

The Estrangement of Origin: Phenomenological and Psychoanalytic Reflections on an Unspoken Culture

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Abstract: *This paper examines the experience of discovering a cultural inheritance that was never fully transmitted through language, narrative, or continuous communal life, yet persists as an intimate and unresolved presence. Beginning from the belated recognition of an Arbëresh inheritance, it explores the paradox of an origin that feels deeply one's own while remaining only partially accessible. Drawing on phenomenology, the essay describes this condition as one of belated belonging, shaped by tensions between familiarity and estrangement, proximity and distance. What emerges is not the recovery of a stable identity, but an encounter with a cultural trace that survives as atmosphere, affective resonance, and fragmented recognition. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this inheritance is understood as psychically mediated by silence, interruption, and incomplete symbolization. Rather than offering a general account of Arbëresh culture, the paper focuses on the subjective experience of discontinuous inheritance, arguing that belonging may persist precisely through rupture, and that origin demands symbolic elaboration rather than recovery.*

Keywords: Arbëresh identity, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, identity, cultural transmission, estrangement

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Introduction

What does it mean to discover oneself as belonging to a culture that was never fully spoken, transmitted, or inhabited, and yet remains deeply one's own? This question emerges with particular force when cultural inheritance is not given through the continuity of language, daily practice, or explicit family narrative, but appears instead in fragmentary, delayed, and affectively charged form. In such cases, origin is not simply known; it is encountered belatedly, as something both intimate and strange, familiar and inaccessible. One does not return to a clearly preserved identity but rather confronts the disturbing and fertile experience of recognizing oneself in what was never fully possessed.

This essay reflects on that experience through the specific case of discovering an Arbëresh inheritance that was never fully lived in linguistic or cultural continuity. The Arbëresh are Albanian-descended communities established in southern Italy from the late medieval period onward, whose historical experience has been marked by the preservation, in varying forms, of distinctive linguistic and cultural traditions. The purpose of this essay is not to offer a general account of Arbëresh culture, nor to assume an authoritative position on its historical or collective meanings. Its focus is instead on a subjective experience of inheritance: the experience of finding oneself implicated in a cultural world that was never explicitly transmitted, yet persists as trace, resonance, and unresolved presence. The central question, therefore, concerns not cultural identity in a broad sociological sense, but the ways in which an unspoken culture may continue to inhabit the subject both psychically and phenomenologically (Musacchio and Renzi 2014).

The notion of an “unspoken culture” must here be understood in a double sense. First, it refers literally to a culture whose language was not inherited or practiced as a living medium of expression. Second, it points to a broader symbolic condition: a cultural belonging that remained unarticulated, not fully narrated within the family or integrated into conscious self-understanding. What is at stake, then, is not only the absence of a spoken language, but the interruption of a transmission. Yet interruption does not necessarily imply disappearance. What has not been fully said may nevertheless endure in indirect forms: in affective tonalities, in family silences, in obscure identifications, in gestures, names, atmospheres, or recurring intuitions of proximity to something that cannot be fully grasped.

To approach this condition, the essay places phenomenology and psychoanalysis into dialogue. Phenomenology offers a way of describing how such an inheritance is lived: how it appears in experience as ambiguity, resonance, partial recognition, and estrangement. It allows us to attend to the texture of belonging before it is stabilized into identity, and to examine how one may feel claimed by a world that one does not fully know. Psychoanalysis, by contrast, offers a framework for thinking about the dynamics of transmission, interruption, and psychic inheritance. It allows us to ask how what is not consciously transmitted may nevertheless remain active across generations, and how the subject may come to inhabit traces of a legacy that was never fully symbolized.

The conjunction of these two perspectives is especially fruitful in relation to experiences of belated belonging. Phenomenology helps articulate the lived paradox of feeling close to what remains distant;

psychoanalysis helps interpret the psychic force of what returns without having been fully formulated. Together, they make it possible to think of inheritance not as the simple reception of a coherent tradition, but as a more fragile and complex structure in which presence and absence, continuity and rupture, intimacy and foreignness coexist. The discovery of origin, in this sense, does not take the form of recovery, but of encounter: an encounter with something that has always already marked the subject, while remaining only partially available to thought.

The title of this essay, *The Estrangement of Origin*, seeks to name precisely this paradox. Origin is often imagined as the place of greatest familiarity, the ground of belonging and recognition. Yet when transmission has been interrupted, origin may appear instead as estranged: not foreign in the sense of external, but foreign within the intimate. It is this internal foreignness that gives the experience its particular phenomenological and psychoanalytic significance. To discover one's origin under such conditions is not to regain a lost unity, but to begin the difficult work of naming, thinking, and symbolizing what was inherited without ever having been fully spoken.

The argument developed here is that discovering oneself as part of an unspoken culture can be understood as an experience of belated belonging in which phenomenological estrangement and psychoanalytic inheritance converge. What emerges from this convergence is a conception of origin not as possession, but as task: not as a fixed identity waiting to be recovered, but as a field of reflective and symbolic elaboration. In this sense, the essay proposes that the estrangement of origin does not simply mark a loss of continuity; it also opens the possibility of a new relation to inheritance, one grounded not in immediacy or certainty, but in the labor of attention, interpretation, and thought.

Belated Belonging

To discover oneself as belonging to a cultural world that was never fully spoken is to undergo a peculiar form of belatedness. What appears in such an experience is not the reassuring recovery of an already possessed identity, but the emergence of a bond that seems to have preceded conscious knowledge. One does not simply learn something new about oneself; one encounters, rather, something that feels as though it had always been there, though without ever having been clearly given. In this sense, belonging does not arise here as possession, continuity, or mastery, but as a delayed recognition of what had remained latent.

From a phenomenological point of view, such an experience may be understood not as the acquisition of new information, but as a transformation in the way one's own past and self-relation come to appear. Phenomenology, in its classical sense, is concerned with structures of lived experience and with the ways in which meaning is disclosed from the first-person point of view (Smith, 2018). Within this horizon, the discovery of an unspoken cultural inheritance is not reducible to a historical fact or genealogical datum. It is first lived as a modification of one's relation to familiarity itself. Something formerly peripheral, silent, or obscure begins to acquire affective density. Fragments that may once have seemed incidental - names, sounds,

gestures, family tonalities, passing references, even silences - come to be gathered under a new figure of significance.

This emergence is marked by a tension that is difficult to resolve. On the one hand, the discovered culture appears as intimate: it concerns one's own origin, family history, and sense of self. On the other hand, it remains distant, since it was not inhabited through language, explicit ritual continuity, or sustained communal participation. The subject is therefore placed in an intermediate position: neither wholly inside nor fully outside, neither bearer of a continuous tradition nor simple observer of it. Belonging here takes the form of partial recognition. It is a relation sustained by nearness and interruption at once.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is especially helpful for thinking this condition, insofar as it resists any sharp separation between subject and world and instead understands experience as embodied, situated, and already intertwined with a meaningful horizon not entirely of one's own making (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). If this is so, then cultural belonging need not be conceived only as a set of explicit representations. It may also persist as atmosphere, style, orientation, or felt background. One may thus find oneself affected by a cultural inheritance that was not conceptually possessed, but that nonetheless informed one's sensibility in indirect ways. What returns in the moment of discovery is not always a recoverable content, but often a mode of attunement.

This helps explain why the encounter with an unspoken culture may be accompanied not only by recognition, but also by estrangement. What is discovered is not simply "mine," in any immediate or transparent sense. It appears instead as something both inward and withdrawn, intimate and inaccessible. The paradox is not accidental. Indeed, the phenomenological force of belated belonging lies precisely in the fact that what should have been nearest - origin, inheritance, language, transmission - is encountered under the sign of distance. In this respect, the experience bears an affinity with what Freud described as the uncanny: that peculiar mode in which something long familiar returns in an unfamiliar form, disturbing the distinction between what belongs to the self and what remains alien to it (Freud, 1919/2003).

Yet the point here is not simply uncanniness in a narrow sense. It is rather the discovery that origin may be structured by a fracture in transmission. A culture that was never fully spoken does not disappear for that reason. It may continue to inhabit the subject as a weak but persistent claim, as if belonging survived the interruption of its own clear articulation. What is then disclosed is a mode of inheritance without full possession: a belonging that cannot be grounded in fluency, continuity, or certainty, but that nevertheless asks to be thought. The subject does not recover a lost whole; instead, one enters into relation with a partial legacy that had remained psychically and affectively active before becoming conceptually available.

In the specific case of an Arbëresh inheritance, this structure acquires particular resonance. Arbëresh communities in Italy preserve a historically layered linguistic and cultural tradition, and the very fact of their survival across centuries gives special weight to the question of what it means to stand in relation to such a tradition without having fully received it in language (Toso, 2019). The issue, however, is not only ethnolinguistic. It is existential and interpretive. To discover oneself as linked to such a world without having

spoken it is to confront a discontinuous inheritance - one that does not authorize immediate identification yet does not permit indifference either.

Belated belonging, then, names a threshold condition. It describes the moment in which origin ceases to be a neutral background and becomes a question. But it becomes a question precisely because it is not fully available as memory or continuity. One belongs and yet does not know how to belong; one recognizes and yet cannot simply claim. In this sense, the experience is neither merely nostalgic nor merely cognitive. It is a lived tension in which the self becomes newly legible to itself through what had remained silent within it.

Language, Silence, and the Unspoken

If belonging is discovered belatedly, language becomes one of the decisive places where this belatedness is felt most sharply. To encounter oneself as linked to a cultural world whose language one has never spoken is not simply to register a factual absence. It is to confront a gap in transmission. Language is never only an instrument of communication; it is also a mode of world-disclosure, a way in which memory, kinship, gesture, and shared forms of life become inhabitable. Within the phenomenological tradition, language is bound to the emergence of meaning in lived experience, rather than being treated as a mere external code (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). For this reason, the absence of an inherited language may be experienced not only as loss of expression, but as a disturbance in the very texture of belonging.

In the case of Arbëresh communities, language carries particular historical and symbolic weight. Arbërishtja is not simply a dialectal variation, but the bearer of a long diasporic continuity, preserved across centuries in specific communities of southern Italy. To stand in relation to that world without speaking its language is therefore to face a paradox: one may inherit the trace of a culture while remaining excluded from one of its primary living media. The issue is not authenticity in any simplistic sense, nor the legitimacy of belonging, but rather the form that inheritance takes when continuity has been interrupted. What is at stake is a relation to origin mediated by silence.

This silence, however, should not be understood only negatively. Silence may indeed mark deprivation, rupture, or erasure; yet it may also function as a peculiar mode of transmission. Families and communities often pass on what they do not fully formulate. Gestures, tonalities, fragments of vocabulary, recurrent anxieties, unexplained attachments, or the simple force of what remains unnamed may all carry more psychic weight than explicit narrative. In this sense, the “unspoken” exceeds the merely unsaid. It names a condition in which something is transmitted without being fully available to representation. Psychoanalytic thought has repeatedly returned to this problem in its reflections on secrecy, latency, and inherited psychic material, especially in the work of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok on the crypt, the phantom, and the transgenerational effects of unelaborated experience (Abraham & Torok, 1994).

What is not spoken, then, does not simply vanish. On the contrary, it may persist precisely as something that cannot be directly claimed, only sensed through its effects. This is why an unspoken culture may present itself less as content than as atmosphere: not as a body of knowledge already possessed, but as an obscure

familiarity, a felt orientation, or a recurring impression that something in oneself exceeds the available language of self-description. Phenomenologically, this suggests that belonging can endure at the level of affective attunement even when its symbolic articulation is weak or broken. One does not know in full, and yet one is already involved.

At the same time, the absence of language introduces a specific fragility into the work of recognition. Without words through which a world has been habitually lived, the inherited culture risks appearing only in discontinuous fragments. The subject may then experience origin not as continuity, but as remainder. What returns is not a coherent tradition ready to be resumed, but a scattered set of traces requiring interpretation. This is why the rediscovery of an unspoken culture often takes a retrospective form: one returns to names, family silences, local histories, or half-understood signs, and only afterward begins to grasp their significance. The act of discovery is therefore also an act of reading. What had long remained mute begins to ask for form.

To say that a culture was never spoken is thus to say two things at once. First, that its language was not fully inherited as a living practice. Second, that its place within psychic and familial life remained only partially symbolized. The unspoken is therefore both linguistic and psychic. It designates a break in continuity, but also the persistence of a claim. In this sense, silence is not the opposite of transmission; it is one of its most difficult and ambiguous forms. The subject who discovers such an inheritance does not simply recover what was lost. Rather, one begins the labor of giving words to what had been transmitted without speech, and of approaching origin through the very experience of its incompleteness.

Psychic Inheritance, Trace, and Unsymbolized Memory

If the absence of language marks a break in cultural transmission, psychoanalysis allows us to ask how something may nonetheless continue to pass from one generation to another. The question is not simply how stories are told, but how psychic life itself may bear the mark of what was never fully narrated. Psychoanalytic thought has long insisted that not all inheritance is conscious, explicit, or symbolically elaborated. What is transmitted may survive in indirect forms: as affective pressure, latent identification, repetitive sensibility, internalized silence, or a persistent sense of being shaped by something one cannot entirely name. In this sense, cultural inheritance may remain psychically active even when it has not been fully represented. Freud's broader theory of the unconscious already opened the possibility that decisive elements of psychic life may remain inaccessible to direct awareness while continuing to structure experience and meaning.

To speak of psychic inheritance in this context is not necessarily to invoke trauma in a narrow or dramatic sense, though trauma may indeed be one possible modality of transmission. More fundamentally, it is to recognize that human subjectivity is formed within a field of prior meanings, losses, desires, prohibitions, and silences that are never entirely self-generated. The self does not begin from nothing; it inherits. Yet what is inherited is not always metabolized in a form that can be consciously owned. This is why psychoanalysis remains especially useful for thinking experiences in which something feels deeply one's own while also resisting conceptual clarity. The inherited element may appear not as memory properly speaking, but as trace:

something that insists without being fully present, something active without yet being fully thinkable. Contemporary psychoanalytic discussions of transgenerational transmission continue to emphasize that what is not fully processed or symbolized in one generation may persist as a haunting or unresolved psychic presence in another.

Within this field, the work of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok is especially suggestive. Their reflections on the phantom, the crypt, and the afterlife of unspoken family material offer a language for understanding how what remains unelaborated may survive beyond the individual who first bore it. In Abraham's well-known formulation, what haunts are not simply the dead or the past as such, but "the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (Abraham, 1987). The force of this formulation lies in its displacement of inheritance away from explicit content and toward structural absence. One may thus be inhabited not only by remembered histories, but also by what could not be told, mourned, or integrated elsewhere. The subject becomes the site where a previous silence continues its work.

Such a perspective is especially fertile for reflecting on an unspoken culture. If a cultural world was not fully transmitted through language or sustained communal continuity, this does not mean that it left no psychic inscription. On the contrary, its interrupted transmission may be precisely what gives it its peculiar force. What was not received as stable knowledge may persist as enigmatic affinity. What was not spoken may return not as doctrine or coherent memory, but as diffuse identification, obscure longing, or a sense of incompleteness surrounding one's own origin. In this respect, the rediscovery of a cultural inheritance can resemble not a simple acquisition of information, but a delayed encounter with something already psychically operative.

The notion of unsymbolized memory is helpful here, provided it is used with care. Not every inherited trace is reducible to trauma, nor must every silence be pathologized. Still, psychoanalysis and memory research alike have shown that experience can remain active in forms that are not fully available to declarative recall. Work on implicit memory, including clinically relevant studies of sensory-emotional and nondeclarative forms of retention, supports the idea that what is not narratively remembered may nevertheless continue to shape affect, orientation, and response. This does not collapse psychoanalysis into neuroscience, but it does strengthen the broader intuition that memory exceeds explicit recollection. A subject may therefore be bound to an inheritance that is lived before it is known.

In the case at stake here, what returns is not the memory of a personally lived cultural world, but the sense of belonging to one that was never fully available in lived continuity. This is why the inheritance feels both intimate and incomplete. It does not present itself as recollection in the ordinary sense, because one cannot remember what one never directly inhabited. Yet neither is it merely external information. It occupies an intermediate register: not memory, exactly, but psychic proximity; not possession, but claim. The subject finds oneself affected by an origin that appears less as recovered past than as unformulated background.

Psychoanalytically, the work of discovery then becomes a work of symbolization. What had existed as trace, atmosphere, silence, or gap begins to enter language. This does not mean that the inherited culture

can now be restored in full. Symbolization is not restitution. Rather, it is the process by which what had remained psychically active without sufficient form gradually becomes sayable, thinkable, and available to reflective life. If there is a therapeutic or transformative dimension here, it lies not in recovering an intact origin, but in altering one's relation to what had been inherited without words.

This is perhaps the deepest significance of psychic inheritance in the present context. The rediscovery of an unspoken culture is not merely an intellectual reconstruction of ancestry. It is an encounter with the fact that origin may survive precisely in fragmented, indirect, and unsymbolized ways. What one inherits is not only a past, but also a task: the task of giving form to what was transmitted without speech, and of recognizing that one's own selfhood has been shaped, in part, by what could not previously be said.

The Foreign Within the Intimate

If psychic inheritance helps explain how an unspoken culture may remain active despite interruption, the phenomenological quality of this inheritance is perhaps best grasped through a paradox: what is most intimate may also appear as foreign. The discovery of origin does not necessarily produce reassurance, recognition, or continuity. It may instead expose the subject to a peculiar estrangement in which the inherited world is felt as inwardly significant and yet resistant to appropriation. What emerges is not foreignness as external difference, but a form of internal alterity: something that belongs to the self without ever becoming fully transparent to it.

This paradox has deep phenomenological significance. The self is never a closed possession of itself; it is always constituted in relation to a world, a past, a language, and others who precede it. In this sense, subjectivity includes dimensions that are given before they are mastered. To encounter an unspoken cultural inheritance is therefore to encounter a part of oneself under the sign of non-coincidence. One recognizes something that cannot be simply claimed as fully known. The subject discovers that identity is not exhausted by what has been consciously lived or explicitly articulated. There is within the self a zone of inherited opacity.

The foreignness of origin should not be understood as contradiction, as if what is one's own could not also be strange. On the contrary, psychoanalysis has long shown that the most disturbing forms of estrangement often arise not from what is wholly alien, but from what is secretly familiar. Freud's reflections on the uncanny remain relevant here, since the uncanny designates precisely the return of something once intimate in a form that has become unsettling (Freud, 1919/2003). In the present context, however, the issue is not simply repression in the narrow sense. It is the discovery that one's own origin may have been transmitted in such an incomplete way that it returns less as memory than as enigmatic nearness. What troubles the subject is not only the presence of the unfamiliar, but the realization that familiarity itself may be fractured.

This fractured familiarity may be described as a tension between recognition and non-recognition. The subject senses that the discovered inheritance is not merely external information, not a detached historical curiosity, but something implicated in the formation of selfhood. And yet this implication does not yield immediate belonging. One may feel addressed by a cultural world while lacking its language, its practices, or the continuity of its shared life. In this sense, the subject is neither entirely inside nor outside. What appears is

a threshold condition in which identity becomes relationally unstable: one belongs, but not simply; one is connected, but through interruption; one recognizes, but only partially.

Such an experience may also be illuminated by the psychoanalytic understanding of the ego as never fully sovereign in relation to its own foundations. If the self is shaped by unconscious identifications, inherited investments, and affective traces that exceed conscious organization, then it is unsurprising that origin may appear in displaced and disquieting forms. The foreign within the intimate names precisely this situation: that part of one's inheritance which has always been active, but never fully gathered into reflective awareness. The encounter with an unspoken culture may therefore feel destabilizing not because it introduces something entirely new, but because it reveals that the self was never fully identical with its own explicit narrative.

This internal foreignness has important consequences for how belonging is to be understood. It prevents us from imagining identity as a simple return to roots, as though origin could be recovered in pure form. Once estrangement has marked inheritance, origin can no longer appear as a stable possession waiting to be reclaimed. It appears instead as something to be approached with caution, interpretation, and humility. The subject cannot simply declare ownership over what was not fully lived. At the same time, neither can the subject dismiss the claim of that inheritance merely because continuity has been broken. The result is a more fragile but also more truthful conception of belonging: one based not on immediacy, but on the patient labor of relation.

In this light, the foreignness of origin is not merely a deficit. It also opens an ethical and reflective possibility. Because origin is not fully available, it cannot be reduced to identity as certainty. It calls instead for attention, listening, and symbolic work. The subject is invited not to possess origin, but to remain in dialogue with it. Such dialogue does not abolish estrangement; rather, it transforms estrangement into a condition of thought. What was first experienced as inaccessible or obscure may become thinkable without becoming fully resolved. The task is not to eliminate distance, but to inhabit it differently.

For this reason, the foreign within the intimate should be understood as central, not accidental, to the experience of an unspoken culture. The discovered inheritance is moving precisely because it is both near and withdrawn. It bears the affective charge of what concerns the self most deeply, while resisting full assimilation. In this resistance lies its force. Origin appears not as a secure foundation, but as an inner elsewhere — a dimension of selfhood that reveals, at once, dependence, incompleteness, and the unfinished work of symbolic belonging.

Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis in Dialogue

The experience of discovering oneself as belonging to an unspoken culture invites a dialogue between phenomenology and psychoanalysis because neither perspective, taken alone, seems fully sufficient. Phenomenology offers a disciplined way of describing how such belonging is lived: as ambiguity, resonance, partial recognition, and estrangement. Psychoanalysis, by contrast, offers a way of thinking the latent forces that give such experiences their density: inheritance, silence, repression, identification, and incomplete

symbolization. What phenomenology describes as a structure of lived experience, psychoanalysis approaches as a dynamic formation of the psyche. Their conjunction makes it possible to think both the appearance and the depth of belated belonging.

Phenomenology is indispensable here because the rediscovery of cultural inheritance is, first of all, an event in experience. It alters the way the subject inhabits memory, family history, language, and selfhood. What matters initially is not explanation, but description: how something not previously thematized comes to acquire presence; how fragments begin to cohere; how familiarity and distance coexist within the same affective field. In this sense, phenomenology protects the singularity of the experience from being too quickly absorbed into general theory. It reminds us that belonging is not merely an objective fact of descent, but a lived mode of relation. The question is not only what one is, but how one comes to experience oneself as implicated in a world not fully one's own (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012).

At the same time, description alone cannot entirely account for the force of the experience. Why should a partially discovered cultural inheritance feel so charged, so intimate, and at times so unsettling? Why does what was not consciously lived nevertheless seem to have shaped the subject in advance? Here psychoanalysis becomes essential. It allows us to understand that psychic life is never confined to what has been consciously known or narratively integrated. The subject is formed through identifications, losses, silences, and inheritances that exceed reflective awareness. What phenomenology encounters as estranged familiarity, psychoanalysis may interpret as the return of what has been psychically active without having been fully symbolized (Freud, 1919/2003).

The dialogue between the two approaches is especially fruitful around the notion of **trace**. Phenomenologically, a trace may appear as an elusive but persistent sense of significance — something not fully present, yet not absent either. It may be felt in tonalities, atmospheres, and obscure forms of recognition. Psychoanalytically, the trace points toward inscription: the mark of an inheritance, conflict, or absence that continues to shape psychic life without becoming fully representable. In both cases, the trace resists reduction to explicit content. It indicates that experience is structured by more than what is presently available to consciousness. An unspoken culture can thus be understood as surviving in the subject not only as historical background, but as a lived and psychic trace.

What unites phenomenology and psychoanalysis in this context is their shared resistance to a purely substantial view of identity. Neither tradition understands the self as a closed, transparent entity fully present to itself. For phenomenology, selfhood is always relational, embodied, and open to horizons of meaning that exceed immediate possession. For psychoanalysis, the self is divided, decentered, and shaped by unconscious processes that prevent complete self-coincidence. This convergence is decisive. It means that the estrangement of origin is not merely accidental, nor simply the result of missing information. It reveals something structural about subjectivity itself: that one's relation to origin is always mediated, and that what is most intimate may also remain partially opaque.

Yet the two approaches do not simply coincide, and their difference is productive. Phenomenology tends to remain close to the level of appearance, to the way in which meaning is given in lived experience. Psychoanalysis moves more readily toward interpretation, toward latent structures and dynamic processes that are not directly given. Where phenomenology describes the felt ambiguity of belonging, psychoanalysis asks what psychic conditions make such ambiguity possible. Where phenomenology attends to the present texture of estrangement, psychoanalysis reconstructs the histories of transmission, silence, and identification that may underlie it. Their dialogue, therefore, should not erase their distinction. Rather, it should preserve the tension between them as a way of deepening thought.

This tension is particularly valuable for understanding an unspoken culture. If one relied on phenomenology alone, one might describe the experience beautifully yet leave underdeveloped the question of transmission: how such belonging persists across interruption. If one relied on psychoanalysis alone, one might produce a compelling account of inheritance and silence while neglecting the irreducible singularity of how this inheritance is actually lived. Together, however, the two approaches allow us to think of cultural discovery as both event and process: an event of recognition in lived experience, and a process of symbolic elaboration through which an inherited but unspoken legacy slowly acquires form.

The significance of this dialogue lies also in its ethical implications. Both phenomenology and psychoanalysis oppose premature closure. Neither permits the subject to claim total mastery over origin. Phenomenology insists on staying with ambiguity rather than dissolving it too quickly into concepts. Psychoanalysis insists that what matters most may not be fully available to conscious appropriation. In this way, both perspectives encourage a posture of attentiveness rather than possession. The rediscovery of an unspoken culture is not the triumph of recovered identity, but the opening of a more demanding relation to selfhood — one that requires patience, interpretation, and tolerance for incompleteness.

For this reason, the conjunction of phenomenology and psychoanalysis does more than provide two parallel vocabularies. It offers a way of thinking origin itself differently. Origin is no longer a pure point of departure, securely given in advance. It becomes instead a field of mediated relation, shaped by embodiment, transmission, silence, memory, and reflective labor. To discover an origin under conditions of interruption is thus to enter a space in which lived experience and psychic inheritance illuminate one another. What emerges is not the restoration of immediacy, but a more complex understanding of belonging: one in which estrangement is not opposed to inheritance, but constitutive of how inheritance becomes thinkable at all.

Conclusion

The experience of discovering oneself as belonging to an unspoken culture reveals that origin cannot always be understood as continuity, possession, or transparent inheritance. In some cases, origin appears only belatedly, through fragments, silences, affective resonances, and partial recognitions. What emerges under such conditions is not the recovery of a stable identity, but the encounter with a legacy that has remained psychically active despite interruption. The subject does not simply return to what was lost; rather, one begins

to perceive that what seemed absent had never entirely ceased to work within the textures of memory, sensibility, and self-relation.

Through the dialogue between phenomenology and psychoanalysis, this essay has sought to show that such an encounter may be understood as a form of belated belonging. Phenomenology makes it possible to describe the lived ambiguity of this condition: the tension between intimacy and distance, familiarity and estrangement, recognition and opacity. Psychoanalysis, in turn, offers a way of thinking how what was not fully spoken, transmitted, or symbolized may nonetheless persist as trace, inheritance, and latent identification. Together, these perspectives illuminate the paradox that what is most intimately one's own may also remain foreign, and that belonging may become most visible precisely where continuity has been broken.

In the specific case of an Arbëresh inheritance, this paradox acquires particular force. To discover oneself as linked to a cultural world whose language one has not spoken is to confront not only a historical discontinuity, but also a subjective one. The interruption of transmission does not cancel belonging, but alters its form. What remains is not a complete world ready to be re-entered, but a task of symbolic elaboration: a labor of naming, thinking, and approaching what had been inherited without full articulation. Origin, in this sense, is no longer a foundation that guarantees identity. It becomes instead a question that calls the subject into reflection.

For this reason, the estrangement of origin should not be understood only as loss. It also names a possibility. Precisely because origin is not immediately available, it cannot be reduced to certainty or possession. It demands a more patient and reflexive relation, one capable of tolerating incompleteness. To inherit an unspoken culture is not to reclaim a pure past, but to enter into responsibility toward what has been transmitted in broken form. What is asked of the subject is not mastery, but attentiveness: the willingness to remain with ambiguity, to give language to what was silent, and to let thought emerge where continuity had failed.

The essay has therefore argued that origin is not simply what precedes us, but also what remains to be worked through. If estrangement marks the experience of belonging to an unspoken culture, it does so not in order to negate belonging, but to deepen it. One belongs not by abolishing distance, but by learning to think within it. In this sense, origin is not a possession to be recovered, but a task of symbolic and reflective becoming.

And yet, beyond its theoretical articulation, this experience remains irreducibly personal. To discover oneself as part of a culture never fully spoken is not only to formulate a concept; it is to undergo a subtle reorientation of one's inner world. Something once left at the margins of consciousness begins to move toward the center, though without ever fully settling there. What was formerly sensed only as vagueness, as scattered family residue or obscure attraction, begins to acquire contour. But this contour is never complete. It does not restore what was missing; it makes the missingness itself newly visible.

In this sense, the discovery of an Arbëresh inheritance does not feel like the recovery of something I once possessed and then lost. It feels, rather, like the recognition that something had always accompanied me

without ever having become fully sayable. What returns is not memory in the ordinary sense, because I cannot remember what I did not live in continuity. Nor is it simply knowledge, because what is at stake exceeds information. It is closer to a form of nearness that had remained without words: an obscure familiarity, a background presence, a sense that something of my origin had survived in me without ever fully becoming mine.

This is perhaps why the experience carries both emotion and restraint. I cannot claim this inheritance as though it were intact, transparent, or wholly available to me. To do so would be false. And yet I cannot relate to it as something merely external either, as though it belonged only to history and not to the intimate formation of the self. What I encounter, then, is neither pure belonging nor pure distance, but a threshold between the two. It is there, in that unstable space, that thought begins.

If this essay has sought to give conceptual form to such an experience, it is because reflection itself becomes one way of inhabiting what was not fully transmitted. To think this origin is not to resolve it. It is to remain in relation to it more truthfully. Perhaps this is the only genuine form of return available to what has been inherited in broken form: not the illusion of completeness, but the patient work of listening, naming, and allowing a silent inheritance to become, at least in part, speakable.

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