpretive approaches collapse into calculation.

The meditative idiom as discussed in the second chapter is best described negatively. This presents a challenge of forming a firm grasp on what is meant by the idea. However, the elusiveness of the definition is a metaphoric embodiment of the definition. As Heidegger explained, the meditative idiom is the mindset of not having a specific aim or goal, it does not plan out actions, nor does it look to achieve a certain end. The meditative idiom instead allows events to occur. The question then becomes what is meant by the phrase, “allow an event to occur.”

Obviously, it isn't possible to control every reaction in a series of events. However, as discussed above, someone within the calculative idiom accords each action, each means, a role in trying to achieve a certain end. The end may not be the originally planned goal; however, the constant course adjustments are evident of a goal-oriented project. A person within the meditative idiom, on the other hand, does not focus on an end, and does not try to force matters towards an end. Instead, they allow matters to interact and affect as they may. When a project is committed through the meditative idiom, it does not have a goal-oriented direction. In fact the term ‘project’ becomes a misnomer as a project includes an undertone of a possible achievement. A person is within the meditative idiom when they simply allow their actions to cause results. The results of an action, or the actions themselves, are not being measured or digested in hopes of ascertaining something. The meditative idiom instead allows for the actions and results to make their own impressions. It is this allowing that makes *aletheia* possible.

Before explicating the relation between *aletheia* and the meditative idiom, care should be taken to further clarify the meditative idiom. One necessary clarification stems

from the example of a jogger who runs to run contrasted against the jogger who runs as part of a training regiment. As discussed, even a jogger who roles out of bed and decides to go for a run is making a decision to run. He has made a decision to spend time performing an action. However, it is important to remember that the action is being enacted simply for the sake of the action. The jogger does not have a goal or end in mind. Further, the jogger is not displaying the measuring, or computable approach that is a key mark of the calculative idiom. Advocates of the meditative idiom must face similar dilemmas in determining how open a person must be in order to still remain within the meditative idiom—as well as in determining in more detail what it means to be open.

For a palpable example, consider a writer who becomes intrigued by molten wax. The person's acting on this fascination would indicate an exploration of sorts. That is, if an intrigue or distraction is investigated, the person who is investigating seems to be acting with an end in mind—discover more information about that thing that was distracting me. But it is important to remember two important points regarding the meditative and calculative idiom. First, what sparks the project is not what defines which idiom a person may be acting in. As discussed in the previous chapter, what can qualify a person for acting within the calculative idiom is the person's hankering on their actions leading to a certain result. This measuring during the project is indicative of the calculative idiom; it is not necessary for a project to have been started out in this way. Likewise, if a project is begun with a goal in mind, i.e. why is this wax so malleable, and the proceeding actions performed become irrelevant to a goal, then the project has been pursued from the meditative idiom.

Ernie Lepore and Matthew Stone discuss an interesting example of this kind of morphing in their recent opinion article in the *New York Times*' *The Stone* titled "Philosophy and the Poetic Imagination." Lepore and Stone discuss the work of another *New York Times* reporter, Alan Feuer, who occasionally takes ads from Craigslist and reformulates them into a poem. The article discusses how something such as an ad—a paradigmatic calculative idiom entity—can, with some well-placed line breaks and stanza formulations, be turned into a poem searching for truth. Lepore and Stone summarize their stance as they write

When we approach language prosaically, our focus is on arbitrary conventions that link words to things in the world and to the contents of thought. These links allow us to raise questions about what's true, and to coordinate our investigations to find answers. But poetry exists because we are just as interested in discovering ourselves, and one another, in what we say. Poetry evokes a special kind of thinking — where we interpret ordinary links between language and world and mind as a kind of diagram of the possibilities of experience.⁵⁹

Lepore and Stone seem to be expressing the different effects of the meditative and calculative idioms. Their quote explains that even something that is within a complex system that depends on intentions, in this case language, allows for a different kind of experience, if conceived in the right light.

Their use of the word 'experience,' however, should not be taken as a mark of the calculative idiom. The preceding two sentences before the use of the word 'experience' help discern what is intended by experience. The second sentence, "These links allow us to raise questions about what's true, and to coordinate our investigations to find answers" is a calculative experience. The third sentence in the quote, however, tries to step away

⁵⁹ Erin Lepore and Matthew Stone, "Philosophy and the Poetic Imagination," *New York Times* (December 2, 2012).

from this calculative experience. It points out a difference between this poetic thinking, which their article aims for, and thought concerned with truth and questioning and answering. Instead, ‘experience,’ as used in the final sentence, should be understood as opposing the calculative idiom, which Lepore and Stone see as the prosaic use of language. Their intention is for ‘experience’ to be understood in the way that Heidegger understands a disclosing of world. Instead of using Heidegger’s language they do their best with terms such as, “discovering ourselves, and one another...Poetry evokes a special kind of thinking ... links between language and world and mind as a kind of diagram of the possibilities of experience.”⁶⁰ Lepore and Stone provide a preliminary understanding of what can happen when the meditative idiom is taken to literature as opposed to the calculative idiom. Before discussing this, however, a second subtle point about the meditative idiom and calculative idiom must be explicated.

The author who becomes distracted by wax, Lepore and Stone’s modified ad, or similar situations are representative of times where a project may be begun with an end as the focus. But as shown, this does not relegate the project to be inescapably calculative. The author can be open to discovering interesting metaphysical claims, or an ad can be read in such a way that no content is understood but rather a disclosing is the only thing taken away. Related to this point, it is important to understand that a project begun by an opening does not necessarily remain within the meditative idiom. Oakeshott helps elucidate this point as he discusses his view that the conversation of mankind, which was once strictly the poetic idiom, has recently become heavily practical and *scientia*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Considering the earlier discussion of Oakeshott's essay, recall his emphasis on the child's conversation as being paradigmatic of the poetic idiom. Oakeshott understands the child's insatiable inquisitiveness⁶¹ of why, as a prime example of the openness required for the poetic idiom. As Oakeshott concludes his essay he returns to the children's conversation metaphor, which provides a macrocosm of what can occur in the approach to a single project. Oakeshott writes,

Everybody's young days are a dream, a delightful insanity, a miraculous confusion of poetry and practical activity... We [as children] speak an heroic language of our own invention...because we are moved not by the desire to communicate but by the delight of utterance. And however immersed we may become in practical or scientific enterprise, anybody who recollects the confusion it was to be young will have a ready ear for the voice of poetry.⁶²

Oakeshott argues the human conversation today is bogged down by the *scientia* and poetic idioms. His claim is that as the human matures, due to cultures of today, the typical person is unable to remember their innocent wonder of childhood. Instead, a person who was once fluent in the poetic idiom is now transfixed in the practical or *scientia*. A person may begin in the meditative idiom, but as the project unfolds they may be struck by a curiosity instead of contemplation, or become fixated on something. They then develop a goal because of this curiosity, a piece of information they want to develop or understand and then act according to this end. Once this happens they have left the meditative and entered the calculative. Oakeshott claims the maturation of

⁶¹ "Insatiable inquisitiveness" is personified in a child's never-ending question of "why?" The phrase embodies the idea that even when a child is given a correct answer to the question of why, they still pursue the matter. Any answer, even the correct or true one, does not register with the child because they are not in pursuit of a resolved answer. But, instead, are exhibiting the contemplative openness of the poetic idiom.

⁶² Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 539.

children into adults often involves a development from the meditative idiom into the calculative idiom.

A person leaving the meditative for the calculative is a likely and regrettable possibility. Similarly, it is also plausible for a person to think they are in the meditative idiom, but in actuality they never left the calculative idiom. This type of mindset is embodied by the colloquium “he’s a follower, he just goes with the flow.”⁶³ When this phrase is used it indicates a person who apparently does not fixate or think ahead, but instead has an inactive acceptance of events. But it is important not to mistake this as the meditative idiom. The person within the meditative idiom, as pointed at in Oakeshott’s childhood metaphor, has an interest in the project. But it is an interest that is one of allowing, not manipulating. Oakeshott attempts to explain this difference when he writes:

Contemplating, then, is a specific mode of imagining and moving about among images, different from both practical and scientific imagining... In practice and science ‘activity’ is undeniable... But since in contemplation there is neither research for what does not appear nor desire for what is not present, it has often been mistaken for inactivity. But it is more appropriate to call it (as Aristotle called it) a non-laborious activity—activity which, because it is playful and not businesslike, because it is free from care and released from both logical necessity and pragmatic requirement, seems to participate in the character of inactivity. Nevertheless, this appearance of leisureliness is not an emblem of lethargy: it springs from the self-sufficiency enjoyed by each engagement in the activity and by the absence of any premeditated end.⁶⁴

It is crucial to notice the language Oakeshott utilizes as he attempts to express his claim.

The first point Oakeshott helps illuminate is that although an insouciant apathy may appear to be meditative, it is in fact calculative. The fact that one must actively try to be

⁶³ Flow here should not be understood in the context of “the flow of a game.” Instead what is being highlighted is a person’s indecisive nonchalance.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 513-514.

insouciant instantiates a means end relationship, which is calculative by definition. A person who is constantly focusing on avoiding decisions or the possible effects of their decisions is persistently affecting the means to arrive at their indecisive end. This active evasion of decision-making is inherently a calculative project.

The meditative idiom, however, is an unconcerned interested allowing, not an apathetic mindset. Oakeshott's quote states that the meditative idiom is reliant on an interest. There is an interplay between the project and the person enacting it through the meditative idiom. It is important to remember that the meditative idiom is "...free from care and released..." (the use of the word, released, evokes Heidegger's use of disclosing, and unconcealing). The main point drawn from Oakeshott is the necessity of a person not being inactive, but instead being within a "non-laborious active." Returning to Oakeshott's emphasis on the child's innate inquisitiveness helps to elucidate this point. The child is asking why, not because they need to act on the answer, but because they are looking for an irresolvable something. The child achieves a "...self-sufficiency enjoyed by each engagement in the activity and by the absence of any premeditated end." This relation recalls Heidegger's work, specifically the unconcealing that occurs in terms of what he dubs with the Greek word *aletheia*.

ii. The relationship between the meditative idiom and aletheia

The relation between the meditative idiom and *aletheia* is a complicated one, but an essential one. It is important to remember that Heidegger understands *aletheia* as truth through unconcealing. However, *aletheia* does not necessarily result in a lucid

explanation of the thing unconcealed. That is, truth unconceals itself to a person's Being, but as is often the case in Heidegger, there is still something just beyond that is not grasped by the person. The importance of the interplay between object or thing and person in *aletheia* cannot be understated. *Aletheia* is dependent on the object typically existing before a person encounters it, and becomes true as it discloses. The meditative idiom is what makes this disclosing possible. The calculative idiom always results in a person trying to compute the events that have taken place; they are in search of a palpable result. The disclosing of *aletheia*, however, is ungraspable. Instead *aletheia* results from an unconcealing which points, directs, and yet is withdrawn. As an un-concealing, *aletheia* supposes a concealing that it cannot undo. It has an irreversible imperceptible influence. Also essential to this unconcealing towards *aletheia* is the object, entity, concept not being completely accessible.

This last distinction (between accessibility and inaccessibility) is essential to the argument. Calculative thinking must have tangible computable results, results that the person has created through their means ends actions. Such results are incompatible with *aletheia*. The meditative idiom, however, is defined by its insensible results. The meditative idiom allows results to unconceal, while also realizing and being non-laboriously active in what remains ungraspable and concealed. These incomputable results are what Oakeshott envisions as the goal of a child's conversation, what concludes from a person acting "...free from care and released from both logical necessity and pragmatic requirement..."⁶⁵ This unconcealing that the meditative idiom allows, and is

⁶⁵ Ibid., 514.

impossible through the calculative idiom, seems to be compatible with Susan Sontag's focus on reworking the standard approach to literature.

iii. The meditative idiom in other philosopher's work

Susan Sontag's "Against Interpretation" helped explicate the dilution of the literature and art experience in the culture of interpretation. In her essay Sontag argues for a return of focus on what she terms 'form' in art and works of literature. This precedence given to form would be an example of projects enacted through the meditative idiom. Sontag writes, "If excessive stress on *content* provokes the arrogance of interpretation, more extended and more thorough descriptions of *form* would silence. What is needed is a vocabulary—a descriptive rather than prescriptive, vocabulary—for forms."⁶⁶ As discussed above, Sontag sees interpretation concentrating on content, a strictly calculative project. However, she argues that with precedence given to the form of art, art can illuminate the senses. In her concluding paragraphs Sontag highlights this view as she writes,

Transparence is the highest, most liberating value in art... *Transparence* means experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are... Interpretation takes the sensory experience of the work of art for granted, and proceeds from there... What is important now is to recover our sense. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more... Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art... Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all⁶⁷

Sontag's description of *transparence* appears to be her attempt at the meditative idiom.

She envisions *transparence* as an open approach to the form of art. This *transparence*, according to Sontag, leads to an illuminating of the thing in itself. Her insistence that the

⁶⁶ Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 12.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

thing⁶⁸ be experienced in itself is another way of saying that it not be measured for an end. When transparenence is achieved Sontag too agrees that an unconcealing occurs. Sontag describes, “The function of criticism should be to show *how it is what it is*, even *that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*.”⁶⁹ Sontag here is describing an *aletheic* experience. Her phrasing “how it is what it is” does not refer to the physical or grammatical properties of an artwork or piece of literature. It also does not refer to the meaning behind a piece of artwork or piece of literature, as the end of the quote makes clear. “How it is what it is” should be understood as the work communicating via the transparenence of a person, truth. Or in Heideggerian terms, the “how it is what it is” is the possibility of it unconcealing.

Sontag’s prime examples of art that today incites this transparenence are works of abstract painting and the Pop Art movement. Sontag understands abstract paintings as attempting to break entirely with the idea of content causing a viewer to instead recognize its form. Pop Art she understands as causing transparenence by overcompensating. According to Sontag, Pop Art provides content in such a blatant way that the content becomes uninterpretable. These attempts by artists are made to challenge the content focused, or the calculative idiomatic approach. Similar to Sontag’s push for works to be

⁶⁸ The thing, here should be understood as the artwork or literature. Concentrating on the form of this thing then leads to transparenence.

⁶⁹ Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 14. Her emphasis. The word ‘criticism’ should not be taken literally here. By ‘criticism’ Sontag should be understood as meaning the vocabulary that is used to talk of art, or in this case her descriptive vocabulary instead of prescriptive from her previous quote. It could be understood as the vocabulary of her transparency.

approached with transparency, Roger Shattuck argues for what he terms “an innocent eye.”

Roger Shattuck’s book *The Innocent Eye* is an interesting overview of literary study. The book would be characterized as fundamentally calculative as Shattuck is attempting to analyze literature, enacting means towards a certain end. But in this case, the end he reaches is one that encourages him to act within the meditative idiom instead. Shattuck’s afterword is titled “The Innocent Eye and the Armed Vision.” In it, Shattuck discusses the use of literature, what authors may aim for, and most importantly how literature should be received. After focusing his attention on the study of literature, Shattuck realizes that criticism should not necessarily be the focus of an interaction with literature.

Literary study has many directions, and I pursue several of them in the essays of this collection. Here I am suggesting that it is possible, and sometimes advisable and rewarding, to start by looking at individual works with as innocent an eye as one can attain. Complete naïveté is impossible, but one can learn to put aside many categories of thought and provisionally to meet a work of art on its own terms.⁷⁰

Shattuck’s innocent eye immediately conjures Oakeshott’s discussion of blissful children’s conversation. Shattuck understands there is a stark difference between approaching literature with a critical aim as opposed to allowing the literature to be itself. Notice the congruence in Shattuck and Sontag’s terms. Sontag described transparency as making it possible for literature to be understood “how it is what it is.” Shattuck writes of approaching “a work of art on its own terms.” Both understand that art, and specifically literature, contain an indefinable something that cannot be withdrawn by

⁷⁰ Roger Shattuck, *The Innocent Eye* (Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1984), 348.

analysis and conjecture. Instead, Shattuck's innocent eye, and Sontag's transparency are their attempts to read literature, or take in a piece of art, through the meditative idiom in hopes of unconcealment.

It has been argued that the meditative idiom is dependent on a leisurely active opening that when applied to literature results in unconcealing something along the lines of Heidegger's interpretation of *aletheia*. In addition to this claim, it has been shown that philosophers and literary critics—Sontag and Shattuck—have a sense of this meditative idiom. But little has been mentioned of the authors' or artists' interaction with their own work. To address this aspect of the author, reader, text/artwork continuum we turn to Anton Chekov.

iv. Authors' relation to the meditative idiom

Anton Chekov was a great 19th century Russian author. One of the things that makes Chekov such an interesting author, is that writing was not his primary focus at any point in his life. Chekov was a doctor and spent most of his time, when he was not sick himself, traveling the countryside attending to the ill. Chekov would write in spare time during his travels or while waiting alongside someone's deathbed. Yet, his short stories and plays are revered for their ability to connect to a wide range of people on something resembling an emotional level. Often, however, the connection is ineffable. This connection is a prime example of Heidegger's account of unconcealing in the clearing. When a person reads a Chekov story they are pointed towards an inexpressible truth that is just beyond their grasp.

The effect of his stories is not the sole reason Chekov has been selected as an example. Not only is his writing ineffably cathartic, but when Chekov wrote he was aware that he was not trying to articulate messages, rather he would simply allow. *The Portable Chekov* edited by Avrahm Yarmolinsky, contain letters Chekov sent to a variety of persons that support this sentiment. In one of the letters, sent to Dmitry V. Grigorovich a well-respected novelist in his time, Chekov writes

Up till now my attitude towards my literary work has been extremely frivolous, casual, thoughtless... I wrote my stories the way reporters write notices of fires: mechanically, half-consciously, without caring a pin either about the reader or myself . . . I wrote and tried my best not to use up on a story images and scenes which are dear to me and which, God knows why, I treasured and carefully concealed.⁷¹

In this letter Chekov is responding to Grigorovich's praise and suggestion that Chekov quit his medical career and instead move to Moscow and become a professional author. Chekov, however, is flabbergasted. He explains that he could never understand himself as an artist, but instead sees writing himself writing for the sake of writing. Here the use of artist, is meant as Chekov viewed professional artists and authors, which was performing their craft for an end. That is, they write or create through the calculative idiom.

For Chekov this is unfathomable, his work is a result of meditative projects. He writes for no end, he has no goal, he simply allows his work to be as it is. In another letter, intended for Alexey N. Pleshcheyev, meant to vehemently deny political accusations about his work, Chekov explains,

⁷¹ Avrahm Yarmolinsky, *The Portable Chekov* (New York: Penguin Group, 1968), 597-598.

My holy of holies is the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love, and absolute freedom—freedom from violence and falsehood, no matter how the last two manifest themselves. This is the program I would follow if I were a great artist.⁷²

Chekov's obstinate denial of his work as having a purpose shows that he understands his work as a communication of human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love, and absolute freedom. It should not be overlooked that these terms are typically used when discussing a human being's distinguishing nature. In fact, with Chekov's understanding that his work is a communication reliant on and explicative of human nature,⁷³ we have come full circle through reader, text and author.

The thesis began by pointing out Heidegger's claim that meditative thinking is a unique attribute of humanity. We then moved to a discussion of how Oakeshott's development of the poetic idiom is an attempt to provide "...relief from the monotony of a conversation too long appropriated by politics and science..."⁷⁴ As Corey points out, Oakeshott feels that a conversation has lost its human essence with the loss of the poetic idiom. These were the views of philosophers who provided tools to evaluate the interaction between reader and text. Chekov has returned us to this mark of human nature with his insistence on his work as a communication of fundamentally and uniquely human concepts. However, Chekov is representative of the interaction between author and text. Whether author and text, or text and reader, through the meditative idiom and

⁷² Ibid., 605.

⁷³ It is unclear what Chekov means by the term "My holy of holies," but one can infer that this is a way of aggrandizing the entities or ideas that follow. His claim that these would be his program as an artist and the fact that art can be construed as an expression of human nature it can be read the Chekov is making a claim about human nature and his writing.

⁷⁴ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 494.

through the meditative idiom only an unconcealing occurs. This unconcealing corresponds to the event of *aletheia*. This transmission of human essence is only possible through the unconcealing of *aletheia*. The attributes, both good and bad, of the human condition lie concealed. From Heidegger, Oakeshott, Sontag, Palmer, and Chekov, it has been shown that only projects from the meditative idiom are able to disclose this truth.

v. Examples of interactions through the meditative idiom with literature contrasted with the calculative idiom

Much time has now been given to the development of the meditative and calculative idioms and their results when each approach is used towards literature. However, all discussion has been rather abstract, it may be useful to consider some tangible examples. The first example considered will be the short story *Gooseberries* by Anton Chekov. The story has multiple layers, because it is composed of a tale being told within the short story. Ivan tells the tale about his brother Nikolai. Nikolai becomes fed up with his job, marries rich, and then spends his dead wife's fortune attempting to grow gooseberries on his estate. One day Ivan visits him to catch up for old times, and Nikolai insists that Ivan try some of his prized gooseberries. The gooseberries do not impress Ivan; he of course does not share this with his brother, and visits with him for a while before leaving. Chekov's story then moves back to the present where the men who Ivan had been telling the tale to have not been paying attention.

This short summary does not do the story justice, but the highlights have been provided. A person who reads this story from the calculative idiom will take away that

material objects are never as good as we suppose them to be. Or, we may live long enough that one-day we become diluted with false preferences to attempt to compensate for things we have done in the past. These are results of the calculative idiom, as would be any other number of themes that a critic or reader would point toward a specific line or lines in the text as evidence for. However, an unconcealing via the meditative idiom may cause someone to be overcome with a feeling of insatiable complacency. The gooseberries would not be seen as a material object; Chekov would not be understood to be making an argument. But rather the recognition that humanity is perpetually fixating on trivial matters to avoid confronting their own morbid futility would resonate in the reader's head. An understanding would present itself that *Gooseberries* is hinting that ends are built up in our mind, but in reality they will always be sour and unripe. There is a fundamental difference in these two explanations and understandings of *Gooseberries*. The first, the calculative approach, has a disclosure, but it is a limited one. The minimal disclosure that does occur is then often disregarded because the person is so focused on the computable content, or their end. The conclusion they draw is only understood in the context of their original goal. The meditative response, however, has no goal, the unconcealing is not lost on the reader. Instead, the reader reflects on and attempts to comprehend what is at first an ineffable significance upon reading the story.

A second example to consider is E.B. White's Charlotte Web, a classic children's story, but one that affects persons of all ages. The most moving part of the story is when Charlotte knows her time has come and eventually she passes away. A calculative approach, would be reflected in a reader who learns that death is miserable and

unfortunately, unavoidable. The meditative response would be embodied in the children to whom the story is often read. What happened to Charlotte? Is she sleeping? Mommy, why are you crying? These questions that may come from a child embody the meditative idiom, they are responses that have no end in mind. The questions do reflect a partial understanding of what has occurred, but they spawn from an inquisitiveness, a yearning to comprehend something that is simply just beyond their grasp.

Returning to another Chekov story, the effect of the meditative idiom can again be illustrated. In *A Calamity* an older man, Ilyin, is infatuated with a younger woman, Sonya. Ilyin is convinced that Sonya has been teasing him, allowing him glimmers of hope that she will leave her husband and go away with him. Sonya, at the beginning of the story, feels that she has been perfectly clear in telling Ilyin that he should move on. As the story progress Sonya recognizes her displeasure with what she thought was her ideal life. She resolves to ask her husband to go away with her; he declines and suggests she go alone. Sonya ponders the decision, considering herself at points a vile creature, before finally deciding to go. But the description of what finally forces her departure could only be written by Chekov. He writes, “An irresistible force was driving her forward, and it seemed as though, if she had stopped, it would have pushed her in the back.” Chekov goes on to conclude, “She was choking, burning with shame, she did not feel her legs under her, but what pushed her forward was stronger than shame, reason, or fear.”⁷⁵ Chekov does not tell us what this force is; instead he describes it as quoted.

⁷⁵ Yarmolinsky, *The Portable Chekhov*, 77.

A reader who approaches this through the meditative idiom could understand the closing lines as a description of the story, and the story as a description of human life. Chekov's work discloses the human disposition to be drawn towards or away from things for inexplicable reasons. Chekov's closing lines are powerful descriptions of events all humans can relate too. This ineffable drawing is a concept that Heidegger would describe as hidden, one that is just beyond. *A Calamity* hints at this unutterable motivation that humans are swept away by from time to time. An analysis through the calculative idiom may lead to a similar disclosure. But the disclosure would become bogged down in the significance of such a claim, or maybe in the attempt to provide a scientific rationale for it. The reader through the meditative idiom simply allows the effect of Chekov's closing lines to resonate. This reverberation is discernable opposed to the person within the calculative idiom who would attempt to do more, change something, or comprehend more.

A final example is provided by the film "Marley and Me." The film, based on the book by John Grogan, is about a maturing family and their dog. The film is a mix of comedy and drama, culminating in poignant closing scenes. Significant time has passed and Marley is reaching his end. The owner, played by Owen Wilson, brings Marley to the veterinarian after finding him collapsed outside on their property. The doctor explains that Marley's stomach has twisted and that she has used some gas to flip it back. The veterinarian then shares that once something like this happens it nearly always repeats, and that only one percent of dogs survive the first occurrence. Wilson's character refuses to accept this diagnosis. In a graciously fearful tone, Wilson remarks

“One percent? What’s that number based on?” The doctor tries to interrupt, but Wilson continues:

I’ll tell you what it’s based on: regular dogs.

Lady, we are so far from “regular,” you have no idea.

My guy here, (Wilson now defensive yet teetering on tears) he once ate an entire answering machine, and digested it. Then went back and ate the phone for dessert. So don’t give me numbers like “one percent,” because you don’t know him. But I do, and I’ll see him in the morning.⁷⁶

Marley makes it through the night, but the dog is forced to return a few weeks later. This time there is nothing the veterinarian can do, Wilson’s character knows it is time to put Marley down. The film does not spare the viewer this scene, but instead provides what may be the most powerful scene of the movie. The scene, minimally described to avoid detracting from it, shows the once invincible dog and faithful owner in a veterinarian room, waiting patiently together.

The calculative response to this would be the trivial explanation that the scene invokes nothing more than sympathy. It reduces the viewer to a morbid sadness. A person within the calculative idiom may feel moved by the scene, but they may attribute it to one of their own memories of losing a loved one. However, the meditative viewer sees more. Their interaction with the movie discloses their own inescapable mortality. A realization that they are in a perpetual struggle against what lies just beyond, something they will never be able to directly confront, yet they are unable to elude its pursuit. For the person within the meditative idiom Wilson’s interaction with the veterinarian may take on a plethora of scenarios, all of which center on the shades just beyond.

⁷⁶ “Marley and Me” <http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/Marley-&-Me.html>.

5. Conclusion

At this point it should be clear that the meditative and calculative idioms adamantly oppose each other. Four fundamental aspects of the calculative idiom have been identified. First, the calculative idiom, similar to the meditative idiom, is a framework or mindset a person acts through when partaking in a project. In Heideggerian terminology the calculative idiom is a way a human attends to the world. The second characteristic indicates that the person acting within the calculative idiom is obsessively computing the means of their actions against their anticipated ends. That is, the person acting through the calculative idiom is concerned only with the progress of their actions in regards to their goals. The third aspect to understand is that even if an action has unexpected results, that does not disqualify it as calculative. The trivial statement “that was unexpected” shows that the person is judging her actions and results with a certain end in mind. These three characteristics culminate in the fourth aspect of the calculative idiom, an inability to realize unconcealing. It has been shown more specifically that when a person interacts with literature through the calculative idiom they cannot absorb the *aletheic* dimension. Instead, any disclosure their project may produce is simply missed.

The meditative idiom stands in sharp contrast to the calculative framework. The meditative idiom is understood as a way that a person attends to life without being focused on computing. The person that acts within the meditative idiom permissively attends to events. They are not considering the ends of their project, and are not altering the actions to evoke a certain end. It is important to remember that projects may begin

from the calculative idiom and move to the meditative, or vice versa. The innate openness of the meditative idiom creates the possibility of partaking in “unconcealing,” i.e., the ways that things or themes disclose themselves, regardless of the reader’s calculations. It has been argued that awareness of this possibility, a staple of the meditative idiom, is what generates the appreciation of the *aletheic* dimension in encounters with literature. This possibility of *aletheia* is an essential part of what separates humans from other animals. As technology continues to infiltrate and suffuse human life, as Heidegger warned, it is also important to point out that this sort of unconcealing distinguishes humans from machines.

The focus of this thesis has been the effect of the calculative and meditative idioms on a person interacting with literature. The most striking claim is that interpretation, understood in Sontag’s terms, is fundamentally calculative. This means that the person who interacts with literature with the goal of interpretation cannot appreciate the unconcealing that literature can initiate. In order to encounter the *aletheic* dimension of literature a person must act within the meditative idiom. But the calculative and meditative idioms can be applied to other projects than reading a book. An analysis of the difference between a business that operates strictly calculatively—i.e. an obsession with their bottom line—and a business that has a more amiable meditative business model—such as a neighborhood youth center—could lead to interesting results. Other possibilities such as a calculative and meditative politician or doctor also persist. These questions circle around the difference between how the idioms can affect a person reading, a personal event, an event on an interpersonal level, or a community level.

Further work would have to be done on how the unconcealing is affected when the event includes more variables.

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