

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

The Task of Thinking

Philosophy is, for the most part, an agonising business, a struggle. We have many testaments to this in the biographies of philosophers and their letters. In his *Autobiography*, Russell records that while he was working on his *Principia Mathematica*, with his collaborator Whitehead, he had days when: 'Every morning I would sit down before a blank sheet of paper. Throughout the day, with a brief interval for lunch, I would stare at the blank sheet. Often when evening came it was still empty.' He also records contemplating suicide the next day by throwing himself under the trains at Kennington near Oxford: 'But when the morrow came, I always found myself hoping that perhaps *Principia Mathematica* would be finished one day.'

Wittgenstein reported the same feeling during the First World War. He was at Cambridge before the start of the war studying with Russell. But he abandoned his studies and went to Vienna to serve in the Austrian army. Wittgenstein fought in the war, got captured by the Italian forces at the end of the war and spent nine months in detention. Apparently, he was very brave and was awarded two medals during the war. But all this time he kept thinking hard about 'propositions,' meaning, religion and life. Throughout the war, he adopted a stoic attitude to cope with the hate he had from his fellow soldiers, but that did not give as much concern as his struggle with his thought. This shows the intensity of his thought and his total commitment to his philosophy.

At the beginning of the war he thought he was on the verge of a very important discovery but a year later he wrote: 'The goal of my work seems moved back by more than ever, an incalculable distance! I lack the certainty of victory, the courage of hope. To me it's as if I will never make a great

discovery. For so long I've felt abandoned by all good spirits;...)

Wittgenstein's diaries show an agonised state of mind and thoughts of suicide. He wrote in his diary of Friday 26th February, 1915: 'No work! Will I ever work again?!? Gloomy mood. ... Thinking of suicide. Will I ever work again?!?' The work he mentions is a philosophical work. In fact, he came close to carrying out his suicidal intentions just before the end of the war but for a chance meeting with his uncle that diverted his attention from the idea. He was struggling with a line of thinking that would end up as the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. He finished the book just before his capture at the end of the war.

Philosophy, since Plato, was recognised as difficult and needing patient work. Socrates used the metaphor of the midwife who helps others give birth to the wisdom that is in them. He says it thus, in *The Theaetetus*, (150 b-c): 'My art of midwifery is in general like theirs [real midwives]; the only difference is that my patients are men, not women, and my concern is not with the body but with the soul that is in travail of birth. And the highest point of my art is the power to prove by every test whether the offspring of a young man's thought is a false phantom or instinct with life and truth. I am so far like the midwife that I cannot myself give birth to wisdom'.

Philosophy, then, is a co-operative enterprise, with the philosophical community, small or large participating in the task of thinking of ourselves as midwives. The philosophical community, such as *The Wednesday*, is part of the process and we hope that it is doing good work.

The Editor

Riddles Of Philosophy

Rudolf Steiner's book, *Riddles of Philosophy*, identifies the living, driving-energy behind the evolution of consciousness. It is a philosophy of philosophy typifying Fichte's comment that the philosophy a person chooses depends on the kind of person they are. The character of an epoch is formed by a particular spiritual impulse and Steiner considers the four epochs in European philosophy: Greek, Christian, Medieval, and Modern.

WILLIAM BISHOP

Pre-Greek thought employed imagination, parable and picture and this maintained a person's unity with nature. With Greek thought abstraction separated thought from nature. But thought was felt to be perception so this maintained a link between soul and world. By the sixth century BCE picture-consciousness was superseded by independent thought. Pherecydes (c. 580–c. 520 BCE) straddled this turning point of the transformation of the delicate organization of man that causes the beginning of thought-life as a new form of consciousness. He introduced three principles: Chronos, Zeus, and Chthon where Chronos is alive and actively devours the life of Chthon. Zeus helps to transform the events between Chronos and Chthon into spatial form. This action is felt as picture content by Pherecydes. In the later thought-ruled world, Chthon becomes *matter*, Zeus *space*, and Chronos *time*, which can also be taken as matter, spirit, and soul.

Early Greek thinkers felt that the pictures experienced by their ancestors didn't lead to the original causes and wanted to raise their thoughts to these higher causes. Through progress in thought the world became seen as divided into a *natural* and a *spiritual* sphere. Pythagoras (c. 570–c. 495 BCE) preceded this change and sought the highest knowledge in a life of soul beyond the life of thought. He developed a soul-life connected with a world capable of being intellectually expressed as numbers, based on the soul's experience of proportional numbers in music. He deepened soul-life in a region where the soul reverberates with the invisible, sensually imperceptible, cosmic harmonies and so maintained awareness of the will of cosmic powers as conception in the soul. Freeing

themselves from older means of conception both Pherecydes and Pythagoras arrived at an inwardly independent conception of the soul distinct from nature. However the full significance of a world conception lies in the mood it communicates to the soul. This mood orientates the soul.

With Anaximander (c. 610–c. 546 BCE) thought-life was born from a mood of soul imprinted with temperament and felt itself connected with a world-order above nature. Anaxagoras (c. 510–428 BCE) expressed a soul mood that experienced itself in space and time when united with thought. Extended in this way, thought appeared as 'nous', world reason. But Democritus (c. 460–370 BCE), with the atom, represents an external nature free from any trace of soul. Yet since the soul experiences itself through thought it simultaneously feels it has lost its anchorage in the independent spiritual world power that formerly lent it security and inner stability.

The philosophy of Socrates (c. 470–c. 399 BCE) expresses his personality (the fundamental character of his soul-life). His personality carries the awareness that whoever expresses personal opinion out of the true ground of the soul, expresses something more than just human opinion and manifests the purposes of the world order. According to a dialogue by Plato, the young Socrates was told by Parmenides (born c. 514 BCE) that he should learn the 'art of thought' (dialectic) from Zeno (c.490–c. 430 BCE, Eleatic school), otherwise truth would be unattainable for him. Interestingly, during the picture-consciousness epoch in Greece it was the Oracle that spoke wisdom from outside; now thought spoke to the



Earl of Shaftesbury



Rudolf Steiner

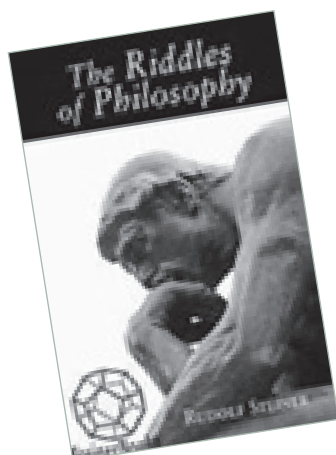
inner soul. Socrates felt the force of this thinking as an experience of the daimon manifesting itself in his soul.

Plato (c. 428–c. 348 BCE) viewed the *idea* as the manifestation of the world spirit through the revelation of thought. The light of the world spirit shines into the soul and reveals itself in the form of ideas, then the human soul in seizing the idea unites itself with the life of the world spirit. For Plato the whole world changes into ideas that act upon each other. His one-time pupil, Aristotle (384–322 BCE), employs thought as a tool to penetrate into the essence of things. For him ideas are in the things and events. Through submersion in beings and events the soul finds the essence of the thing itself; the soul feels as if it had lifted this essence out of the thing and formed it as a thought-form in order to apprehend it as a reminder of the thing. While idea and matter constitute an inseparable unity in an external thing, this is not the case for the human soul and body; here the independent human soul seizes on the corporeal part rendering the idea active in the body ineffective, and inserts itself in its place. For Plotinus (205–270) soul-life is not ruled by thinking. He had a mystical experience that presents an inner awareness without the presence of thoughts in his soul. In this experience his soul was united with the world foundation. In contrast Augustine (354–430)

understood the human soul to be a self-contained world centering on the ego.

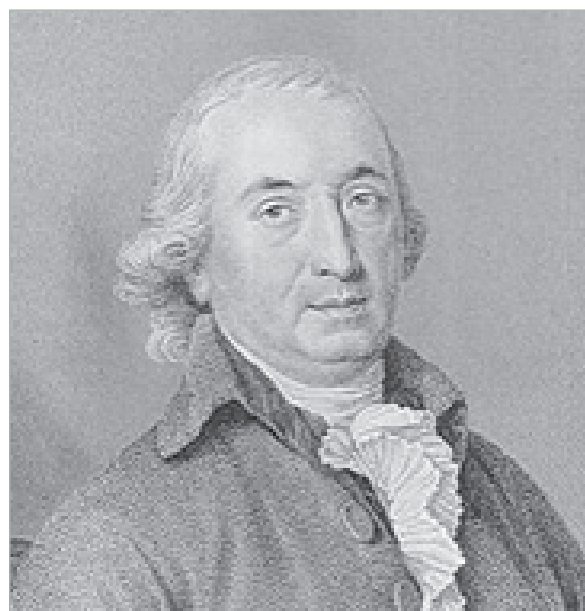
During the medieval period, ego-consciousness penetrated the soul, extinguishing thought as a strongly felt perception, making it feel more like a production of the soul itself. Thomas Aquinas (1227–1274) believed that thought was limited to the soul-world (knowledge of the world) and that a spiritual revelation was necessary to add the spiritual dimension to knowledge. He took Aristotle's thought to be the limit of the knowable by means of thought and the Bible as spiritual revelation, which was hidden from the Greeks. The medieval period also saw conflict between Realism and Nominalism. The Realist, Anselm (c. 1033–c. 1109), saw general ideas as rooted in the spiritual world (the Platonic ideal world). For example, the word 'lion' was a concept (idea) to which individual lions conformed – the form actually meant something in relation to reality. In contrast Nominalists saw general ideas as a product of the mind and arbitrarily related to the things of sense perception.

From the eighth to the sixteenth century thought-experience freed itself from inner self-consciousness yet allowed for revelation. Following this the *experience* of thought gets eliminated from the picture of nature, leaving the self-



consciousness to form a world conception through thought. Leibniz (1646–1716) included the ego as a monad in his theory of uncreated and indestructible monads: infinitely small, animated, psychically self-aware, fundamental beings, producing by their combined activity the phenomenon of nature. Shaftesbury (1671–1713) thought an ‘inner sense’ lived in the soul through which ideas enter man to form a worldview just as external perceptions enter through the outer senses. Conversely, George Berkeley (1685–1753) recognized inner experience (say of a rose) as a spiritual perception stimulated from outside but in a spiritual (non-material) realm, while Christian Wolf (1679–1754) founded a science of the world, the soul and God on the presupposition that the self-conscious soul can produce thoughts in itself that are valid for what lies entirely outside its own realm. Lessing (1729–1781) then furthered evolution by viewing history as the education of the human race, with reincarnation supporting the ego in its evolution. Then Herder (1744– 1803) regarded the conscious soul as the fruit of the cosmos and nature, toward which it strives through evolution.

For Kant (1724–1804) mathematics and natural science did not contain laws of the external world but expressed laws of our mental organization. It is therefore only necessary to investigate this organization if we want to know what is unconditionally true. Kant reasoned that knowledge of the moral (ideal) realm was impossible but it was important that duty (the inner voice) was followed to obtain meaning and purpose in life. For him the highest truths were moral truths. Man had to renounce all insight into a supersensible world, but his moral nature compensated for this. In Kant’s



Johann Gottfried Herder

opinion true religion was the belief that the moral law rules over all other events of the world and is supported by a divine being. Goethe (1749–1832) took an opposite view to Kant. While Kant drew the laws of nature into the human mind, Goethe saw the human spirit as part of nature, because nature to him *was* spirit. Goethe believed it was not merely the spirit that spoke in the subjective faculty of cognition, but that the spirit of nature had created for itself an organ in man through which to reveal its secret. It is not man who speaks about nature but nature that speaks in man about itself. He imagined an archetype for plants as an *idea* from which all plants could be created and continue to be consistent due to the unitary creative principle. The *archetype* was for him a living *thing* in nature that provided the idea within the self-conscious ego.

The Modern begins with Descartes (1596–1650) and his radical statement: ‘I think therefore I am’. Indeed the Modern age seeks a new worldview as it questions how the world is to be depicted so that within it the human soul can correspond adequately to the concept of self-consciousness. In sympathy with Kant, Fichte (1762–1814) was convinced that the love of speculative knowledge could occupy a person so much that no other wish is left than to pursue it in calm concentration. Schiller (1759–1805) synthesized Kant’s opposition between



Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

Reason and Moral law and arrived at the *work of art* with its combination of the sensual and spiritual, offering a world of ‘play’ where man was free. If desire raised itself to conform to virtue then a person would freely do what was right.

Schelling (1775-1854) recognized that nature and spirit are the same entity in two forms. A divine spirit created the world and creates man in order to form tools in their souls where the spirit can, in recollection, become aware of its creative activity. It is not man that thinks but the spirit of the world-forces that think in him. Hegel (1770–1831) saw thought contemplating itself as a great achievement in man; man lifts himself up to the vantage point of the Supreme Being that rules within him and is the source of his morality. Goethe also believed that the nature of all world phenomena was brought to light as truth in and through man. This conception places man so high because it sees realized in the human being the basis of the world: the fundamental force, the Primal Being. Hegel raised the soul to the point where it could live with the element of thought. Any progress beyond Hegel should lead to the growth of thought in the soul beyond itself and into a spiritual world. Hegel understood how the soul magically produces thought within itself and experiences itself in thought. He left to posterity the task of discovering through *living thinking* the real being of the soul that can fully experience itself in



Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller

the element of thought. Modern conception strives from the *perception* of thought to the *experience* of it. Thought shouldn’t be stationary as thought, but must awaken to a higher life. Indeed Fechner (1801–1887) observed that viewed from within, the spirit is seen, and viewed from without, an external physical world is seen, and yet spirit and matter are essentially the same. Robert Hamerling (1830–1889) highlighted the condition that the ideas of the ego are interwoven with elements of feeling, and what the spirit has not *experienced* it is also incapable of *thinking*. For Hamerling all higher world conception depended on the necessity of feeling the act of thinking itself, of experiencing it inwardly. He felt that knowledge in a person must light up with its own power of truth within the self-conscious ego in a similar way that it had manifested itself in the *perceived* thought of the Greeks.

The Greek era was a watershed in the evolution of consciousness, and Steiner suggests we are in the midst of one today: ‘the theory of relativity is significant for the fact that it proves the necessity of a science of the spirit that is to be sought in spiritual ways, independent of the observation of nature’. A final thought: ‘the message of this book is that a world conception based on spiritual science is virtually demanded by the development of modern philosophy as an answer to the questions it raises’.

Exploring

When I felt I could fly
I opened my arms wide
in a flutter of angel wings,
sun rays lifted me up into the azure.

As I was floating upwards
the sun was just setting.
My hair shone in a golden glow
looped in pink and orange light.

People were looking in wonder.
I never saw myself as an angel,
but there I was.

When I raced past the moon
I went faster and faster.
Planets whizzed by, the odd meteor,
but nothing could harm me.



Out on a journey of a lifetime
exploring space, I could not help
looking back to earth, not sure
if it really existed.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Discovering Kristeva: A Discourse With The New Kierkegaard

Like other French theory names like Derrida (born in Algeria) and Levinas (from Lithuania) Kristeva isn't really French but hails, somewhat controversially, from Bulgaria. She arrived in the ferment that was France and married a writer and got involved with the journal *Tel Quel*. She studied with Barthes, Lucien Goldmann, and Todorov, all of whom were substantial figures. Julia Kristeva has written many books in this century building on what was written in the latter part of the last century. Kristeva is more of a religious writer, which in recent times has led to accusations that she is in her later work at least too close to Catholicism. She is often grouped with male writers like Charles Taylor and Richard Kearney in that regard. In this article, we will argue that it is particularly in *Strangers to Ourselves* that connections with modern theology emerge and that they connect closely with recent discussions around Kierkegaard's later discourses like his *Works of Love*.

DAVID CLOUGH

Kristeva wrote tougher texts at the start of her career. Some are linguistic, others about the mother's body. *The Poetics of Revolutionary Language* and *Powers of Horror* are key texts for hard core Kristevans where concepts about the semiotic and the abject are expounded. But I started by reading her slightly gentler *Black Sun* with its connections to Walter Benjamin and Freud's *German: Mourning and Melancholy*, and things got easier still in *New Maladies of the Soul* and *Strangers to Ourselves*. But you still have to know something about Freud and Lacan, and perhaps Augustine and Arendt too.

Before that, Kristeva's *Tales of Love* was one of the texts that awakened me to the idea of re-imagining medieval thinking, particularly women's thinking as a kind of supplement to Charles Taylor's mostly male *Sources of the Self* which kind of jumped over this period. There were other texts generally that complimented this, such as Bruce Holsinger's *The Pre-Modern Condition* and another book by Aers and Staley called *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*.

Lacan's Turn To Linguistic

But even in the early work, if a kind of

psychoanalysis of religion is there, the religious presentation has been simplified in recent years. Maybe as it has also with Protestant Philosophers of Religion. It maybe due to the fact that the severity of critique and suspicion has reduced. Early on for Kristeva, the Father is put to death by Oedipus as the place of the symbolic. But Oedipus here merely helps us see the role of language.

Religious discourse does this where Christ creates the loving space but his being has the necessary discontinuity within its conception. For Kristeva in her early work, like *Tales of Love*, the story of Christ's relation to God gives image and narrative for the separations of psychic development. Kristeva wants to retain the contact with the infinite, but not as God. Instead of symmetrical 'I' and 'Thou' she gets the third a bit like Levinas.

The Dark Side

Although I am going to talk about Kristeva and Kierkegaard one needs to mention those figures on the darker side of melancholy that Kristeva brings in. The fairly obscure Gerard de Nerval still looks within to a hidden god, though a different one from Pascal's. There's Holbein too and the slightly more familiar Dostoevsky who is discussed by other



Julia Kristeva

religious thinkers like George Pattison and Rowan Williams. Then Job and divine law comes up in Žižek and Kierkegaard. Yes, Kierkegaard also knew and wrote about Job and liked the *Epistle of James*, contrary to Luther. But as Auden observes in his reading of Kierkegaard, has there ever been a law like love?

Kristeva is sufficiently Nietzschean to be aware of the thesis that *God does not now exist* (Nietzsche's Death of God). But it then gets very poetic as in Holsinger's book on music which looks at Bosch's painting where in a tiny detail a man is crucified on a harp. Kristeva draws out points like this: as a result of the absorption of the dead star into the lute, the *Black Sun* of melancholy emerges. Melancholia belongs in the celestial realm, as in Dürer's *Melancholy Angel* and this melancholy travels from the star-spangled heights to the night of the grave.

Looking at her links with Benjamin in *Black Sun*, melancholy is amorous passion's sombre lining. Nevertheless, melancholy is not French – Rousseau and Nerval are really exceptions. Her knowledge of Nerval and even Dostoevsky exceeds ours probably and this can make this

aspect difficult. Yet if there is nothing sadder than a dead God in these crucifixion paintings or in Nietzsche's shadow period, Bernard Williams and new atheists might not feel what she is taking so seriously here. Walter Benjamin's melancholy substratum of the imagination was deprived of both classical and religious stability yet anxious to find new meaning. Holbein's painting it is true shows the resurrection, but the image of the dead Christ is more powerful. At any time of crisis melancholy imposes itself and lays down its representation and knowledge. There might be a link to Nussbaum here in the transference of emotion and empathy (or sympathy), if one accepts that mood can be a generalised transference.

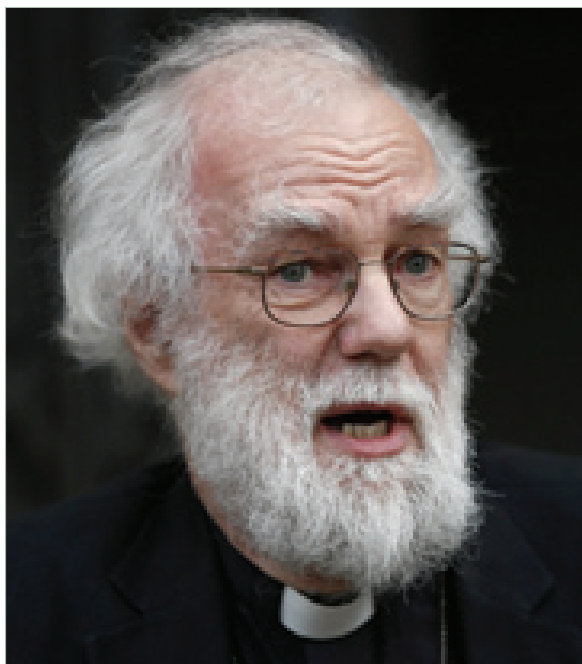
Confused Images Or A Spiritual Tradition?

If Vanhoozer, George Pattison and others are right about living a sacrificial life being more important than erudite expressions of ideas, then what are such academics or mere intellectual flâneurs like myself achieving? How much suffering of, and for others, does one need to bank.

If trusting expectancy has become preferred to the 1970s eschatological hope, whether that is Ricoeurian, propositional or otherwise, hope now is another incompleteness really only sketched. A period existed where Habermas escapes Steiner's counter theory of the necessity of the sacred through his concept of 'ideal speech situations.' Merleau-Ponty introduces synchronic and diachronic terms to event and archetype respectively. Using the term *advent* (from early Ricoeur) Merleau-Ponty sidestepped the event/structure problem refashioning it as an event/advent one. Merleau-Ponty similarly stressed in Kojève's reading of Master/Slave the necessity of some primary common ground between them, which he felt Hegel overlooks in such an all or nothing struggle or dialectical annihilation. Post-Structuralist thinkers overcome 'the subject' through a modern interpretation of the world as an event in an epochal discourse.

Kierkegaard

Merold Westphal's recent book on faith in Kierkegaard sees it as a process with twelve aspects, where faith becomes a lifelong task, a



Rowan Williams



Alister MacIntyre

trusting in divine promises, but still embattled with challenge and temptation in a Bunyanesque way. He still calls Brand Blanshard a fundamentalist about divine commands, but his own language seems to have moved significantly from his earlier book on Kierkegaard called *Becoming a Self*. But C Stephen Evans talks about knowledge of something as contrasted with personal wisdom. People with much third-party knowledge often lack this self-knowledge though this is less extreme than the defensive posture known as intellectualisation.

Universalizing The Stranger

Turning next to her book *Strangers to Ourselves*: it seems to talk in more familiar language. So much so that certain things that look more like facts even emerge. In America, strangers are called aliens. In the ancient Greeks only foreign women murder their cousin's husbands. In ancient societies and some anthropological examples now there is an incest taboo. Look at thinkers like Durkheim and Levi Strauss. Women were famously separated from Polis.

What was foreignness like in Homer?. Odysseus was disguised as a foreigner. What did he wear. Was he just hard to see. We are so used to panto

jokes now its hard to know. We weren't there. Hellenists gradually merged with the local provinces. There was stoic conciliation and universalism. A foreigner was defined less by birth than an inability to keep with local rules, the laws of providence. Like Zizek and others Kristeva will say that, in contrast, Jewish people either choose or find themselves cast in the role of foreigners, until 1948 at least. But dispersion or exile are not confined to them. Anyway, she sees St Paul as an outsider too. He too always seems to be on nomadic solitary journeys like Jesus, Abraham and certain prophets etc. Tent makers knew that a place teeming with foreigners needs hospitality. Paul's churches were late Hellenistic cosmopolitan communities of estranged foreigners. This is a theme I link to Kearney and others around the phenomenology and hermeneutics of hospitality as well as Zizek and Santner's book on *The Neighbour*.

Theology And Politics

Augustine had attempted the first cosmopolitan history of mankind. Augustine took psalms as his pattern for a city of freedom and the existing oppressed type as a parable of estrangement and reunion. But Herder turns this into real romanticism in his *Fragments on the New German Literature*, and his *Origin of Languages*, his *Another History*



Kierkegaard



Walter Benjamin

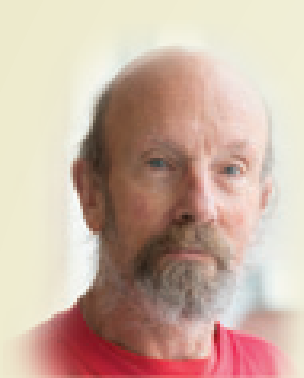
of Philosophy, and his *Voices of nations in their Songs*, which all emphasis the role of national language and revived interest in Medieval German.

Arendt, like MacIntyre, favours quest rather than totalisation, but is the political space becoming too artistic? and how does Kristeva's aesthetic redemption of melancholia fit? Does a certain cult of poetry and myth using a national language always lead to national aestheticism? Can narrative partake in another politics (that of re-opened memory) forming a particular 'who' narration? That the narrator may be unreliable is not the main point. The narrative still has a political action. That is the main point. But is it saying that discourse is what acts? Post-Structuralist thinkers really adopt a self-adapting model of language as itself the occurrence of truth.

They overcome 'the subject' through a modern interpretation of the world as an event in an epochal discourse. In Foucault all validity claims have become immanent to a given discourse. The 'subject of knowledge' has been sacrificed. Science is replaced by genealogy. But is Foucault right that power is more crucial than education? Surely Foucault, Arendt and Marx would see that both are tools to reduce tension and violence.

I am wandering myself here into Augustine - Kierkegaard territory when I quote the following: 'My boundaries are disturbed, and memory the clear walls of a container.' If Kristeva sees even in Augustine the idea of the stranger encountered in neighbour space is more dissolved as anyone can be encountered modern debates around Kierkegaard see older Kantian problems still remaining. But for Kristeva if the *Old Testament's* stranger needed a chosen people the *New Testament* involves now receiving anyone as Christ or with Christ-like love as DZ Phillips and others might argue in Kierkegaard's text around which there has been so much debate. I mean his *Works of Love* book, one authored in his own hand. Most Christian interpretations today will want to say that in divine love, no-one is excluded or put beyond this. But this is so inclusive there are no boundaries, so the neighbour here is every man. But can we love everybody? Did Kierkegaard? Contemporary Kierkegaard debates discuss not only the role of God as the middle term in Lutheran understanding, but in terms of there still being a boundary between neighbour and stranger, which puts limits back. But for Kierkegaard whereas the parent and child have a particular relation, meeting a stranger or neighbour under God is not particular. There is sufficient self-renunciation to enable the other to enter in the presence of God.

'Free Verse': a Formalist Riposte



CHRIS NORRIS

It's helpful and effective to have some limitations on one's choices and even to 'give up' some control over the poem. Which, I suppose, is a little scary for some people. To give up some control to the muse, to outer things. I feel there's almost a sort of Ouija Board feeling about rhyme and meter, where maybe you're in control, and maybe you're not . . . Maybe it's a negative freedom, something like a negative capability type of freedom.

A. E. Stallings

**'Free verse'! The thing's a nonsense from the start,
A flat-out oxymoron: why
On the one hand pay homage to the art
Or craft of verse where none get by
Unless verse-structures play some basic part,
While on the other riding high
On claims to ditch the rules, go à la carte,
And have no such constraints apply
Where poems answer to the call of heart,
Not head; as if free verse could fly
To altitudes way off the metric chart
With wings that cleave an airless sky?**

**The thing goes deeper, wider: think of 'free'
As 'under no constraints', and it's
Odds on you'll head off on some antic spree
Of reverie where nothing fits
The way things are, or how they might yet be
If tweaked in ways good sense admits
Within the bounds of possibility,
Instead of those world-counterfeits
Put out by freedom-touts who fail to see,
Through a skewed glass, how that which sits
Too well with how they fancy things to be
May miss the life-transforming bits.**



A. E. Stallings

No more in life than verse can freedom mean
 An end to everything that sets
 A limit on the power so to convene
 Our words and world that nothing gets
 Speech-hackles up; or brings some unforeseen
 Life-setback; or covertly lets
 Occur some slight *dérèglement* between
 Intent and sense; or kindred threats
 To settled expectation and routine
 Speech-rhythms that renounce all debts
 To metre, rhyme, and all their jumping-bean
 Routes out from under custom's nets.

My point here: it's as far from true to say
 Of rhyme as of verse-metre that
 Such formal artifice gets in the way
 Of what the poet's driving at,
 Or that their *vouloir-dire* is led astray
 By formal features going flat
 Against the 'natural grain of speech' that they,
 The *vers-libristes*, put up to bat
 In this their master-plan designed to play
 Clean off the field all those silk-hat
 Verse-manners kept up merely to convey
 Verse-forms and verse-thoughts got off pat.

Poetry

Not so, I say: it's an apt rhyme that brings
Us closest to that give-and-take
Of freedom and necessity that springs
Surprises of a kind to make
Us freshly cognisant of many things,
Like how word-choices for the sake
Of rhyme or meter may give thought new wings,
Or how, at times, some make-or-break
Life-choice that's forced on us by adverse swings
Of fortune proves a lucky break,
Or how it's poetry with formal strings
Attached that tugs the heart awake.



Muse, perhaps reading a scroll (c. 430 BC)



A. E. Stallings

For it's just here the old dilemma lies,
The puzzle that's so long defied
Philosophers' best efforts: how to prise
Some space for free-will from inside
The stronghold of necessity, or rise
To such occasions as provide
Portals of world-discovery in the guise
Of formal obstacles which hide,
Like rhyme, the occult principle that ties
Verse-sound to sense in forms supplied
By our unending need to improvise
A means whereby to ride
The tiger of necessity that tries
Free-will in ways unknown, untried.

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Editor: Dr. Rahim Hassan

Contact Us:

rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk

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Rug



Sharp light pokes at your faded weave.
To adult eyes you are not much to look at,
but a thousand footfalls ago you were my island.

Memories lap around my feet of dusk-sodden expeditions
made in the coal fire flicker to your interior.
Journeys for time off the clock, but back in the flick
of a switch, when adults would join me - but not join in.

Your borders contained me completely.
Even now I can see in your pattern, the old way
abandoned with growing up. Maybe one last stretch,
before I roll you up, consign you to the flames.

David Burrige