



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service

Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

## NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

## AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service    Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-56112-2

In the Way of Knowledge

Bryan Sentes

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September 1989

© Bryan Sentes, 1989

## ABSTRACT

### In the Way of Knowledge

Bryan Sentes

The motivating question of the present work is:  
How can philosophy and poetry be synthesized?

Each piece or group of pieces embodies a particular way of answering the question. Approaches represented are both actual and fictional, traditional and experimental. Collectively, the pieces offer no single dogmatic answer to the question. Rather, they are pseudonymous and make up an anthology collected by an equally fictive editor in order to emphasize their exploratory and provisional nature.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION.....	1
I. FATHER FIGURES.....	4
THALES OF MILETUS.....	5
HYPOSTASES OF ELEA.....	9
THE LOST PSALMS OF ANSELM OF CANTERBURY.....	10
II. BILL DUNG.....	22
AFTER BOETHIUS.....	23
THE SONG OF SEBESTYEN TIMCDI LANTOS.....	26
AFTER THE BLESSED ESPINOZA.....	30
AFTER THE SEER OF HARTFORD.....	34
THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MORNING.....	35
III. JULIA PETITRUE.....	42
THE NAKED THOUGHT.....	43
POLYLOGUE.....	45
IV. JAN KIENER.....	48
AN ACCIDENTAL APOLOGY.....	49
NOTES IN EVIDENCE AGAINST A TAUTOLOGY.....	51
THE SPIRIT OF LW--A DRAFT.....	53
V. GEORGE GOODMAN.....	56
TWO APOLOGIES.....	57
THE ALIEN GOD.....	59
THE END OF KNOWLEDGE.....	60

THE OWL OF MINERVA.....	61
A VALID WAY OUT OF A FLY-BOTTLE.....	62
SENSE-DATA.....	63
SYMBOLIC LEXICOGRAPHY.....	64
THE RULE OF METAPHOR.....	65
IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE.....	66
HERMENEUTIC GRAMMAR.....	67
OBSERVATION I.....	68
OBSERVATION II.....	69
(UNTITLED).....	70
LOGICAL SPACE.....	71
LOGICAL ATOMISM.....	72
KNOWLEDGE BY DESCRIPTION.....	73
PHILOSOPHY AS VELOCITY.....	74
("WHAT-IS IS...").....	75
CONTEXT.....	76
VI. HEINRICH AUFSCHNIDINGER.....	77
READING PARMENIDES' WRITING.....	78
VII. CLAUDE HOCQUARD & DENISE ROYET-JOURNARD.....	85
CORRESPONDENCE.....	86
VIII. JOHN YOUNGMAN.....	93
<u>HOMO OMNIBUS</u> .....	94
IX. ARCHIBALD A. MONS.....	100
AT RED RIVER'S EDGE.....	101

...it is ambition enough to be employed as an underlabourer in clearing ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way of knowledge...

--John Locke, "Epistle to the Reader", An Essay Concerning Human Understanding

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Were I to choose an auspicious image for the new millenium, I would choose...the sudden agile leap of the poet-philosopher...

--Italo Calvino, Six Memos for the Next Millenium

It is unknowable now how auspicious Calvino's image will be for the next millenium, but we do know that one of the most vigorous lines of intellectual and literary inquiry today is that investigating the fraternal strife between literature and philosophy. Admittedly, the quarrel was an ancient one even in Plato's day, but presently the struggle is at its most intense in decades, with literature threatening to absorb philosophy as just another style and philosophy doggedly defending itself as a bastion of knowledge distinct from the purely imaginary worlds, no matter how vital, illuminating, or "realistic", created by the literary artist. And within this foment and confusion are shadowy, nomadic figures, neither poets nor philosophers themselves (although often resembling one more than the other), surveying the no-man's-land between too-rigid conceptions of poetry and philosophy. The writers collected here are of this kind.

Each one brings into question the proximity and relation of poetry and philosophy and rather than composing



a dissertation or poem about the question, answers it by creating a new kind of writing. Some of these are obvious hybrids; others hide their parentage in curious ways; some intermingle only a trace of one with an overriding amount of the other in way of tentative experiment, but all bring literature and philosophy together, either to show the essential, if hidden, unity they share, or to propose a writing beyond both song and speculation.

I have opened the collection with three seminal figures: Thales of Miletus, Hypostases of Elea, and Anselm of Canterbury to provide a minimal historical context. Other authors have composed works equally fitting. However, the three works presented here have the value of being newly discovered and translated and might eventually serve to revise our understanding of the ancient quarrel now in its latest round. The remaining writing I have organized nearly arbitrarily in the hope of invoking a certain discontinuity that will serve to subvert any reader's will-to-absolute-unity. I have tried at all points to avoid convincing the reader of anything, since persuasion, in this context, whether it uses the tricks of rhetoric, the force of argument, or the charm of lyric, always betrays a will-to-power that attempts to bend the will of the reader and subvert his or her freedom.

Therefore, I invite the reader to a banquet instead of an academic symposium. Some of the views here will be familiar, some unexpected, some charming, some wearisome, some frustrating, some puzzling, but all present an opportunity for dialogue, even if this dialogue is finally only between the reader's own thoughts. But any opportunity to think is always more fruitful than being allowed to be just a receiver of some monologue, which, as Plato knew so well, more than anything else, stands in the way of knowledge.

Max Young

I

FATHER FIGURES

## THALES OF MILETUS (624--546 B.C.)

I came down from the high city to the sea.  
The waves, red with dawn, failed and fell on the shore,  
A low chorus in slow measure for my thoughts.

That black ship on the wine-stained ocean  
Can know her distance from shore the way I learned  
The height of Pharos's tomb by its shadow's length.

The water wrestles here with the stubborn stone  
The way it did when I turned a river's will  
For the sake of the Lydians and their king.

My psyche has danced ahead of the spirits  
Who possess the bodies of heaven and move  
The moon before the sun, darkening the day  
And even the long-burning hate of peoples.

And because I know all these things I am called  
The wisest this side of Hesperus' Gates.

From somewhere beyond what I know, some daemon  
Plays and flickers in the shadows at the edge  
Of what light my understanding's lamp casts.  
So I beg the gods to feed this flame, to blow  
Upon it and brighten its glow, so that it  
Bursts forth in a blinding radiance, burning  
This teasing unnamed question like a moth.

But the waves still rise, and fall, and ebb away  
In the sun's rising to noon, whetting the edge  
Of the present, sharper and finer, nearer  
And nearer nothing, all sound drowned in the waves'  
Strain, all vision lost in the fragments of light  
That swim together on the troughs and crests  
Of the slowly shivering surface of the sea  
And in the sparks that swarm from off every facet  
Of every grain of sand.

A gust of wind off  
The water cleared my sight and I saw a stick  
Swirled in a tide-pool by the turning breeze,  
Revolving and changing shape as if it were  
A long thin drop of olive-oil pulsing  
In the currents of a stirred pot. Then I saw

The sands run slowly  
in their own time, mirroring  
the sea's swells and runs;

The clouds tossed and stirred  
like froth, carried on currents  
of sea-blue aether;

The cliffs and mountains  
          themselves heave heavier than  
any sea-water;

And my thought became  
          a light trickle suspended  
in a fluid vision:

I saw birds pool  
          in the blue, drop away, or  
drift upward like steam;

Saw horse-herds charge  
          with a river's low roar, or  
stand stiller than dew;

Saw dancers step light  
          as rain, caught in the course of  
flowing harmonies;

Saw young men move with  
          the ease of a stream, old men  
bubble with laughter,

Saw their dark eyes glint  
like grove-shadowed pools  
sacred to Diane;

I saw all cities,  
their people and laws, give way  
in the flood of blood

That carries in time  
peoples to colonies far  
past the present's gates,

Their revelations  
held and passed on by any  
vessel that can bear them.

translated from the Greek by  
Felicitas Wordsworth

## HYPOSTASES OF ELEA (c. 329 A.D.)

That moment always present and long  
Foreseen as the absolute end  
Of the poem encompassing history,  
History's period, you might say, closes  
Nearer the farther we extend  
The line measured by the genius  
Of technique alone.

The deified  
Deserted the house where language slipped  
From song lost to sound and sense,  
Where the hermetic seal on the word split  
Into tesserae held by siblings,  
And the burning pitch of constant wonder  
Fell to the merest volume of memory  
Or of musings murmured anywhere  
Attention is broken by contrast  
From ecstasy.

translated from Coptic by  
John Maskull



## THE LOST PSALMS OF ANSELM OF CANTERBURY (1035--1109 A.D.)

## I

At dawn, I came from the green hills  
    Pale and moist with spring mist;  
Left the yew in its morning stance,  
    Let the rowan kneel still;  
Left the stream's quiet chuckling  
    To the minnows and toads;  
Left the larks to twist their songs,  
    Sparrows to their quick flight;  
Passed the freshly furrowed fields,  
    The ox's trudge and groan;  
Passed through the village and its smells  
    Of peasant life at dawn;  
Mounted the slow rise surrounding  
    The monastery's walls;  
Traced their careful and smooth stonework,  
    The curved arch of the door;  
Turned and filled my sight with the sky,  
    The far and massing clouds;  
Stood and prayed in thanks for this day,  
    Turned again and entered.

## II

At ease in my high cell, I rest  
    My legs from the climb's strain.  
I consider the day's duties,  
    And allow them to pass  
Clear from my mind, for these define  
    My life in earthly days.  
I carefully list all duties  
    Of one of my Order  
That border my vocation,  
    And, listed, let them pass  
From my mind's attention also.  
    Family I recall,  
Ponder my own small place  
    In the ranks of human  
Souls that walk the face of the earth  
    Under the loving face  
Of God the Almighty Father;  
    And on that focus  
Body and all the faculties  
    Of the created soul.

## III

Once, I listened to two dispute  
The proposition that  
All Creation is a codex  
Revealing the Design  
Of God, the way that words reveal  
(By making visible)  
The private thoughts of their author.  
If this is true, what of  
All those who are illiterate?  
And what created man  
Can claim he has interpreted,  
Not some treatise composed  
By some mundane mind, but the thoughts  
Of God that sing like choirs  
Of wise angels in harmonies  
And sublime chords no man  
Can hope to transcribe in truth?  
The learned may dispute  
And climb on Reason's wings alone,  
But not for all such flight.

## IV

But if God is everywhere, why  
    Cannot all men see Him?  
Can it be true that one must learn  
    To see His great Presence?  
But if one were to stare into  
    His Face, one would surely  
Die. Therefore, it is human pride  
    That dares to measure God  
By the scales of the fleshly eye;  
    A deadly sin again  
Trips humble and sincere desire  
    For Him into the Pit.  
So, we must not seek to prove Him  
    By our human senses.  
And all the pagans and the heathen  
    Had faith in gods of stone.  
Some even worshipped trees, and wound  
    Around their trunks for praise  
The entrails of living men.  
    Pure faith answers nothing.

## V

No man is Reason and senses  
    And faith held together  
In a wrap of clay. Man is one  
    Undivided being,  
A unity broken only  
    In thought and abstraction.  
And being made by a loving  
    Father, must have access  
To that love so he may return  
    Love. In quiet, passive  
Meditation, then, I ponder  
    What passes are open  
Through this high range of questions.  
    And then I see my pride.  
No one comes to the Father but  
    Through our loving Saviour,  
And one need only approach His  
    Portal and knock humbly.  
So now I call on memory  
    Of all the things He said.

## VI

"Unless a man be born again  
    "Of water and spirit  
"He shall not enter the Kingdom  
    "Of God." But what water?  
"What we sprinkle on infants' brows  
    Is purely symbolic.  
Surely the water that God breathed  
    Over is meant: chaos  
And darkness that threaten to drown  
    The helpless human soul.  
"And what is spirit?" one asked.  
    "No man knows," He said,  
"Where the wind comes from or where  
    "It goes, but everyone  
"Hears the wind. We of the spirit  
    "Are like that." Thus, I will  
Rest like a leaf, blown and carried  
    By the wind where He wills.  
Already my spirit lightens  
    And rises to God.

## VII

Withered and frail through vice,  
    Yet rising higher through  
The blinding clouds of sin, I come  
    To light at last before  
What I conceive You, Lord, to be.  
    I know You incarnate  
In my idea of You, wrought  
    Of dross metals, hardly  
Gold, that constitute the substance  
    Of even my finest  
Thoughts. You still reside beyond  
    The lofty heights you've brought  
Me to; I know my conception  
    Is true as it can be:  
I do not seek to understand  
    So that I may believe,  
But I believe to understand.

## VIII

Give my faith some understanding  
That You exist as I  
Believe You to exist. I know  
There is no thing above  
My thought of You; no greater thing  
Can I conceive at all.  
And can it be that such a thing  
As I think you to be  
Does not exist? Only the Fool  
Says in his heart "There is  
"No God." For it is more perfect  
To exist than not to,  
And what can I imagine  
More perfect than You, Lord?  
I understand that You must be,  
For Your perfections pass  
Far beyond what I can conceive.  
Now, knowing, I believe  
As one whole man: intellect,  
Faith, passions, together,  
A small created trinity.



## IX

But now, the great grey seas of doubt  
    Begin to boil and churn,  
And though I had danced over them  
    With the faith of a saint,  
They trip, and toss, and buffet me  
    Till I near drown in fear.  
My heart thuds, thundering blood  
    In my ears, and the storm  
Passes away, leaving only  
    A quiet stiller than  
A heinous soul before the Seat  
    Of Judgement. And then, there  
Rises a shadow, an island  
    That navigates the seas  
Anchorless, at random, a ship  
    Of imagination  
Alone. No more perfect island  
    Could be: rich forests,  
Choirs of paradisal birds,  
    A temperate halo.

## X

That much I could see from this far  
Off. I swam to its shores  
And crawled onto its beach. The sands  
Were white, and soft, and warm,  
Lightly fragrant with salt and airs  
Breathed gently on breezes  
From the pale throats of flowers,  
Still, on the fresh foliage.  
Birds fashioned songs of audible  
Quicksilver, suddenly  
Gone, then sung again. And streams  
Splashed from the forested  
Cloak mantling the island's peak.  
Around its slopes I saw  
Animals, perfected by some  
Husbandry of genius:  
Golden flanked deer with opaline  
Eyes; ghostly grey squirrels  
Quicker than shadows; and angel  
Feathered birds in vast flocks.

## XI

Sodden, trembling, and cold, I  
    Watched, muted, a woman  
Approach with the ease of a Summer's  
    Dusk. Her eyes and hair were  
Jet, her flesh a living ivory,  
    And her voice, music  
As vibrant and soft as the blue  
    That gives way before night.  
She was the angel the pagan  
    Parmenides mistook  
For a goddess; the consoling  
    Woman Boethius  
Loved as Sophia; the angel  
    Who called my mind from earth  
To the contemplation of God,  
    Who showed me now in ways  
My earthly soul could comprehend  
    Faint reflections of His  
Infinite Perfections. I knelt  
    And sang a prayer of thanks.

## XII

With dusk, the sun ignites the clouds  
And burns them red as blood;  
My soul is calmer than the dawn  
Our Blessed Lord was raised.  
My being sings the praise of God  
Who gives to all who search  
Some understanding of His Love  
For every man with faith  
Enough to rise on Reason's wings  
In rapture and in hope.

translated from the Latin by  
Frank Lambdin

II

BILL DUNG

## AFTER BOETHIUS

These walls are made of such rough-worked stones. Laid  
one up on the other--like sons of  
sons of sons of no doubt virile fathers--  
the same that hauled a statue of Venus  
to the sea and tossed it in with laughter.  
The same that took her virgins singly  
and wound their guts around a stake for sport.  
They worship instead a goddess with dugs  
as big as cows', and hips the width of three  
of these cells--if the figures I've found  
in caves tell true.

These, these slaves of Caels  
till Caesar sent their masters west, revel  
in villas outside Rome, believing that  
taking our land conquers us. And we took  
Sparta thinking the same. And now the whims  
of Mercury displace the will of Zeus.  
Virgil aspires to gloss old Homer.  
These Ostrogoths will earn our pleasures and  
inherit our vices and their grandsons  
will read Latin and burn with the pride of  
Empedocles.

\*

Still, in the rose of dawn,  
the stupid guards asleep,

awake or not, deaf and blind  
regardless, She comes.

Her mien is past  
all time. Her eyes

seem mine, She knows  
my mind so well.

She sings awhile  
and speaks to me

of love of thought,  
of script and song,

their clarity  
the clarity

of water, stilled  
in white sunlight.

How few bear this.

How few

are able to see.

Her truth, with dawn,

eases the stones,

in time, to dust.



## THE SONG OF SEBESTYEN TINODI LANTOS

I forged rivers and fens and rid  
Myself of the plain to enter  
The court of the learned at Pecs--  
My end, to leave prairie and people

And plain ways to trail their herds,  
While I would earn from the wise  
Cloistered here a coin smoother  
Than the gold that lights on a brook.

Here, they trained my tongue and hand  
At Latin, and all their tomes opened,  
And my eyes rode over Rome's  
Gold leaves. Here, I read till words blurred,

Merged with page and pale dawn--I  
Heard, heard the sea's red surge chant  
The dirge of Troy, read Flemish oils  
With ease, and saw the spark that burned

The words of Thomas like straw, struck  
From the stone of Luria's long  
Silence. My teachers' reason and  
This school's walls became as glass.

Clearly I had learned all they taught,  
For I argued them down in rhyme  
And turned their livers to water  
With wit. They and their walls became

The palest and feeblest ghosts.  
I left to wander to and fro  
All over the dark, dumb face  
Of the earth. Yet, long later,

Waking to Autumn's first frost,  
I heard the far, low groaning  
Of cattle. The black herd seemed fluid,  
Pooled by racing dancing sharp dogs

And the mounted herders, weathered  
And sparse as prairie trees. They  
Homed and fed me, and wet my eyes  
With their wine, wit, and all they played

On their resonant lantas. Some  
Sang of the cry of rooks that crawls  
Among the dead at battle's end,  
And others of red turned leaves,

Layered into loam with Summer,  
Like the leaves of a sealed book.  
I learned every song I heard  
And earned hard the lanta's strain,

For I saw the Natural Law  
Here, writ in long lines on the arm  
Of one who clubbed a wolf to death,  
And I followed a telos

In the scars that are muscles  
On the backs of all who till.  
In time, bored of chasing pale harts  
With two brothers, my friends, I left

And rode East, led by dusk and dawn.  
I had no end: I rhymed at court  
For what coin I wanted--took all  
They gave--though loving more the song

Of the country's cherry trees,  
Singing verses to the sun's light  
Refrains, and searching the fine lines  
Of every leaf grown gold and red.

Envoi

Now, I would each leaf a leaf.  
I would this season slowed and  
Stopped. Then, I'd see each red  
And leave each leaf to fall and  
End in loam, each heard, not lost  
to all.

## AFTER THE BLESSED ESPINOZA

The book is  
Understood  
By no one.

They call me  
Atheist,  
Heretic.

But its thoughts,  
Every word,  
Syllable,

Every holy character  
Traces a world precise  
As the thoughts of God.

How could it be other?  
The hand that traced  
The stroke and turn

Of every letter  
Was God  
Thinking.

The scar  
Aches now  
Only

When storms  
Brew, or  
I sense

The light  
Falling  
From High

Summer,  
Each leaf  
A shard

Of light  
Redeemed  
From night,

Deeper night,  
Darkest night,  
Then Solstice.

The Book of the World  
Is thrown on the pyre  
Of the seasons and

Catches flame and burns,  
Burns the withering  
Arms of the martyred

Rabbi that holds it,  
Purges his vision  
Beholding the words,

Letter by letter,  
Lighting and flying  
Back to their Author.

Tonight, beside  
The book, I cut,  
Grind another

Lens for another  
Eye needing clean sight.  
And this, grinds again

For me, my clear soul's  
Substance, its blind dross  
Worn off like fine dust,

Its perfected curve  
And surface tracing  
The optic of All.

I do the piece-work  
Of God, my hand making  
Glass, something real,

Transparent only ideally,  
Swerve the world's light  
For vision.



## AFTER THE SEER OF HARTFORD

Tonight, the world is simple and plain.  
The earth is round and the sky two domes  
Enclosing us, excluding nothing.

The stars are all arranged in such a way  
As to suggest an endless emptiness  
Or heavens full of foreign deities.

And choosing to choose neither we lose  
Ourselves, desiring only an end  
To this plane enclosed around itself

That keeps us coming to ourselves again.

## THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MORNING

In space pure of matter  
    and ideal  
the mind's merest act  
    might posit a point.  
Around it another  
    might inscribe a line  
nowhere straight  
    and from nothing  
create dimension.  
Half a languid turn,  
    as easy as twisting  
a bean-flower's stem,  
engenders the perfection of a sphere  
half lit in the radiance  
    cast by the eye of the mind.  
One dimension further waits  
    on only the whim  
that sets the first event of Time  
    in twilight  
needing the light of presence  
    to be.  
The sphere may be set revolving

slowly  
to reveal the kinema of history.

This a well-versed youth might think  
straining to trace a line of understanding  
composed of figures adhering by necessity  
to the meaning of his master's aphorism  
forbidding him to taste the fruit  
of the bean's flower.

An initiate to mysteries that will confound  
even the coul that will rise on its own wings  
to an ecstasy transcending even the vision  
that perceived Necessity to be a goddess--  
even he is ignorant of his place on the sphere  
of his time, having only a cupped palm  
of worn and irregular tesserae  
of stories or conjectures to piece together  
again some mosaic depicting a drama  
of Origin.

Even he is only a citizen by birth  
of history's perennially remotest colony:  
the present. The wilderness of the future waits  
on those given to explore and open its horizons,  
while the past lies in the dark always deepening  
farther and farther to the east.

Smugly, some will offer shards of stone transubstantiated  
from bone to evidence a literal Metamorphoses  
narrated by blind Life itself, making us a single  
line running on surely to an indifferent end.

Originally, Life itself was borne in a primal fire fallen  
into a space of its own making, wrapping it around  
itself as it flickered and dulled into only matter.

Here, the flame refined itself from nothing alive to something  
vital to light the dead dark around it with a halo of  
barest awareness.

And we are asked to imagine this world emptied of the  
imagined, a silent place endlessly opening to a race  
needing only everything be made in that pitch that  
alone can bear itself a semblance of permanence.

Our origin's story can neither exclude our finest faculty nor  
fail to account for the question questing after Why?  
and Whither?

But all this is best left in a florid prose leisurely composed  
by a naturalist, as observant as idle, on holiday  
somewhere in the New World's tropics.

Imagine

Then, a Maker and  
Let Him make us  
Two, a solution  
for any loneliness.  
Let us know our bodies  
In the quick of our wills.  
Give us good food and shelter  
In warm mothering weather.  
Give us leisure to compose  
The grand poem that encloses  
The whole Cosmos, Created  
And Uncreated, carolled  
With easy joy in rhyming  
Couplets. And when the world  
Is real and full of harmonies

That note only the most heavenly  
Chords, let us play  
With the world's potential  
And gleefully weave legends  
Of infinite worlds to discover  
And explore and command  
And fly from to the next and  
The next on the most untiring  
Of angelic wings.  
And when we weary  
Drunk and giddy  
On the fragrance  
Of this heavenly  
Flower we've made,  
Let it bear the promise  
Of its fruit, and let us feed  
On the knowledge we have made  
This place from our need  
To make, borne of endless  
Incompleteness.

Now, perceive  
The Maker in naked despair,  
His creations poetic and lovely

As desire requires, every  
Imperfection a venomous hornet  
Whining and stinging, one  
With the howling swarm inflicting  
Boils that burn like fresh cinders.  
Another is conceived in desperation  
To aid in driving the hellish cloud  
Away. And these conceive still  
Others to labour and bear Utopias  
To other worlds others have made.  
The whole explodes and falls  
In cacaphony and din, every one  
Driven and desperate as the first.

What seemed  
An unbreachable plenum cracks and bursts  
Open like a new flower in Spring  
That fills the emptiness around it  
With colour and fragrance and promise  
Of pollen and bees, fruit and seeds,  
An empire of fields, and seasons.

Tonight,  
Stars are slowly exploding,

Constellating possible gods  
Only for us to see. Trees  
Wave a million leaves  
Apiece and shower the flowers  
Beneath them with seeds.  
This wilderness, we have made,  
In time, our home.



III

JULIA PETITRUE

## THE NAKED THOUGHT

Language disguises the thought; so that from the external form of the clothes one cannot infer the form of the thought they clothe, because the external form of the clothes is constructed with quite another object than to let the form of the body be recognized.

--Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,  
4.002

that from the the thought; so Language disguises  
not infer the he clothes one can external form of t  
ause the external t they clothe, bec form of the though  
ith quite another s is constructed wfrom of the clothe  
ody be recognized. the form of the bobject than to let

the thought; so Language disguisesthat from the  
he clothes one can external form of tnot infer the  
t they clothe, bec form of the thoughause the external  
s is constructed wform of the clotheith quite another  
the form of the bobject than to letody be recognized.

the thought; so that from the Language disguises  
he clothes one cannot infer the external form of t  
t they clothe, because the external form of the though  
s is constructed with quite another form of the clothe  
the form of the body be recognized.object than to let

Language disguises that from the      the thought; so  
 external form of the      not infer the      he clothes one can  
 form of the thought      cause the external form of the thought they clothe, bec  
 form of the clothes      with quite another form is constructed w  
 object than to let      body be recognized. the form of the b

that from the      Language disguises the thought; so  
 not infer the      external form of the clothes one can  
 cause the external form of the thought they clothe, bec  
 with quite another form of the clothes is constructed w  
 body be recognized. object than to let the form of the b

## POLYLOGUE

try to explain what knowledge is. Never say it is beyond your power: it will not be so, if heaven wills it and you take courage.

We have for that purpose not to reflect about it and ponder what it might be in truth, but to deal with it merely as sense-certainty contains it.

Sense-certainty itself has thus to be asked: What is the This? If we take it in the two-fold form of its existence, as the Now and as the Here, the dialectic it has in it will take a form as intelligible as the This itself.

\*

This is Here

something absolutely uniform; and, without the things placed in it, one point of space does not absolutely differ in any respect whatsoever from another point of space. Now from hence it follows, (supposing space to be something in itself, besides the order of bodies among themselves) that 'tis impossible there should be a reason, why God, preserving the same situations of bodies among themselves, should have placed them in space after one certain particular manner, and not otherwise; why everything was not placed the quite contrary way, for instance, by changing East into West. But if space is nothing else, but the possibility of placing them; then those two states, the one such as it is now, the other supposed to be quite the contrary way, would not at all differ from one another.

## and Now

Which is never more than this instant, than you, figuring it out, and acting, so. If there is any absolute, it is never more than this one, you, this instant, in action.

What is the Now? we reply, for example, the Now is night-time. To test the truth of this certainty of sense, a simple experiment is all we need: write the truth down. A truth cannot lose anything by being written down, and just as little by our preserving and keeping it. If we look again at the truth we have written down, look at it now, at this noon-time, we shall have to say it has turned stale and become out of date.

IV

JAN KIENER

## AN ACCIDENTAL APOLOGY

A flat in Cambridge, 1938. The walls are bare and the floor scrupulously clean. In the living room two canvas chairs and a plain wooden one. An iron heating stove in the middle of the room. In the bedroom a cot and card table with papers and pen.

A man sits at the card table. His face is lean and browned. He wears light grey flannel trousers and a flannel shirt open at the throat. His shoes are extremely clean and polished.

His look is concentrated and severe. He makes striking gestures with his hands as if arguing with someone. He stops, sits still.

He remembers swimming-- a small boy-- the ease of floating, the sun and water in his eyes, closing them tight. He remembers how hard it was forcing himself down, down deep to the mud at the bottom, the water always pushing him back to the surface, his needing air pushing him back to the surface.

He has written a treatise on logic. He knows those who do not know him think him an old man, irritable and obscure.

He remembers writing his thoughts for the book in



little notebooks he carried around after leaving Cambridge for the first time. He remembers writing "If the proposition 'the watch is shiny' has sense..."

He remembers the flash of sun on the watch-face that gave him that example. At dusk it had rained and the sun was only now cutting through red clouds. The field's mud is soupy and slick. He crouches down in the water of the trench, almost having to stand up to avoid slipping over in the muck. He hears the sharp and tiny ticking at his wrist. He dates the entry 16.6.15.

## NOTES IN EVIDENCE AGAINST A TAUTOLOGY

Death is not an event of life. Death is not lived through.

If by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness, then he lives eternally who lives in the present.

Our lives are endless in the way that our visual field is without limit.

--Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 6.4311

It is vision in the clear sky's depthless blue drowning.

It is the million odd leaves of every tree passed.

It is every morning's belated rising to the comforts of night.

It is this present drawing memory.

It is the membranous pulse of the body.

It is the pairing of limbs and some organs.

It is the mind-absent agility of our gait and standing.

It is the silence timing our breathing's monotony.

It is the weight that moves each day.

It is the early autumn highway, shadowed by apple orchards, still.

It is the halo of loss that beatifies the focussed.

It is the massive white reading lamp.

It is a knot in the flex of necessity.

It is that any admission admits an entire world.

It is the perpetual motion of argument.

It is the grace of every breath.

## THE SPIRIT OF LW--A DRAFT

This book will perhaps only be understood by those who have themselves already thought the thoughts which are expressed in it--or similiar thoughts.

--Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,  
Preface

We know no sensations  
give these propositions sense. Questions  
that exact innocence free of naivete  
demand a rigorous ignorance of the evident  
apparent given as the one condition  
for their initial  
stuttered utterance.

The long tautology that bends,  
say, the blade of a jet engine  
to just the angle of most force  
turns on this  
when the need for further thrust  
draws inertia from the potential  
for doubt, unbinding concepts and arguments  
and baffling mathematicians  
just this side of mathematics.

We need our end to be

the final determination  
of the rule that keeps stasis  
appearing repeatedly, that blesses with some semblance  
of regularity frequently enough  
to let us see this  
and hear that  
completely unsurprised. These things we know  
are hardly thought, for the common  
is the category entered most  
easily. We can count, yet,  
to ask what numbers are  
reveals the path that eases  
the passage everywhere but where  
the answer you expect to desire lies  
and leads you to question  
again the writings of those who forced you  
to conclude the first proposition  
that defined one doubtfully. For them  
it is mere dissection; for you  
something more that flails you  
to what is truly necessary. The clear thought  
expressed as clearly as the fabric of language  
will strain it  
fascinates you with its immaculate muteness

that finally becomes a song so mythic  
you are bound from it,  
fast, and your hearing is filled  
with what is spoken  
in innocence, naively.

V

GEORGE GOODMAN

## TWO APOLOGIES

## 1. Three dicta

Tomorrow's forecast is for no weather.

\*

No philosophical text is Real.

\*

I don't experience what I think.



2. A leap of faith

- a) Metaphor relates disjunct entities.
- b) Words refer to an extra-linguistic reality.

- c) All language is metaphorical.

## THE ALIEN GOD

We have long been charmed by bird-song, although most today believe it merely spontaneous, or of only the barest biological utility. It is an old doctrine that visible Creation reveals the Design of its Creator, the way the words of a book manifest the less perceptible thoughts of their author. Hearing a bird sing you hear a string of syllables composing but a fragment of a speaking to humans in a language only as tortuously sophisticated as its meaning. To hear a single word, you must first hear an owl sigh to sleep at dawn, then a sea-parrot purr on a Elasket Island cliff, and finally a meadowlark carol on the Great Plains. Not only must each be heard, but each must be heard in sequence, regardless of their spatial displacement. Our response to this attempted greeting is limited only by the number, deployment, and synchronization of our recording instruments; and the will and imagination of those who need to listen.

## THE END OF KNOWLEDGE

The bright balloon was too big for the infant to hold. On the fingertips of one stretched-out hand she would balance it; the moment she grasped, the balloon squeezed free and away.

Knowledge can only paradoxically render its object transparently clear, since the literal fulfillment of this guiding metaphor would remove the known to an absolute, an invisible, clarity.

## THE OWL OF MINERVA

Ideas and concepts are as vivid and sensuous as the slow greening of trees in early spring, or the charged blue of the sky after dusk before the full dark of night.

The most intense sensations, perceptions and visions ignite and burn only within that space emptied of disorder that the concepts of 'figure' and 'ground', 'green', 'vital', and 'holy' maintain as tacitly as the glass of a light-bulb holds the argon that allows its illumination.

## A VALID WAY OUT OF A FLY-BOTTLE

The sign, in general, is nothing other than the union of signifier and signified. There are three species of signs: the index, whose signifier is causally related to the signified; the icon, that signifies by resembling the signified; and the symbol, whose signifier and signified are arbitrarily connected by convention.

Sensations are indices of the objects that cause them. Since they must in some way resemble their causes, sensations are also icons of objects. However, this iconographic relation can be affirmed only arbitrarily, since we know nothing of objects apart from our sensations of them.

The perceptual world is a language in the most emphatic sense, one whose speech is sublime and transcends us at every turn: colours mutter at the edges of our vision; our fingertips discourse with the finest textures.

## SENSE-DATA

Sensation is an unending and unbroken testimony to the radical intelligibility of the world; one that is only rarely heard, since there is neither court nor question, in any conventional sense, to elicit our expectation of a voice and its answer.

Sensation's voice is a synaesthetic white noise; one inaudible on principle; one of its tones, silence.

## SYMBOLIC LEXICOGRAPHY

Imagine a people vocationally disloyal to every profession, school, church, nation and race. Their only common accident is the need to speak of something with which language has not yet come to terms. They howl, chant, sing, stutter and murmur. Often they lift words freely from any discourse and turn them to a new sense. Some have learned to study their predecessors' solutions and work from them with an always increasing sophistication sometimes decadent. Although their end seems insoluble, their answers to this mute yet relentless question approach the purest, most ecstatic music, every attempt drawing nearer the sheer plenitude that tantalizes and tortures them in its absence.

## THE RULE OF METAPHOR

Metaphor is the essential form of poetic utterance, wherein one thing is made something else: a dreary scholar is a dried fig; a lover is a rose; a stupid and brutal dogma, a devil. Once the metaphor is discovered, one can as easily speak of a massive sphere of burning gases as of a numberless angelic host, the terms interchangeable as they are identical.

Imagine a sequence of metaphors, each successive one troping on the one before, relentlessly. If metaphor discloses the essential identity of its terms, then the final metaphor of the series bares the unity of the poet and the One.

Poetry is a most rigorous mysticism; its rule, metaphor, the revelation of universal identity.



## IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE

The metropolis is unexceptional except for its foundations sunk profoundly deep into the bedrock of the Pacific Ocean's floor. A hemisphere of breathable air is maintained by a permeable membrane admitting necessary gases and freeing the excess of others into the surrounding sea-water. Lights, that on the surface are overpassing aircraft, here trace the course of super-tankers. A traffic of smaller boats swirls into constellations nightly. The ocean exerts a pressure on the outer surface of the membrane infinitesimally greater than the pressure exerted on the inner surface by the atmosphere within. This potentially catastrophic difference is corrected by three beams of light whose common source is three spotlights turning on the roof of the city's highest edifice, identical to those atop Place Ville Marie in Montreal.

## HERMENEUTIC GRAMMAR

Many theoreticians today conceive language as a pane of glass between reader and world. Imagine the relation between reader and world as a stroke of light: the angle of refraction through the pane represents the mediation of the reader's perceptions by language.

Though the substance of this model is correct, its triadic scheme may be better re-presented by an unbounded sphere of crystal wherein every being is possessed of a different density through which the light of consciousness is thrown. As the transparent atmosphere is coloured some visible tone by sunlight, Being (refracted by every being) illumines subject, object, and the medium of their encounter.

## OBSERVATION I

It has recently been determined that it was simply not possible for the moon to have been formed by a piece of the earth breaking free from the then-infant planet, the forces necessary for the fission being sufficient to propel the moon free of the earth's gravitational field. Further, the moon would have had to have been travelling at an impossibly slow velocity for the earth to somehow have snagged it from space as it drifted past. We must conclude, therefore, that the moon is a product of artifice.

One might question how common sense could have missed this satellite with a massive smile carved on its face.

## OBSERVATION II

It is commonly understood that the hue of the sky is caused by the refraction of the sun's light through the earth's atmosphere. Yet the most innocent know the air is transparent and colours, whether high pale blue, deep navy, or even pink, are all opaque.

The myth of refraction is clearly a ruse devised to bind human speculation and aspiration.

Happily, a limit is visible only once transgressed.

## (UNTITLED)

The longest-lived organism is undoubtedly the tree, some possessing an historical breadth of literally centuries.

In the westernmost reaches of Alaska, a single plant has been discovered whose longevity has transcended the presence of human beings in the Americas by an indeterminable span. Records, from echoes of the earliest oral narratives to those of present-day on-site botanists, reveal the plant has undergone at least twenty-six metamorphoses so startling that it is undecidable whether the plant is lichen, fungus, moss or fern, deciduous or coniferous, having been all of these, bizarre ingenious combinations, and unseen varieties that can only be imagined. One can only speculate whether the plant is living in that stage preceding death or changing in a way that hints at the threshold of its infancy.

## LOGICAL SPACE

Logical space is the absolute event horizon of every noetic act; a horizon defined by neither sunlight nor night.

Sensuous helicopters sound heaven to their own choppy applause.

## LOGICAL ATOMISM

Conceive a particle so simple, it just evades imagination; its transparency so pure, it is invisible; the perfection of its geometry transcending even the most capable and refined conception.

This particle is the true atom of reality, the Idea of which the objects discovered and described by physicists are only material shadows.

## KNOWLEDGE BY DESCRIPTION

In recent decades, a radical group of experimental sculptors and conceptual artists have infiltrated the scientific research community. Imitating atomic physicists and engineers, they have managed to convince governments internationally to fund the construction of massive installations. These sculptures are dumbfounding in the rigor of their design and explicit intricacy. Synthesizing the worlds of art and science, they generate experimental data in a manner consistent with the most demanding mathematical and scientific methods. These "particle accelerators" constitute a communal artistic and engineering accomplishment unprecedented since the construction of Stonehenge, the Pyramids, or the Coliseum.



## PHILOSOPHY AS VELOCITY

That the universe is boundless but finite means that the greater your velocity the faster you return to your point of origin.

\*

Imagine this circuit many times in rapid succession.

\*

When Goethe met Hegel he didn't know whether he'd met a madman or a genius. He described him as "dizzying."

("WHAT-IS IS...")

What-is is endlessly disclosed. The end of revelation is the most brilliant and final moment of human knowing.

\*

The growing mass of knowledge increases proportionately in gravity, accelerating Apocalypse.

\*

Metaphysics is the most demanding and dangerous confessional poetry.

## CONTEXT

The being of the world appears as something constant, hence mundane.

Why from instant to instant it should be at all, is both the most necessary yet unasked question; the answer lost to our knowing yet always already granted us as the sole condition for our wondering and asking.

The moment Being is questioned, you hold your own. The sky shows itself ancient and empty of history. You are thrown into the world, into a free fall of possibility: every perception is equally mystical and infernally profane; the world, as charged and plastic as your imagination; living, bouyant as your choice.

You need only improvise with the sincerity of the purest possible will.

VI

HEINRICH AUGUST LINDING.

# READING PARMENIDES' WRITING

Even such names as "logic", "ethics", and "physics" begin to flourish only when original thinking comes to an end. During the time of their greatness the Greeks thought without such headings. They did not even call thinking "philosophy".

--Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism"

Parmenides of Elea preceded even the very conception of philosophy. Plato acknowledged his pre-eminence in the dialogue he named after him; the only dialogue that undoes Socrates and his so-called Platonism. Professors of philosophy agree, nearly unanimously, that the essence of philosophical method is logical argument, the invention of Parmenides. His epic poem is understood to be apophantical; that is, composed exclusively of propositions and deductions. John Burnet writes that "the great novelty in the poem of Parmenides is the method of argument" (Burnet 205). W. K. C. Guthrie asserts that "the first part of the poem deduces the nature of reality from premisses asserted to be wholly true" (Guthrie 4). Kirk and Raven concur that the poem "presents an unprecedented exercise in logical deduction" (Kirk and Raven 266). Even the most recent translation of Parmenides into English is prefaced by the remark that "Parmenides is the earliest ancestor whose work contains explicit and

self-conscious argumentation" (Gallop 3). I intend to show that to read Parmenides' writing as apophantical prohibits any of the deductions it is supposed to perform; therefore the reading must be mistaken.

Obviously it is necessary to survey the arguments traditionally found in Parmenides. One will see that these deductions rest upon the disjunction of two terms: "what is" and "what is not". For my thesis to possess any veracity it is necessary that all of Parmenides' so-called deductions proceed from the above disjunction. I turn to the primary source to demonstrate the truth of my assertion.

In rehearsing the first Parmenidean argument, I present the fragment from which it is derived:

A single story of a route still  
 Is left: that (it) is; on this (route) there are signs  
 Very numerous: that what-is is ungenerated and im-  
 perishable;  
 Whole, single-limbed, steadfast, and complete;  
 Nor was (it) once, nor will (it) be, since (it) is,  
 now, all together,  
 One, continuous; for what coming-to-be of it will  
 thou seek?  
 In what way, whence, did (it) grow? Neither from  
 what-is-not shall I allow  
 You to say or think; for it is not to be said or  
 thought  
 That (it) is not. And what need could have impelled  
 (it) to grow  
 Later or sooner, if it began from nothing?  
 Thus it must either be completely or not at all.

Nor will the strength of trust ever allow anything  
     to come-to-be from what-is  
 Besides it; therefore neither (its) coming-to-be  
 Nor (its) perishing has Justice allowed, relaxing  
     her shackles,  
 But she holds (it) fast; the decision about these  
     matters depends on this:  
Is (it) or is (it) not? but it has been decided,  
     as is necessary,  
 To let go the one as unthinkable, unnameable (for  
     it is no true  
 Route), but to allow the other, so that it is, and  
     is true.  
 And how could what-is be in the future; and how could  
     (it) come-to-be?  
 For if (it) came-to-be, (it) is not, nor (is it) if  
     at some time (it) is going to be.  
 Thus, coming-to-be is extinguished and perishing not  
     to be heard of. (Callop 65)

There are two arguments in the above passage. The first  
 that "what is" has always been; the second that "what is"  
 always will be. In conjunction these two arguments demon-  
 strate the eternality of "what is". The deductions may be  
 stated succinctly. "What is" must have always been, for  
 there is only "what is" and "what is not", i.e. nothing.  
 In order for "what is" to come into being, it must have  
 (by the disjunction above) proceeded from "what is not",  
 but from nothing nothing comes. Likewise, for "what is"  
 to "perish", it must become "what is not", and this is  
 absurd.

It is obvious that the veracity of the arguments above  
 hinges upon the meaning of the terms "what is" and "what is

not". Parmenides' poem uses arguments of the above form, i.e. proceeding from the disjunction "either it is or it is not", to demonstrate that "what is" is not only eternal, but also continuous, indivisible, and motionless. The truth of these deductions rests upon the properties of "what is not", namely, no properties at all.

I intend now to turn to one of the terms of the crucial disjunction from which Parmenidean cosmology is supposedly inferred. There exists a fragment which asserts the relation between thought, language, and "what is". Fragment six reads: "It must be that what is there for speaking and thinking of is" (Gallop 61). It requires only a simple inference to obtain "'what is not' can neither be spoken nor thought of." And if "what is not" can neither be spoken nor thought of, the Parmenidean arguments cannot proceed since one of the disjuncts of the disjunction pivotal to their proceeding is illegitimate.

I wish to make it very clear that the term "what is not" can have no apophantical significance and so cannot be legitimately used in any deduction. The fragment above entails that one cannot speak of "what is not", and if one cannot speak of "what is not", then one cannot use the notion in one's deductions.

The case can be made stronger yet. Guthrie writes that



the verb translated "think of" (noein) could not, in and before his (Parmenides) time, convey the notion of imagining something non-existent, for it connoted primarily an act of immediate recognition. (Guthrie 18)

Philology shows why one cannot think of "what is not".

One cannot speak of "what is not" because

"to say nothing" in Greek does not mean to be silent: it is the regular expression for talking nonsense, uttering what does not correspond to reality. (Guthrie 20)

Even if Parmenides intended to write apophantically about "what is" and "what is not", his language would have denied him the categories of thought necessary for his project.

If one approaches Parmenides' poem as being apophantical, then there can be no deductions within his writings, since the poem declares explicitly that "what is not" is utterly unintelligible. Either one approaches Parmenides' poem as being apophantical or not. To approach his writings as being apophantical renders them non-deductive. And to approach the poem as being not apophantical disallows its being deductive also. Further, the very possibility of deductiveness is denied Parmenides by his very language. Therefore, on logical and factual, i.e. philological, grounds, one must conclude that Parmenides' writing must

be read not as contemporary argumentative philosophy, but  
rather as what it is: poetry.

## WORKS CITED

- Burnet, John. Early Greek Philosophy. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908.
- Gallop, David. Parmenides of Elea. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.
- Guthrie, W. K. C. A History of Greek Philosophy, Vol II. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965.
- Kirk, G. S. and Raven, J. F. The Presocratic Philosophers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957.

VII

CLAUDE HOCQUARD  
DENISE ROYET-JOURNARD

## CORRESPONDENCE

13.11.88

Dear A-----,

Here's the letter you're expecting.

I've been thinking again about the dilemma that faces  
 LANGUAGE writing: e.g., Steve McCaffrey (LANGUAGE poet  
 of the North (strong and free?)) writes in his book of  
 essays North of Intention re some review of Dowdney's  
 first book:

...Cairdner's response to the book is not in every  
 sense erroneous, it is on the fundamental level of  
 Dowdney's work entirely irrelevant, assuming as it  
 does a theory of language that is patently not one  
 shared with the poet...

I think we'd both agree that what's entirely irrelevant is  
any writer's theory of language--if we're writing in a  
 language that language does what it does quite independently  
 of what we think it does or how it works. And so the dilemma:  
 If your theory of language is descriptively true, then  
 anything you write will be consistent with your theory; if  
 your theory is not descriptively true, then it's just a

bad theory.

"What do you think? As Gadamer writes: "...both the poetical and philosophical types of speech share a common feature: they cannot be 'false'."

Seems to me that what's important in LANGUAGE writing is the same thing that was important about the Abstract Expressionists: the very medium of their work has become an object (or, better, a field) for investigation: the very medium of the art has become at least important if not problematic. And in this, LANGUAGE writing is at least consistent with the concerns in philosophy this century: language. A lot of people, Gadamer, Perstein, McCaffrey etc. see this problematic as the field (of moment) where poetry and philosophy come together (as if Plato or Heraclitus didn't know this.)

Anyway, that's why I've adopted the tactics I have for the Wittgenstein poems, and that's why I'm always so irritated when people criticize it for being (in its language) too 'abstract' or 'general' or 'conceptual' instead of phanopoeic (i.e. "casting an image on the imaginative eye of the reader")--"why should I have to "cast an image on the

imaginative eye" when I'm already casting an image on the striate cortex?! Just a case of not being able to see the trees for the forest I guess. More likely it's an unfamiliarity with a concern for language. But how can this be? Stevens wrote that the best poetry will be rhetorical criticism. And you can't criticize rhetoric until you can see it!

And that's exactly what the Wittgenstein poems are all about: the ways that philosophy has been incarnate in language, from aphorisms and epic verse to dialogues and bootleg lecture notes to notebooks and collages (or mosaics) of remarks to mixtures of verse and prose to even the rather bland academic essay we're trapped with today. And of course the reverse is true, poetry has come to philosophy, has been "philosophical" almost all along: I've shown you enough Shelley and Wordsworth and Whitman and Smart and Stevens and Pound and Ammons and Levertov that I know it's hardly an issue between us anymore.

But finally I think what's even more important is the remark by Gadamer I quoted earlier: the value of poetry and philosophy is the world they give us, if indeed the world is always already mediated, and if we have any control over that

mediation, and I think we do (just reflect on the way that I can use the religious lingo of Judeo-Christianity and not for a moment affirm the existence of some guy in the sky with a beard), then poetry and philosophy are "fictitious" in Stevens' terms: it doesn't matter that there really are no atoms or electrons etc., as long as the mythology works-- And this is why arguing over it and trying to determine a priori whether the Wittgenstein poems work or not is the wrong way to go at it: "It is like looking into the cabin of a locomotive. We see handles all looking more or less alike. Naturally, since they are all supposed to be handled."

Anyway, you've heard me rave about all this before many times. But I'd like you to take a ride in the locomotive I've sent you here and tell me how it runs. I know it's pretty crudely steam-powered and all and there's a lot of smoke and steam and noise and it loses velocity when it goes up hills and probably even scares away a lot of wildlife (don't try the whistle). But the landscape is nice, and I think the little town somewhere near the ferry to the Western Lands is pretty and a good place to stay for a while--it's dangerous and unusual and somehow the streets keep changing around every now and then, but, honestly, would you want to live anywhere more static?



Write soon. Good luck with Michel and Roland (watch out for laundry trucks!), and, above all: WORK HARDER!!!

Yours,

B----

\*

10.1.89

Dear B----,

My apologies for the tardy reply.

Yes, I agree entirely with what you've said about the writers and theories of language. But it is important to keep in mind that the truly inescapable dilemma you have posed is only recognizable to those who are genuinely familiar with the concerns of contemporary philosophers of language--probably those who have benefited from instruction in philosophy. When Steve McCaffrey, for example, refers to the different theories of language held by Davidson and Gairdner, I suspect that he's not thinking of the domain surveyed by Kripke, Putnam, Quine, Davidson, and followers.

It seems, rather, that "theory of language" stands in for some much more amorphous notion about how meaningful constructions are created and how, in turn, such ideas can be used to create a certain kind of poetic presentation. "Theoretically", this is harmless, though sloppy. It is, no doubt, a more unsettling (political) matter when such things begin to infect the critical reception of someone's work. So one must insist on clarity and demand, as everyone's favourite Harvard philosopher demands (Paul Ziff): "You gotta at least learn how to keep the slop in the pail!"

I smiled when I read what you wrote about the Abstract Expressionists because, ironically, that was an interpretation of their work which was foisted on them. It began with Clement Greenberg's nationalistic fretting about the dominance of French painting and, through an almost unbelievable confluence of social and political circumstances, ended with CIA backed European tours of the "New American Painting", designed to win the support of war-weary Europeans ("Have you seen the art coming out of the Soviet Union?") Really, it's true! It's as well documented as any such phenomenon could be (check out the work of Serge Guibault, Griselda Pollock, and Peter Fuller). The amazing thing is that all the major "Abstract Expressionists" vehemently

and insistently denied this interpretation of their work, and the artworld systematically ignored them. The pen might be mightier than the sword but the paint brush is a part of the means of production. Here lies the key to understanding why art since the fifties has taken on such a radically different appearance. But, I guess, you don't need the CIA for a conspiracy, at least I don't think that the CIA is issuing directives to critics insisting that they claim that poetry "must cast an image on one's imaginative eye." There can be garden variety plots, nourished by inertia.

As for this business about poetry being poetry and philosophy being philosophy, I'm afraid I don't understand it. So, okay, we all have our fears. My dad has recently developed this fear of ice patches, but I guess that's understandable, as you know, he has walked with crutches most of his life.

Yours as always,

A-----

VIII

JOHN YOUNGMAN

HOMO OMNIBUS

(for one voice)

On that bus  
there  
is a man

in a big  
black  
baggy  
suit.

And that man  
on that bus  
is lusting--  
lusting after a dusky girl  
with dark eyes.

And that man  
on that bus  
evades those eyes

when they look near him  
or at him, or  
to him.

And that man  
on that bus  
is thankful his suit  
is baggy

when those eyes look near him  
at him  
or maybe  
to him.

And that man  
on that bus  
on that street in this city  
is thinking--

he is--  
he's thinking--  
and he's thinking

no one can pin me down on this bus-- he's thinking--  
you could drive a big pin of light through this bus  
through the point on the great curve where it is  
and you would always  
miss.

Thinking of curves  
and the looking-around  
dusky  
dark-eyed girl

he's thrilled  
and breathes  
and he knows he is

and is thankful  
his suit is baggy  
and loose  
and cool

that man  
on that bus  
on that

always changing street--  
cars passing  
passing plants  
and dogs  
and plants beside dogs  
and people  
and people beside plants  
and plants beside dogs beside people  
and plants beside dogs beside people beside buildings  
and air  
beside  
everything else.

And that man  
on that bus

is glad he's not  
beside

the dusky girl  
with dark eyes

who looks at him  
sometimes



then he's glad  
his suit is baggy

and loose  
and black

so that  
not even shadows

or shadows of folds  
reveal the curve

or a shadow  
of a curve.

And that man  
on that bus is glad--

glad as he steps from the bus at his stop  
a few feet ahead of the dark-eyed girl

and glad as the bus passes  
rippling leaves, rippling leaves

and his baggy suit,  
his rippling

baggy suit,  
always changing its shape

in accord with what's outside,  
its place

with what's  
inside.

IX

ARCHIEALD A. MCNS

## .                   AT RED RIVER'S EDGE

I shed scales and  
blood the slow water  
at the river's edge, the fish  
guttled on a warming rock.  
A wondering after  
origins and wellsprings  
rises with my standing  
and squinting into the glare  
of light broken upstream  
at my vision's limit.  
What one source spills  
up this river?--  
Numberless puddles brimming  
over as rain falls  
to fill them, clear  
water writhing  
over slick dark rock  
too hard to trace  
a lasting path in,  
waves of rainwater  
draining in rippling sheets

.

off flat rock walling  
a gleaming highway,  
or running in rivulets  
charging a careening stream  
from a sudden height  
in an opening spray of sparks  
that scatter against one  
mountain's steep  
lower rises. Upward,  
glaciers moan and turn  
themselves to fluid under  
their own weight  
for the sake of motion.  
Lighter ice and snow  
drop, over-heavy  
overhang, giving  
the glitter of crystals  
to the lift of wind  
and the long swerve of descent  
to dew on darting spear grass  
leaves or on the grains  
of the smallest ant mounds  
mining the glint  
of sand mixed in the topmost soil

of swelling foothills.  
Clouds shadow the climb  
of rock, condensing  
and losing themselves  
in the strain  
to come to nothing  
but clearest light.  
Everywhere countless sources urge  
one flow that fills  
perfectly any particular  
gap in every ground  
in its scrambling run  
to that ease of gravity proper  
to the sea. This river  
one route before me  
and beyond me on  
either side, never ebbing,  
only changing course  
to another. I follow  
some black bark carried free  
on flashing rises of the current,  
sometimes edging a shore, sometimes stilled  
in the turning of  
a darker random

swirl, but always  
spiralling out again,  
to give with the slow measure  
of the ocean's deepest founding swells,  
or float on the light  
lift of waves  
and the chance of the wind  
into some child's quick  
excitement in the sea-drift.