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"I have forgotten your love, yet I seem to glimpse you in every window": The Hermeneutical Aesthetics of (Be)longing

ABSTRACT

The article addresses the nuanced but also profoundly enticing and challenging reality of belonging evoked in painting. I examine three artworks by artists of different times and styles—John Everett Millais, Johannes Vermeer, and Salvador Dalí—to show how art facilitates our understanding of the phenomenon of human belonging. The selected works of art are connected via the motif of a female figure in front of a window, as well as the implicit or apparent theme of love. Focusing on the motif of the window, which represents both a literal and metaphorical barrier but also a gateway to what is unknown and unfamiliar, I seek to discover the diverse and unexpected understandings of the phenomenon of belonging, viewed in the light of either an overt or implied intimate relationship. The aesthetic encounter with these artworks offers a unique possibility to uncover the uncharted territories of our sense of belonging. As a theoretical backdrop, I follow the precepts of Hans-Georg Gadamer's ontology of art. Gadamer claims that the artwork's meaning comes to its full realization in the aesthetic encounter; he names that which happens—an increase in being—*Zuwachs an Sein*. The increase in being relates to the inexhaustible meanings that shine forth while we are contemplating an artwork. The aesthetic intimations of the paintings under scrutiny bring to light the subtle senses of the interweaving of dwelling, longing, belonging, and love.

Keywords: art, belonging, Hans-Georg Gadamer, hermeneutical aesthetics, longing.

"[E]verything is but a path, a portal,
or a window opening on something other than itself."
(de Saint-Exupéry 78)

GADAMER'S ONTOLOGICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL MODEL OF AN AESTHETIC ENCOUNTER[1]

Human longing is a complex phenomenon, ranging from the need to cross a boundary and alleviate the pain of being separated from someone or something one sees as desirable (cf., e.g., McGraw) to the metaphysical longing for God, beauty, truth, and infinity (see, e.g., Tarnowski). Similarly, the human sense of belonging may be understood in diverse ways: belonging to tradition, culture, one another, etc. In this essay, I focus on belonging as an emotional and spiritual state—the fulfillment of the longing to connect with and belong to another human being and to a reality that is desired and anticipated.

Disclosing the manifold ways in which humans belong, the innermost feelings of longing to belong, fantasy landscapes, figments of human imagination, and realms that seem inconceivable, art enhances an understanding of our primordial sense of rootedness and exigency to belong. Our yielding to the power of art and our patient attention to artworks occasion a unique possibility of recognizing the complexities of the phenomena captured in them. Since the beginning of conscious time, artists have been inspired by the topic of belongingness. Art issues a welcoming gesture for us to enter a conversation and remain in a dialogic disposition that opens us up to being and becoming more sensitive to the essence of our lived experience, to what shapes our actions, and to what awakens our dreams. Belonging, captured in art, is one of those intricate areas that spur innumerable senses. Gadamer's hermeneutic aesthetics offers an intriguing perspective, both interrogating and acknowledging the inimitable way in which art discloses the heterogeneous nature of our human experience. The sense of belonging is deeply inscribed in this experience.

In his ontological-phenomenological model of aesthetic experience, Gadamer emphasizes the performative aspect of art. He uses the notion of *Spiel* (game) to indicate what happens in the spectator's *vis-à-vis* dialogical encounter with an artwork. Just as in a game, the result of the aesthetic

[1] The title of this article uses a line from Pablo Neruda's poem "Love": https://allpoetry.com/poem/8497011-Love-by-Pablo-Neruda

experience is not known beforehand (cf. Gadamer, *Relevance* 22–24; Keane and Lawn 91–92; Davey, *Unfinished* 46–49), but it is revealed in the back-and-forth movement that, according to Gadamer, characterizes the aesthetic encounter. A work of art does not procure a static and univocal message; rather, whenever we enter an aesthetic encounter, we are invited to recognize the truth that is being unveiled in the enactment (*Vollzug*). An artwork has its own *being*, and its truth shines forth in its performance (cf. Gadamer, *Reader* 214–15). The reception of art cannot be narrowed down to the acquisition and accumulation of knowledge about a given artwork, even if the historical and social context of its creation remains an important part of the interpretative process. Rather, it is fundamentally the viewer's unique perception of that which is already there that is constitutive of an aesthetic encounter. Significantly, an artwork's claim to truth is not to be understood in terms of a statement or proposition but rather as an unveiling that happens in the actualizing of an artwork in time and place (cf. George 110).[2]

Gadamer argues that in our encounters with art we are arrested by the truth that shines forth. It is the unfolding of truth, which is processive, rather than a sudden revelation, that holds us captive. Gadamer's notion of a game indicates the structure of how art discloses itself to us—when we contemplate an artwork, it is the back-and-forth "conversation" in which the truth is unveiled. According to him, entering into contact with a piece of art is not just revelatory but also transformative. Gadamer famously states: "The intimacy with which the work of art touches us is at the same time, in enigmatic fashion, a shattering and a demolition of the familiar. It is not only the 'This art thou!' disclosed in a joyous and frightening shock; it also says to us; 'Thou must alter thy life!'" (Gadamer, *Philosophical* 104). Significantly, concluding his essay "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics" with those lines, he not only highlights that the artwork addresses us but that it puts a claim on us, requiring a transformation of our course of thinking, acting, or even a decisive change in life. Quoting the closing words of Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Archaic Torso of Apollo," "Thou must alter thy life!", Gadamer does not merely allude to the impact of the work of art (Apollo's statue) on the speaker but makes it into a paradigm—art prompts us to change our lives.

In an aesthetic encounter, we partake of the inexhaustibility of meanings that an artwork holds and that are disclosed in the process of its self-actualization. The fullness of our experience of being captivated by

[2] I offer a commentary on Gadamer's assertion of an artwork's self-actualizing in "*Via pulchritudinis*: The Narrative of Violence and Vulnerability in Painting in View of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutic Aesthetics" (2023).

what is in the artwork brings forth an increase in being—*Zuwachs an Sein*. In our intimate encounter with a work of art, it increases its own being (cf. Gadamer, *Relevance* 37). Gadamer's notion of an "increase in being" is the core of his explication of the ontological aspect of the experience of art (Gadamer, *Truth* 135–36). He argues: "[I]f we really want to think about the experience of art, we can, indeed must, think along these lines: the work of art does not simply refer to something, because what it refers to is actually there. We could say that the work of art signifies an increase in being" (*Relevance* 35). Gadamer's phenomenology of art emphasizes the unpredictability of human interaction with a piece of art. His approach is anti-reductionist and anti-objectifying. Each time we attempt to address a work of art, it speaks to us, bringing into the open what is already there.

According to Gadamer, our encounter with art is not merely of a personal nature but is an event (*Ereignis*).[3] Something ultimately important *happens* when we contemplate art, since an aesthetic encounter induces a ground-breaking change—we enter the process of *metanoia* (cf. Gadamer, *Relevance* 34–35). Following Gadamer's claim of the transformational character of an encounter with art, we can say that when we undertake an intimate conversation with an artwork, it activates a process of questioning and self-questioning, and we respond with the entirety of our being, finding ourselves at the threshold of the familiar and the unfamiliar. Art has the capacity to overwhelm us, and its "piercing watching" of us is a way of calling on us to change (34; cf. Gadamer, *Philosophical* 104). Drawing our attention to the seminal change that happens *to* us and *in* us in an aesthetic encounter, Gadamer connects his claim to the avowal of the self-disclosing nature of the symbol: "The symbolic does not simply point toward a meaning, but rather allows that meaning to present itself. The symbolic represents meaning" (34).

Although in the subsequent section I point out the manifold meanings commonly attached to the symbol of the window, it is crucial to highlight that since, for Gadamer, the symbolic allows the meaning to present itself, employing his aesthetic hermeneutics means to transcend the practice of merely deciphering the symbolic meaning. Allowing the meaning to present itself, the work of art invites us to indulge in the familiar and the uncharted territories of meaning. My tracing of the many figurative meanings of the window serves as a preliminary investigation of the viable possibilities of diving into this, on the one hand, common and, on the other hand, always intriguing motif, generating new senses. Placing the transformational and revelatory nature of an artwork at the forefront,

[3] I proffer a thorough explication of Gadamer's phenomenology of art as play and the *eventing* of art in *On Beauty and Being* (125–46).

Gadamer talks about the symbol as a site of excess and that which "rests upon an intricate interplay of showing and concealing" (*Relevance* 33). It is in the interplay of concealing and revealing (*Verbergung/Entbergung*) that the meaning of an artwork shines forth (cf., e.g., Gadamer, *Werke* 259–60).

WINDOW IMAGERY AND THE ENACTMENT OF DIVISION, DISCLOSURE, AND BELONGING

The above remarks on Gadamer's ontology of art will serve as a backdrop to my encounter with the selected artworks embodying human (be)longingness. To be able to appreciate the chosen, exemplary pieces of art more deeply, while using the tenets of Gadamer's aesthetics, I will first resort to a survey of the hermeneutically dense symbolic meaning of the window motif used in art to represent the mystery surrounding our human belonging and longing. The human settlement and the world of nature are literally and metaphorically (dis)connected. The threshold between them is a liminal space riven with polyvalent meanings. Rather than merely providing a background for human habitation, the natural environment is a force that shapes and participates in creating human dwelling (cf., e.g., Arias-Maldonado). If we think of the landscape as something that co-creates our place of dwelling, we can witness how it impacts our personal living area, stays in contact with us, and emanates a certain aura (cf., e.g., Baudrillard 34). The edge at which the human dwelling begins and the world of nature ends is the genuine locus of the hermeneutically informed tension, with astonishing and even competing senses. This meeting point is the *locus revelationis*—the space of poetic revelations of intimacy and (di)vision, wherein vision is an integral part of (di)vision.

Artistic evocations of windows, doors, and gates—the edges between human residence and the outside world—show that these partitions are the space of an encounter between two seemingly different realms. Constituting a divide, a window, just like a door, is the real and metaphorical venue where distinct realities and states of being meet. However, unlike the door and the gate, the windowpane creates the illusion of complete permeability, or the disappearance of the boundary between the household and its surroundings. The apparent lack of the frontier caused by the window's penetrability, which, however, is not complete, draws our attention to the ambiguous nature of the phenomena of familiarity and strangeness that is denoted in the intriguing relations between exteriority and interiority, remoteness and closeness. Even more importantly, though, the seeming unity of the outer and the inner provided by the window inspires us to think ontologically about human dwelling. The connection between the

outside and inside reminds us that human existence remains in primordial oneness with the world outside, both animate and inanimate.

Crucially, the existence of the transparent glass barrier between landscape and habitation sensitizes us to the puzzling reality of our concomitant seeing and not seeing fully (cf. Baudrillard 42) and, by extension, to the hermeneutic dilemma of understanding and not understanding completely. The concurrent possibility of vision and an impasse in attaining it to the fullest is cogently expressed by St Paul, who uses the metaphor of glass to depict the impossibility of reaching out for another reality and, at the same time, sensing and anticipating it: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor 13: 12). The symbolic nature of the window partition embraces the possibility of considering our human way of seeing as impaired and insufficient, simultaneously alerting us to the undisclosed—to the presence of the invisible. Furthermore, the fragility of the window partition prompts us to consider the possibility of breaking through and bringing the gulf between the *inside* and the *outside* to an end. Undeniably, the easily destroyable divide can also suggest the potential precariousness of the movement between different places and differing states of being, both literarily and metaphorically.

Satiated with figurative senses—including diverse understandings of caesura (division) and opening (vision) that embody the tension between nature and culture—the evocations of the window partition in art draw us into the plethora of meanings of human dwelling that resonate with our sense of familiarity, safety, and rootedness, but also strangeness, precariousness, and uprootedness. Hermeneutic sensibility, however, lets us move beyond the matrix of dichotomous thinking about the window as the space of the encounter between divergent realities. This kind of sensibility encourages us to transcend the cursory understandings of the window's dual function and provides a possibility of appreciating the meanings that arise from entering the dynamic communication between the outer and inner spheres of home. Similarly, transcending a rigid, dualistic framework means relinquishing a clear-cut understanding of notions of home, being-at-home, and homelessness. Alongside the more nuanced ways of perceiving reality encapsulated by those concepts, the window's apparent translucence draws our attention to issues of permeability and transparency without transition (cf. Baudrillard 42) and, thus, to the simultaneity of exclusion and inclusion in our experience of being-at-home.

While it might seem like a cliché to state that the window carries the rich symbolism of closeness and distance, openness and closure, the wonder of seeing, and the impossibility of touching (cf. Baudrillard 41–43), these binary oppositions may lead us to an acknowledgement of the

more subtle and profound realities that the window evokes. An open window directs our thoughts to moments of epiphany. As much as it can play the role of alerting us to the forthcoming and unsettling crisis, the window can also symbolize the foresight of time promising happiness. As Paul Ricœur states: "The symbol invites us to think, calls for an interpretation, precisely because it says more than it says and because it never ceases to speak to us" (28). The polysemy of senses that the window as a symbol contains invites versatile interpretations, even conflicting ones, and simultaneously opens new vistas in our understanding of notions of closure and disclosure, and distance and remoteness, evoked by the symbol of the window. We can argue that an open window epitomizes a desperate desire to be close to what one views as one's *home*, a place that can possibly differ from the location of one's residence.[4] Equally, the open window reflects an urge to escape the suffocating, demeaning, and hostile environment inside. In literature and art, the open window is often an emblem of an attempt to open oneself to the unpredictable otherness or to regain the *home* that no longer exists or is lost by (re)imaging, (re)creating, and (re)establishing it in a new environment. The closed window, on the other hand, is often evocative of entrapment and captivity.

The sense of separation and belonging evoked in the literary and artistic images of the window brings to mind an ontological search for a *home*. Our ongoing journey to what we perceive to be our home is also infused with epistemological reflexivity. The memory and the knowledge of the familiar create the possibility of reconstructing the once familiar in our present milieu. Equally importantly, the apprehension of the familiar can entail creative homecomings: the mental construction of the home to come, the unknown home, and the home of our destination. Consequently, the open window is sometimes seen as a sentimental attempt to recapture a romanticized past, tinted, nonetheless, with feelings of suffering and nostalgia (cf., e.g., Kenzari 41). On the other hand, the open window often stands for the possibility of a new life, presence, and home. The semantic opaqueness of the window motif, resting on the window's basic function of vision and division, has long intrigued literary and visual artists.[5] An examination of the diverse, centuries-old use of the window motif in literature and the fine arts elicits insights into the complex nature of the relationship between landscape and home. Their concurrent separateness and inseparability express a hermeneutic in-between that implies the

[4] This is aptly portrayed, for instance, in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, where the harsh and beautiful Yorkshire moors, rather than the grandiose interior of the Thrushcross Grange palace, serve as a true home for the novel's heroine, Catherine Earnshaw.

[5] Cf., e.g., Rewald; Racz; Masters; Iovane, Bernasconi and Franciolli.

paradoxical closeness of two divergent states of being, symbolically understood as *now* and *after*, the living and the dead, present and future, spiritual and physical.

When positioned *vis-à-vis* the language of art, the above observations lead us to uncover how the window in works of art creates an aesthetic-hermeneutic space that reveals the multifaceted reality of human dwelling and belonging. Commenting on Maurice Blanchot's provocative assertion that art describes one who has lost himself, the world, and the truth of the world (74), Karoui-Elounelli (ex)claims: "Art is the enactment of one's belonging to exile!" (10). Although Blanchot focuses on literary art, we can, by extension, view his and the commentator's avowal as potently expressive of visual art's potential to capture the paradoxical reality of *being an exile* and *being at home* as belonging together. Belonging is perceived as responding to but also integrating a physical and symbolic barrier, both rigid and fragile, including and excluding, accepting and threatening.

Created by artists of different nationalities, epochs, and styles, the three paintings under discussion serve as the focus for an exploration of human belongingness in its inextricable interweaving with the phenomenon of dwelling, which cannot be restricted to a place of residence, but also encompasses mental states and reflects introspective moods. The paintings under scrutiny in this study: *Mariana* (1851) by the Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais; Johannes Vermeer's *Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window* (c. 1657–59); and *The Woman at the Window*, by the Spanish surrealist artist Salvador Dalí (1925), immerse us in the poetics of tenderness and privacy, of severance and seclusion, of the movement toward and the palpability of the reality outside, of the firm or broken sense of belonging. The connective thread in those three paintings is the motif of a female figure situated near a window. On a deeper level, however, they are also connected through the motif of love, either expressed via the literary text that the painting is based on (*Mariana*), suggested in an indirect way (*Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window*), or evoked by an intense sense of dissolution (*The Woman at the Window*), which may be viewed as the epitome of consummate love. The fragile boundary between the external world and the human dwelling provided by the window invites us to ponder all that exceeds the dual nature of human existence in its relationship to the outer and the foreign. In these exemplary artistic embodiments, the window seems to both provoke and undermine clear-cut distinctions such as openness and covertness; the need to expand limitlessly and to commit oneself to a certain relationship, activity, place, and realm; alienation and belongingness. The fragile nature of the window divide inspires us to

recognize the subtle, emotive *in-between* of human existence as positioned between interiority and exteriority, immanence and transcendence.

Although exploring Gadamer's philosophical reflection on belonging is not the focus of this essay *per se*, it is interesting to note that he himself engages with the topic of belonging in manifold ways, though not always in a straightforward fashion. His stance on this issue is mostly interwoven with a deliberation on tradition—one of his prominent themes (see, e.g., Gadamer, *Truth* 354–55, 457–59). It is germane, though, to here call upon Gadamer's hermeneutics of conversation and his perspective on belonging together in human relationships. He argues that "belonging together always at the same time means being able to listen to one another" (*Truth* 355). Significantly, the female figures that feature in the selected paintings are loners who either experience a lack of belonging, or whose sense of belonging is deeply disturbed. The only way they seem to dwell in the listening mode is not through a *vis-à-vis* conversation with the Other (the beloved), but through attentive listening to their own hearts. Their interior monologue may give the impression that they converse with and listen to the Other. This imagined conversation, however, does not change their condition of being alone and longing to belong.

MARIANA: THE MICROCOSM OF LONGING FOR INTIMATE BELONGING

The trope of the window in visual art is frequently used to evoke human longing and, at the same time, in an intensely provocative way, to embody a sense of (be)longing, or an unrelenting desire to belong to another place and reality. The relation between distance and belonging can bring to mind the varied spaces we might be dwelling in. The unreachable and faraway that we long for can become the source and site of the workings of the imagination. When we yield to the remote while simultaneously attempting to make it our own, we reconfigure it to become something approachable and tangible. With a tinge of the uncanny, the apparently far-off turns into the near and is full of poetic intensity, as expressed in Novalis's famous dictum (1798): ". . . in the distance everything becomes poetry—poem. *Actio in distans*. Distant mountains, distant people, distant events, etc., everything becomes romantic. . ." (translation by Hoeckner; qtd. in Hoeckner 55). This kind of appropriation is present in Millais's painting *Mariana*, which romanticizes the feminine longing to reunite with a lover. The painting alludes to Shakespeare's comedy *Measure for Measure*, featuring the character of Mariana, an abandoned fiancée, as

well as to Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem "Mariana," an echo of this play,[6] thematizing a lengthy period of waiting and the feminine capacity for endurance while potently employing landscape to convey intense, fragile, and suppressed emotions.[7]

Awaiting the beloved, a common artistic and literary motif, takes on a solemn tone in Millais's masterpiece, one suited to grieving and unrequited love. Here, dwelling is an endless awaiting in the solitariness and scantiness of the space for living, which highlights eerie feelings of entrapment and weariness, heartbreak, loss, the ecstasy of longing, and the sorrow of unbelonging. Captured in a moment of exhaustion, fueled by a hopeless need to speak with the outside world, Mariana is positioned next to the window, which acts as a barrier rather than an escape, sealing the irreversibility of her gloomy situation. Longing and tense eroticism are emphasized through the female protagonist's bodily comportment, which clearly indicates separation from her lover and a painful absence of company. Conversely, the window can be understood as playing the classic role of a possible opening (both literal and metaphorical) to the mysterious afar and beyond, which is tantamount to a desired and true sense of belonging. Addressing the two opposite sensations of shutting-off and opening, this artwork compels us to reconsider what we understand through the irrevocable path of destiny and how we respond to the primordial call to belong.

The reality outside the window in Millais's painting seems to remain very close to the one experienced by his heroine. An intense sense of deprivation is perhaps subdued by calling on the realm of fantasy and imagination, which is facilitated by the perceived proximity of human dwelling and nature. The motif of leaves communicates the unanticipated relationship between external and internal space, replete with Mariana's spiritual longing. The leaves having entered the room appear to have been woven into the tangible materiality of the embroidery she has been working on (cf. Easby). Emphasized by the lyrical confluence of the outside and the inside, the boundary dividing the domains of nature and humans seems almost non-existent. But upon closer inspection, we can see that Millais deconstructs this apparent mood by adding yet another significant aspect to the landscape: the window overlooks not just the garden but

[6] See Moller. Millais's painting is also an intertextual allusion to Tennyson's other poem, "St Agnes's Eve." Both poems, "Mariana" and "St Agnes's Eve," as Anne Hardy accentuates, "engender the contrasting emotional extremes of melancholy and religious ecstasy" (211). For more on the intersections between poetry and Pre-Raphaelite art, as well as the "transgressive hybridity" of visual and literary arts, see Armstrong (15–31).

[7] For an analysis of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings inspired by poems, but also poems inspired by the works of the Pre-Raphaelites, see, for example, Andres and Donnelly.

a wall (another partition), which bears a symbolic meaning. The interplay between creating and removing physical boundaries reflects the typical Victorian preoccupation with maintaining and exceeding constraints on behavior:

> Since virginity for its own sake was so universally exalted by the Victorians, the importance of keeping up "mural" defenses to protect that purity was reiterated ad nauseam. In courtship imagery, the resulting wall served as an architectural maidenhead in some senses, a reminder to women of the need both to restrain the boldness of men and to check their own passions. (Casteras 91)

The wall in the painting signifies the need to abide by social and sexual norms but also draws attention to a common transgression of them. The wall outside also inspires us to examine how the figure of Mariana, "walled," is positioned within the composition of the painting. Her head, symbolizing her thinking, is stretched back, emphasizing that she is confined to her home. Her lower body, which is her center of desire, is thrust toward the window as a means of communication with the outside reality.

Mariana's place of dwelling is filled with melancholy and a sense of time passing. A deep, though somewhat disturbing, unity is felt in the nostalgic intensity, which best characterizes the mode of being that Millais captures in his painting. Nostalgia relates to the depiction of the interior of the chamber, which is saturated with an aura of solemnity and piety but also a tormenting sense of incompletion. The quintessence of the heroine's devotional disposition is her dwelling in the in-between of blissful togetherness with her lover in the past and the prayerful, inarticulate desire for the actuality of a union with her fiancé in the present. The evocation of this meaning-laden in-between provokes questions about the formative and transformative power of devotion. This painting both upholds the legitimacy of dedication and downplays its genuine sense, calling on us to creatively respond to the dubious status of piety. The mystery of longing that spurs thoughts of erotic oneness with the beloved echoes Diotima's famous lesson to Socrates about love's delicate but powerful nature and its space of dwelling that is stranded between infinity and temporality. The dualistically founded character of love so vividly articulated by Diotima, can be articulated thus: "Eros is an in-between reality (*metaxy*) partaking of both eternity and time" (Greenaway 127), and invites the viewer of *Mariana* to ponder love's labor and locate its fruits in eternity rather than in earthly reality.

Weariness affects Mariana's soul and body—the bodily posture perfectly matches spiritual weakening, as well as the profound longing to release frustration and to dwell in reciprocity. Interestingly, Millais's

heroine is exemplary in representing the hysterical pathology characteristic of early modern women. The immediately recognizable body language suggests hysterical symptoms, and one may say that, evoking feminine exasperation, the painting reveals womanhood in its primary carnal form (cf. Peterson 57). Inevitably, the corporeal is equated here with a vital mode of dwelling. Providing a barrier, the windowpane marks another meaningful in-between, recognized in the spatial composition of the painting. The centrality of the female figure effectively draws attention to longing located in the bodily being, but the way Mariana is positioned, with her back stretched, transports us straight to the realm of daydreaming—the moment of imagining an escape from captivity (cf. Easby). Yielding in front of *Mariana*, the embodiment of feminine capability, the viewers dwell in the world of an imagined love and are held in the unstable equilibrium of romantic infatuation. Under the poignant curse of Eros, self-understanding seems to be an explicitly tall task. Mariana's eroticized body—her velvety, dark blue dress, the ornamental belt, calling to mind heroines inhabiting medieval romances,[8] and her look expressive of her forlorn soul—appears to be the genuine site of where love is dwelling.

Significantly, Mariana's gaze is only moderately directed to the window, while the tint of resignation and suspension seem to hold it in the ambience of the ephemeral. Imagining belonging to where one is not and spiritual dwelling in external space—outside the walls of the room—seem to give a misleadingly truer connection with the harmony of the past and the possible delight of the future, the dreamy land of consummate love. Millais expresses a sense of imprisonment and desperate seeking to belong through several distinct details of the painting's composition. Rather than providing an aperture, the window evokes the feeling of an immensely poignant enclosure—its ring-like shape, suggestive of a cage—directs our thoughts to the woman's fate, which is inevitable. The death motif, just as in the Tennyson poem which inspired Millais ("She only said, 'my life is dreary, / He cometh not,' she said; / She said, 'I am aweary, aweary, / I would that I were dead!'"), is noteworthy. The sheer physicality of wished-for death is exacerbated by the intuited demise of the self. The absence of the object of love equates with the loss of Mariana's present self—the dissolution of her identity as a fiancée; imagining and memorializing is unable to stave off death, and, thus, she seems to already belong to the shady world of the dead rather than the tangible reality of the living. The viewer is invited to ponder the destructive power of unrequited love,

[8] Interestingly, Millais, like other Pre-Raphaelites, depicts the female character as wearing a medieval-like gown. However, her rounded pelvis seems to accord with the way the Victorians portrayed women's physiognomy; see Hollander (486).

yielding to the portrayal of love's paralyzing aptitude. Millais's painting speaks to the deepest recesses of the spectator's need to love and be loved. Embodying the failure of love, it enflames the coming to the surface of fundamental questions about love and its indispensability in our lives.

Interestingly, the artist chooses to paint a stained-glass window, and its imagery, the scene of the Annunciation, inspires us to think of it as a mirror for Mariana, since her waiting countenance reflects Mary's vigilance.[9] What is the role of the Annunciation motif in the painting's thematic framework? Does it highlight the detachment of a woman's world of devotion and worship from the joyful and unimpeded flow of romantic love? Or, on the contrary, does the heroine's zeal and piety imply her closeness to Mary and herald future fulfillment? Millais plays on the meaning of the Annunciation, which is the moment when Christ is conceived and Mary becomes the mother of God, inspiring us to reflect on how binary oppositions of fulfillment and emptiness, joy and sadness, belonging and separateness are disavowed. In Shakespeare's play, Mariana is finally granted the position of a married woman, whereas in Tennyson's poem and Millais's painting, she is doomed to desolation and remains alone and childless (cf. Hickey). Mary's praise, joy, and profound sense of belonging to God's plan are displaced and juxtaposed with Mariana's sadness, despair, and sense of being in the wrong place.[10] The implication of Millais's choice of the stained-glass window rather than a standard one is equally stark. This kind of window prevents the direct emanation of light, which seems to imply that the permeability between the two worlds is less effective, and this may also indirectly suggest that the abysmal darkness of not-belonging obscures true vision and does not allow for the satisfactory dénouement of Mariana's immense struggle. Millais's painting calls on us to rethink our ability to see and feel. Despairing over the loss of love is a process of disavowing the deeply ingrained myth of separate selves; aliveness is propelled by love. Instead of putting an end to longing, the unreciprocated love dwells in shadows, blurred by the interweaving of grief and hope.

Acutely lonely and craving kinship, Mariana, the modern-day Penelope, is as much the epitome of the female capability of endurance as of wounded womanhood—of any woman who is expected to passively consent to the *status quo* of societal mores.[11] Drawing on the well-known trope of a female awaiting her lover (cf., e.g., Schweizer 279–82; Van Zyl Smit 393–406), Millais's painting not only includes the window as a meaningful motif but also offers a window into the gendered world of the division

[9] An engaging analysis of the role of the stained-glass window in *Mariana* and its minute details can be found in Kelly.

[10] For insights into the enticing relationship between Mariana and Mary and Mariana's lover and Archangel Gabriel, see Kelly.

[11] Cf., e.g., Hoffman (264–71).

between the feminine and the masculine realms of Victorian England (cf., e.g., Marsh). Evoking submissiveness and patient tarrying—traditionally ascribed to women—their hands and hearts cannot be idle—the picture holds a direct but mute appeal: women are expected to show modesty and compliance, and this is the realm where they arguably belong.[12] However, exploring the passivity-activity dichotomy, and the formulaic distribution of power between males and females, Millais appears to pose a query about the rigidity of the barrier in acting out gender roles[13] and, at the same time, questions the obviousness of the ambits the two sexes belong to, complicating further the univocal response to the painting that seems to be expressive of the societal expectations imposed on females.[14]

Interestingly, the stasis of Mariana's situation—dwelling in the compelling (ir)rationality of her desolation (we know from Shakespeare's and Tennyson's works that she lost her dowry and was abandoned by her fiancé)— may also be understood as her *ek-statis* in the Heideggerian sense of being-outside-of, of an *ek-sistence* that is transcending itself.[15] Mariana's being-in-the-world is out-of-bounds as it is completely dedicated (transcending its being) toward the Other—her lover. The belonging of the loving party to the beloved and their belonging-together, which can also be subject to torment and violation, as in Mariana's case, can be expressed as follows:

> Belonging, we can say, is grounded in a luminous beauty within the murkiness of the ordinary, simply because the beloved is a beloved, and present in our midst. From the beloved to whom we are now subject, we pick up the boundaries that demarcate the uniqueness of our selfhood. It is for the sake of the beloved that we choose to exercise our agency. We exist-from and exist-toward the beloved whose presence invites us to be responsible and free, in that order. In the presence of the beloved, I am present to myself as *lover*, unfolding myself in ways that I may not have otherwise done. In such unfolding, I bring my own possibilities to light. (Greenaway 129)

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[12] A survey of gender relations in the context of the social hierarchy and domestic problems is offered, for instance, in Langland and in Hoffman.

[13] Interestingly, Millais, as a male artist, appears to draw our attention to women's feelings of being overwhelmed by the world of men, subverting the conventional attitude represented by men. A similar sentiment can be discerned in paintings by other Pre-Raphaelites.

[14] For an analysis of the intersections between Pre-Raphaelites' art and the Victorian novel, as well as the Pre-Raphaelite artists' attempts to redefine gender constructs, see, e.g., Andres (46–48).

[15] In *Four Seminars*, Heidegger asserts that "Dasein is essentially ek-static" (71), underscoring thus that Dasein is transcending in its being. For further explication of the notion of *ek-stasis* see, for instance, Polt (265–67).

Besides engaging the ontological-phenomenological dimension, Millais's painting perfectly distills the essence of an epistemic dilemma. Mariana is captured in the crisis of time—in her desire to cross the boundary between the known, to which she belongs, and the unknown to which she wants to belong. Her sense of belongingness arises from the fundamental law of love—lovers (be)long to one another. Since longing is "an ever-present energy, questing and fusional" (Gifford 9), the fragile partition of the windowpane can possibly be easily destroyed, and oneness can be reestablished and belonging reconfigured.

As much as Millais's choice of the stained-glass window seems to bear on the message of his painting, so the decision to use a bay window has certain important connotations. The bay window best serves to render the proximity of the raging world of nature and the secure interior of the human dwelling. The window's very construction—it protrudes and occupies part of the space thought to belong to nature—suggests an obvious intrusion of the human into the natural surroundings, which is ingeniously paralleled by the penetration of human habitation by the outside world of nature—the leaves that seem to fit in the object of the woman's art. If Millais's painting evokes female passivity, it is one that is pregnant with meaning. Entrapped in the privacy of her room, "totally enclosed and isolated by her surroundings, with even the garden visible outside the window bordered by a high brick wall" (Easby), the woman is a prisoner, tragically limited not only because of the room's compactness, which indicates the lack of a possibility of personal development, but because of the mental structures imposed on her. The life led between the little altar and the table with the embroidery symbolizes selfless devotion, adoration, and passionate love. Mariana's art (her embroidery) is an escape of the self that suffers from an aggrieved sense of not-belonging to the creative self that seems to expand. Downcast thoughts seem to be counterbalanced and sublimated by a religious sentiment suggested by the place of worship, which can also be viewed as symbolizing the woman's sacrifice in expecting a lover who is tarrying and who will probably never come. Millais's embodiment of womanhood as anguished and distressed discloses the painful condition of not-belonging.

Viewing Millais's painting through the lens of Gadamer's model of aesthetics prompts us to move beyond the formulaic distinction between the safe inside and the hostile outside. The truth about the female protagonist's predicament of not-belonging daunts us. We have to acknowledge that instead of a cozy interior and an innocent act of relaxation, the painting evokes a sense of uncomfortable confinement and frustration. Despite the picture's plausible expression of the theme of love, Millais's character neither delights in love nor belongs to her place of

dwelling. In the back-and-forth movement of contemplating this artwork, our initial response to the embodiment of belongingness and alienation is questioned while other senses emerge for us on our meditative aesthetic journey towards a comprehension of the reality that the painting captures. The gradual apprehension of the reality—or, rather, the realities—that the painting conveys both calls on us and enacts the invaluable possibilities of the expansion of the viewer's self. The artwork's *increase in being* in the process of self-actualizing coalesces with the spectator's *increase in being*.

GIRL READING A LETTER BY AN OPEN WINDOW: LONGING AS THE PORTAL TO BELONGING

The acute feeling of entrapment and doom in Millais's pictorial evocation of Mariana's condition can be contrasted with the sensation of impending freedom and perhaps happiness in Vermeer's painting, *Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window*. This masterpiece encourages us to ponder the reality of longing as the cognitive and emotive space of connection and contentment. The female character in the picture seems to represent the typically feminine desire for romantic fulfillment,[16] which is potently expressed through the motif of the open window, as if in a gesture to invite the world of sensual and/or mental pleasure. The significance of the window as the portal to happiness and gratification is powerfully underlined by Vermeer's use of light. The light that infuses the room from outside might be understood as symbolically indicating that alterity and newness present themselves as more satisfactory and pleasing than the known reality of the inside, heralding the reality that the female figure is drawn to. Vermeer's employment of light seems to highlight the emotional state of longing.[17] In combination with the human gaze and the clarity of composition—suggesting the artist's attentiveness to time—his evocative use of light directs our thoughts to longing as the thematic framework of the painting (cf. Ford and Wheelock 86). The apparent dissolution of the barrier between the exterior and the interior invokes the sensation that the imaginary world is near, and that the woman's fantasy can come to actualization.[18] However, when we focus on the evocation of the need for romantic fulfillment, we may miss the interpretation of light as symbolizing intellectual and/or spiritual illumination, and, thus, the female figure engaged in thought rather than romance.

[16] An engaging study of femininity and libidinous desire in Vermeer's paintings of women is offered, for instance, in Salomon.

[17] On Vermeer's use of light and shadow, see, e.g., Thurston (475–76).

[18] Feminine subjectivity in relation to home and domesticity, as captured by Vermeer, was analyzed, for example, in Chapman.

The wide-open window encourages us to view the space outside as both distinct and as amalgamating with the internal. We do not see the window opening *en face*. Instead, Vermeer's ingenious composition makes us confront the window sash with the girl's face reflected in it. The reflection introduces the element of the uncanny—perhaps the maiden's hidden part of herself, the unknown and the possibly suppressed. Although the heroine's gaze is fixed on the letter, her figure faces an open window, which positions her in the direct impact of the light flowing from the outside. The figure of the girl, bathed in light, arrested in time, and almost timeless, impresses us with a profound spiritual quality that can be viewed as a particular kind of serenity (cf. Read 64). Vermeer engages us with a thought-provoking synchronicity between the window remaining open and the possibility of a new existential opening that the letter appears to represent. The stylish metal divisions highlight the bulk and the material tangibility of the window partition. This ornamental element, typical of the time when the painting was created, counterbalances the immediate interpretation of the window as providing an easy passage to the world outside.

As the dark red curtain in the window is pulled aside, our attention is simultaneously drawn to its concealing and disclosing purpose. The drapery's practical materiality serves as a reminder to us to keep what is private closed off from prying eyes and to be mindful when doing so.[19] On a symbolic level, the curtain makes us more alert to the sudden burst of the radically new, when it is pulled back to reveal something unexpected in all its alluring splendor. Perhaps it is the reality of a secret love that tempts the girl to succumb to its beguiling power. Vermeer's ability to seize the moment and imbue it with insight and meaning draws us into the very heart of his art. The important, symbolic component of the painting's composition—the enigmatic letter, whose contents are known only to the girl and not to us, the viewers—is how the artist cleverly captures the moment of revelation. The painting's exploration of the tension between belonging and non-belonging and the ambiguity of the letter's message[20]— its transparency and secrecy—resonate profoundly, raising an

[19] Vermeer's frequent use of the curtain in many of his paintings is the source of unwavering interest, induced in both art historians and common viewers. One of the innumerable instances that feature a drapery is his masterpiece, *An Artist in his Studio*. A detailed analysis of the importance of the drapery in the composition of this painting can be found, for instance, in Hinden (23–24). Interestingly, as the critic claims, unlike in *Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window*, half of the room would be covered if the curtain were released, which may imply that the message of the painting (*An Artist in his Studio*) is even more complex than it seems to be suggested by the dichotomy of openness and covertness encapsulated in the image of the room either closed or made open to the eye of the spectator.

[20] The intricate nature of the letter in the painting is explored, for instance, in Nash.

awareness that the epiphanic moment is the time of disclosure, possibly revealing that the girl longs to belong to a reality different from the one she is dwelling in.

Vermeer demonstrates how something that appears to be disclosed can nevertheless remain hidden and available for further disclosure. The hermeneutic tension of veiling and unveiling operates here to the effect of bringing us, the viewers, to the brink of uncovering some essential truth, only to subvert the closeness of our discovery and make us aware that what has been disclosed is simultaneously engendering other mysteries. The Gadamerian reading of art (cf. *Relevance* 34) alerts us to how Vermeer's painting puts a claim on us by drawing us into the realm of intimacy, silence, and something genuinely unresolvable. The intensity of the painting's address to us has been cogently expressed by Wiseman:

> The task for the viewer of a canvas by Vermeer is to get beyond mere identification of the pictured scene and the effort to figure out what is going on in it, to recognize the silence pervading the canvas as a metaphor for the reality and the separateness of the minds of the depicted figures. What is called for is that the viewer bear witness to the privacy of their worlds, not try to fathom it. We can bear witness only to what we stand before or are in the presence of. We know we are in the presence of another (painting or person) when something in the other leaps up to touch, to pierce us. (323)

The seemingly accessible world of Vermeer's art is also acutely inaccessible, when we are invited to attend to the private and the intimate, yet recognize that crossing the boundary between the world of the artwork and ours would be a mere figment of imagination. The enigmatic, dense reality of his work, calling on us to respond and let ourselves be overwhelmed by that which happens in our aesthetic encounter with this painting, precludes a univocal response to the query of belonging and not-belonging when the portrayal of longing overpowers our cognitive and emotive capabilities, generating more questions than answers, and inviting us to appreciate our confrontation with the shifting borderline between the consciousness of belonging and its opposite.

Apart from thematizing the human need to belong, Vermeer's painting draws our attention to another level of belonging—the intimate game between the spectator and the artwork, following the back-and-forth movement paradigm.[21] The effect of the red screen is intensified by the

[21] The back-and-forth movement bespeaks the self-forgetfulness of the viewer and her absorption in the work of art. It is the kind of movement that relates to playing a game. What happens is not intentional; rather, it is something that comes from beyond the viewer

existence of the green one, which creates the illusion that the boundary separating the viewer and the world of the artwork may break, which makes him/her feel strangely connected to the painting, as if they belonged to it. The space of the room seems to open when the green shade is pulled aside, encouraging viewers to explore its contents or—even more intriguingly and engagingly—to become part of the narrative. Rather than the starkness of separation, the impression of inclusion and a peculiar sense of belonging prompts us to look at the reality of belonging from yet another angle. The paradigm of veiling and unveiling hinted at by means of drapery is a complex issue with provocative overtones.

The literal veiling and uncovering seem to metaphorically emphasize the dynamic interplay of concealment and unconcealment (*Verbergung/Entbergung*) of Being[22] that discloses itself to us. We can surmise that Vermeer prompts us to acknowledge that his art poetically discloses the reality of love, and, at the same time, renders it hidden, and open to interpretation. As Wiseman notices, "Vermeer's subjects do not unlock their secrets under his brush, interpretations of his paintings are uncertain and indeterminate. In this they are like the contents of the unconscious mind, primitive in being untouched by culture and its systems of intelligibility" (319). When we contemplate Vermeer's painting, something important is brought into the open in the hermeneutic tension of veiling and unveiling. It is possible that we do not merely identify ourselves with the girl in her need to fulfill her longing, but, more profoundly, discover the power of our own longings. As seems to be suggested by the girl's predicament, longing can become the portal to a true sense of belonging.

The viewer remains in the focal, if enigmatic, in-between that the female character in Vermeer's painting is in—the woman is positioned at the imperceptible border between her current reality and the potential future she faces. While the viewer is separated from the situational setting depicted on the canvas, they also feel uncannily and even uncomfortably close to it—possibly discovering even more in common with the painting's story than is readily and easily acknowledged. It feels as though the

(cf. Gadamer, *Relevance* 22–23). Developing his ontological-phenomenological model of an aesthetic encounter, Gadamer introduces the distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* aesthetics (cf., e.g., Davey, "Lived" 326–41). Through the notion of *Er-fahrung*, Gadamer draws attention to movement and emphasizes that something important happens in an encounter with art. This encounter is an event (*Ereignis*), in which the viewer undergoes a seminal change.

[22] In his ontological hermeneutics, Martin Heidegger accentuates that Being discloses itself to us in the tension between concealment and unconcealment (*Four Seminars* 41). Heidegger extends his ontological model upon the revelation of truth in art; see "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1971).

painting is a kind of window itself because of the green drapery that denotes the artwork's border. Vermeer employs this visual trick to let the spectator recognize the image as a potential window into a reality that is both familiar and intelligible to them while remaining ambiguous and demanding interpretation. The two screens frame the chamber's interior in a provocative way. Their hues, which are rife with symbolic meaning, highlight the painting's ambiguous message and compel us to delve deeper into the complex and nuanced feelings of belonging and longing that lie beneath those phenomena. Red, which is commonly associated with passion and infatuation, is a suitable color to convey the underlying theme of a romantic liaison alongside the overtly sexualized longing (indicated through the figure of Cupid) and is excellently paired with green in its popular connotation of hope and good prospects, thereby creating the possibility of viewing the clandestine message of the letter that the girl is reading as containing the promise of happiness.

Whereas in Millais's picture, the personal domain is kept private and, therefore, emphasizes the entrapment of the female, in Vermeer's painting, the private is infringed upon as the light entering the room through the window seems to metaphorically let drop the mystery that envelops the content of the letter. The recent discovery of a part of the painting that was covered with a layer of paint—a portrait of Cupid on the wall behind the girl—emphasizes the ambiguity of the painting's message and draws our attention to a wider spectrum of interpretations. This broader vision is especially intriguing since we know that it was scientifically proven that someone else's hand, not Vermeer's, interfered with the picture's original form by hiding the Cupid.[23] One possible interpretation is that the portrait of Cupid, a picture within the picture, confirms the assumption that the letter contains an amorous message.[24]

Vermeer's painting engages our imagination to such an extent that the conundrum presents itself as an unending challenge. Interpreting this masterpiece, we succumb to its enticing way of making us pose questions, and thus its impact makes us feel that we cannot remain the same—the slow uncovering of its manifold senses guides us to an experience of self-expansion. Spurring endless responses, the mystery that is captured in this painting bewilders us. Intrigued as we are, we cannot help but acknowledge

[23] Cf., e.g., Brown.

[24] This kind of interpretation can be supported by the message encapsulated in the presence of Cupid in Vermeer's other works, e.g., *A Woman Receiving a Letter*, or *Girl Interrupted at Her Music*. For further information on the meaning hidden in the ekphrastic images of Cupid in Vermeer's art, see, for instance, Weber (298–99). Weber draws our attention to the imposing, large image of Cupid in *A Girl Reading a Letter by the Open Window*, which might highlight the predominance of a love motif rendered in this painting (295).

that the painting's enigmatic power is not to be fully accessed in one sitting and tamed, but rather that it encourages us to patiently let the truth shine forth and, at the same time, to explore greater possibilities for our own development. The aesthetic pleasure that we derive is the pleasure that makes us grow. Thus, we are in the position of both appreciating and awaiting our development in new encounters with this artwork.

THE WOMAN AT THE WINDOW: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF LONGING FOR WHERE WE DO NOT BELONG

Dalí's *The Woman at the Window*[25] is an intriguing instance of how any obvious sense of belonging can be debunked through the artist's choice of blurring the boundary between two states of being. Dalí paints his sister Anna Maria from behind, at the window in Cadaqués. The painting enchants us with the softness of the woman's blueish-greyish dress, her relaxed figure, and the soothing view of the sea that induces an emotional response to the woman's secret longing (cf. Dredge). The figure of the woman seems to belong to both the inside and the outside of the room in this painting. The unification of colors that appear both on the inner and the outer sides of the woman's place of dwelling powerfully indicates her metaphorical dissolution into the seascape. The level of integration with the landscape is so extensive that one may get the impression that the female remains in some mysterious oneness with it. Her confluence with her surroundings may allude to the woman's immature personality or a lack of experience, but such minor observations can only deter us from Dalí's quintessential attempt to explore the paradoxical unity of the exterior and the interior. Spectacular as it is, the visible unity might indicate the longing for something remote or secret and the surfacing of impossible desire. The woman's body language expresses her intense attentiveness and absorption (cf., e.g., Shanes 69). Providing an opening to an unknown reality—the intriguing unfamiliarity outside—the window invites the woman and, by extension, the viewers to cross the boundary and unite with that which is longed for. This sentiment plays the pivotal role in the painting; longing becomes belonging. If longing not only leads to belonging but is shown as interwoven with it, we may surmise that Dalí's phenomenology of human belongingness is much more nuanced than it initially appears to be. It

[25] It is interesting to compare Dalí's painting to Caspar David Friedrich's *Woman at a Window* (1822). Friedrich is believed to be the first to explore the symbolic possibilities of the open window. See, e.g., Grant.

suggests that longing is the *spiritus movens* of any sense of rootedness and connectivity, as we feel connected to where we long for.

When taken to its logical conclusion, the astounding permeability of the landscape and the human being, which is the composition's controlling idea, makes us succumb to the illusion that the fusion of the two is nearly complete. The almost indistinguishable human and natural domains compel us to uncover the meaning of this perfect, if unsettling, equilibrium, achieved through the trick of the woman's dress resembling the sea. Significantly, the room in this painting is empty, dull, and uninteresting, and stands in contrast to the more attractive outside. Dalí provides no details of furniture or décor, and the view of the interior is minimized. One part of the window casement is missing, which almost goes unnoticed (cf. Leal). This heightens the effect of the chasm between the appeal of the outside and the woman's wish to belong to it with all its attractions rather than to the dreary inside. Since the female is depicted with her back facing the viewer, we can only guess her emotional state as expressed through her body posture. Despite the delusion of the unification of the woman and the seascape, at once tempting but uncrossed, the window barrier is suggestive of a reality that is immaterial. The alluring power of where one does not belong is the genuine substance of (be)longing. The window, constituting a sudden disruption in the unified pattern of the wall that is drab, uninteresting, and monothematic, is a gateway to dreams becoming reality.

Dalí defies the principle of mimetic representation, creating a dreamscape that is governed by stillness and fantasy. Looking, perhaps hopefully, at the horizon, the female character inhabits a world that is beyond the tangible reality of her predicament. Longing is about situating oneself on the horizon of where one wants to belong and dreams of belonging. The object of one's longing can be a place that is forbidden, full of mystery, but also fulfilling one's desire for freedom and happiness. It can equally well create the true possibility of self-actualization or the mirage of completion. In a vein similar and yet essentially different from Millais's painting, the outside in this artwork seems to invade the interior of the woman's place of dwelling. The surreal world of Dalí's art, in which the wave-like curtains mirror the sea's velvety softness and appeal, articulates a surrender to one's desire to connect with the outer world. Solitariness, paradoxically both emphasized and disparaged via the odd sameness of the pattern of the woman's dress and that of the curtains, is the space of her inner dwelling and belonging.

Contemplating Dalí's surrealist painting, we are invited to experience an increase in our capacity to transcend the real, and, thus, we realize that while being addressed by this artwork, we are also in a position that may be uncomfortable for us, as the painting necessitates an acknowledgment of the transgression of the preconceived ideas of dwelling and belonging. As much

as the female character is made to belong to the surrounding landscape, the world outside seems to belong to her, too. The bizarre oneness of a human being and the landscape, which is depicted in this artwork, prompts us to partake in a game in which belonging and alienation are not unambiguous terms. Moreover, we may feel intrigued by the possibility of contemplating the delicate and, at the same time, powerful nature of the phenomenon of love, suggested in a clandestine way via the motif of dissolving realities. While disturbing us, Dalí's painting powerfully expands our selves and our sense of (be)longing.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Employing the tenets of Gadamer's ontology of art grants us the possibility of recognizing the specific kind of conversation that takes place between an artwork and its viewers. In this conversation, something important is revealed, and we cannot remain silent in the presence of what is unveiled. Triggering emotional resonance, an artwork holds us in awe. It puts a claim on us, demanding an answer. We cannot escape its "piercing" way of watching us. The seeming reversal of the roles of the viewer and what is being viewed bespeaks the gist of the event of art's performance. Illuminating our pathway of how we can understand what happens *to* us and *in* us when we contemplate an artwork, Gadamer's model of art sensitizes us to an increase in being—*Zuwachs an Sein*, which reveals the ontological dimension of an aesthetic encounter. In the back-and-forth conversation that occurs in this encounter, the excess of meaning that the artwork holds is actualized. Participation in the dialogue also entails the viewer's self-enrichment; her world expands beyond the strictures of what is familiar.

In our patient attention to the selected works of art that embody belonging, we feel the exquisite pleasure of uncovering those realities of belonging that are unexpected and more nuanced. The lingering fashion of exploring the complex relationship between the outside and the inside of *home*, instantiated by the discussed paintings, draws our attention to the intricate reality of dwelling and belonging—one in which the boundary between what we understand as inclusion and exclusion appears to dissolve. When looked at from the perspective of the window motif in art, the close relationship of the two phenomena yields important findings that impact our understanding of (di)vision and (dis)closure. In the selected paintings by Vermeer and Dalí, the window is open: the glass partition loses its dissevering force, and gains a visionary, imaginary, and even transcendent power. The locked window in Millais's painting represents the inaccessibility of the world of otherness and the Other—it

retains its dividing function and seems to suggest no possibility of change. The symbolism of the window examined in these artworks sensitizes us to a deeper understanding of our *search for home*, longing, and belonging that is undergirded by the philosophical quest for the meaning of mortality and identity, but also self-understanding and love. The evocations of (be)longing in art not only acknowledge the truth about our sense of belonging but also make our vision and self expand in the endless unveiling of what is and what will allow itself to be discovered.

The narrative dimension of the chosen artworks exemplifies the disclosure of the longing to belong (also the unthinkable one), which is possibly doomed to failure, but which can equally result in an almost perfect oneness with the reality that is exterior to the self. The window partition grants a vision of the unfulfilled past, of not being present in the moment, of emptiness and desire. It partakes in the dynamics of closeness and remoteness, in terms of both space and time. Space is saturated with an uncanny presence that is juxtaposed with a poignant absence. Time is not simply stopped but immensely treasured. In the process of our self-recognition, the window provides a rich vision of our incessant quest for home, while we are seeking the comforting state of a deep awareness of identity in the analeptic and proleptic movement of meaning. The window glass, as a real and imaginary threshold or a semi-transparent *veil*, features a continuous invitation to hermeneutically unveil the more subtle meanings of an ambiguous relationship between landscape and the human place of dwelling, including the fantasy landscape of our minds and longing for which the longed-for *home*, carrying diverse meanings, is a reality of belonging in epitome.

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