

The *Wednesday*

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Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford



Editorial

An Alternative History of Philosophy

There is a journalistic tradition of reviewing the past year to select the best cultural event. I thought we might join this tradition this year and talk about a new book that I found most interesting. It is *Witcraft: The Invention of Philosophy in English* by Jonathan Rée.

Witcraft is not just another book which recounts the main figures of philosophy - although it does that as well - but one which puts philosophy in the context of historical events, from the spread of education with its changing trends and the rise of universities to the struggle between different Christian sects and the invocation of different Greek schools of thought - Epicureans and Democritus against Plato and Aristotle. It also covers the rise of corpuscular philosophy against occult qualities, the adaptation of philosophy to national language and wit from Greek and Latin, the rejection of the corrupt Greek and Latin of the schools and the return to the original ancient languages, the struggle for free thought and the cost of losing sight of balanced views, and revolution in religion and politics, and then in philosophy.

I don't intend to review the book but I wish to concentrate on its method of research. It does not tell you the history of philosophy as a succession of great figures or important texts. Many history books of philosophy start with the Greeks and Romans, followed by Christian, Islamic, Medieval, and then modern philosophy, but in such books about schools of thought, there is only a bare minimum of information about their context - about the life and circumstances that made the philosophers and their philosophy you are reading. You'll find all this in *Witcraft*, although it starts around the beginning of the seventeenth century, but you will also find a lot more. It is a mine of

anecdotes and gems of wit. It focuses on English or British philosophy but relates it to that of the Greeks and Romans, and the French and Germans. It documents the interaction of English-speaking thinkers with those on the Continent, and it follows immigrant British philosophers to America.

To illustrate the non-linearity of the narrative compared to other histories, the last chapter of the book has a review of Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* by someone whom I feel shares the same point of view about writing history as Rée does. According to the review, Russell is mistaken 'by playing with a common misconception about philosophy: that it deals in "theories" designed, as in natural science, to reflect the facts of experience, and that it progresses towards truth by collecting facts and finding better ways of representing them.' And so Russell looked down on pre-modern ideas. This is not the way of Rée and his *Witcraft*. His book has lots of positive references to pre-Greek thought from Egypt. Russell failed to explain why such thoughts, or similar ones, were life-changing to those who held them: 'Philosophical differences were erased, and the resulting narrative was stale, flat, barren and uninteresting'. This is the way of many books on the history of philosophy but it is not Rée's way. By concentrating on the different and the marginalised beside the great figures, and following their thought through as part of the process of life and history, Rée has contributed a great book to the history of philosophy in English. I hope someone will do the same for other languages and traditions. But maybe they have done! There is still a great amount of knowledge and wisdom to be learned from this and similar books.

The Editor

Nietzsche As A Philosopher: The Views Of Some Philosophers

This is the third and final part of a study of the reception of Nietzsche's books for over a century, both in the continental and analytic philosophy. This part discusses his style of philosophy, his view of truth and ethics in his major work *Beyond Good and Evil* and the recent interpretation of this book.

Part 3

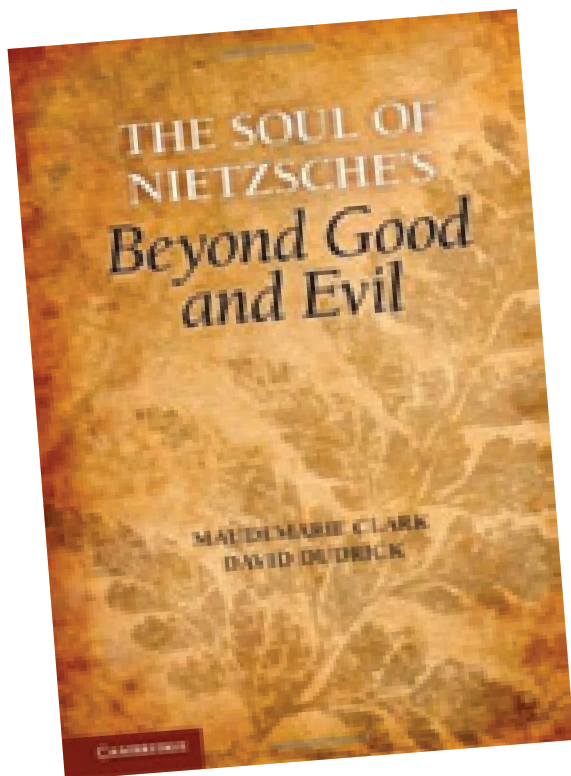
EDWARD GREENWOOD

It is an interesting feature of the recent study of *Beyond Good and Evil* by Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick that they seriously pose the question: "Why doesn't Nietzsche write like a philosopher, laying out his views and giving arguments for them?". I can testify from experience that this disconcerts the ordinary reader as well as the professional philosopher. They endorse Bernard Williams's view that Nietzsche's texts are 'booby-trapped' against extracting a theory standardly enforced by argument, as opposed to being proclaimed, like, say, the eternal return, but they think that he is wrong in thinking that a philosophical theory of a more normal kind cannot be extracted from his work and offer their study of *Beyond Good and Evil* as vindicating their claim.

They maintain that Nietzsche has not repudiated analysis in the wider sense of dialectic open to refutation (p252). What he rejects is what he sees as the false systematisation of Spinoza and Kant, the use of 'concept-mummies' which produce

a killed and stuffed body of thought. Nietzsche (perhaps here like the Plato he attacks) wants to stir his readers with excitement. His ultimate aim is not that of Plato, some totally non-sensual non-natural Form of the Good, but of awakening the reader to the reader's own best self. Clark and Dudrick quote Nietzsche's own characterisation of their aim from *Schopenhauer As Educator*: "Your true self does not lie deeply buried within you, but immeasurably high above you, or at least above what you take yourself to be. Your real educators, those who found you, reveal to you what is the true primary meaning and fundamental substance of your being."

On page 411 of his Nietzsche biography Julian Young writes of *Beyond Good and Evil* that he regards the book as "consisting of two books of unequal size, one concerned with theoretical philosophy, the other with practical philosophy, 'ethics' in the very broadest sense of the word. The first is to be found largely in Part 1, the second in the remaining eight parts." Clark and Dudrick endorse this and devote much of their



The Soul of Nietzsche's BGE



Julian Young

book to Part 1, the section on 'The Prejudices of Philosophers'.

In his own brief account of the book in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche sees it as part of the post-*Zarathustra* 'work of destruction'. It is "a critique of modernity" and a "school for gentlemen", in as much as that concept is taken more spiritually and radically than it has been earlier, a phrase perhaps echoing Brandes's characterisation of his position as "aristocratic radicalism", a characterisation which had pleased Nietzsche himself. Nietzsche says that *Beyond Good And Evil* employs a "hard psychology" and "there is not a single good natured word in the entire book." If *Zarathustra* was God, *Beyond Good and Evil* is the Devil.

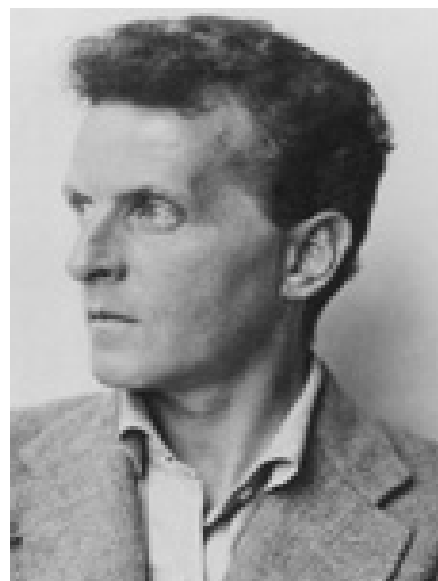
Clark and Dudrick endorse Walter Kaufmann's view that *Beyond Good and Evil* is not a mere "collection of aphorisms for browsing." At the same time they acknowledge that there is much in it to annoy the philosophic mind in that parts of it "seem too crude and too poorly supported to count as good philosophy," for example the attacks on

women (which Nietzsche himself recognises as possibly idiosyncratically subjective in section 231) and his intemperate attacks on "the English in general and Darwin, Mill and Spencer in particular" (253). Clark and Dudrick even seem to concur with what Riehl had said when they reject the idea of the philosopher as "creating values." Like many of Nietzsche's readers they are disconcerted by the note of ruthlessness when Nietzsche criticises religions for "preserving too many of those who should perish." They cannot make sense of Nietzsche's calling the judgments of logic and mathematics false in sections 3 and 4. They try to explain it by suggesting that such subjects have no correspondence to an outside standard beyond man, but do not expatiate further this somewhat obscure claim. It does not seem likely to me that Nietzsche, whose forte was culture and history not mathematics, could have anticipated modern constructivist views of mathematics.

Clark and Dudrick claim that interpreting Nietzsche is something of an art and they are even driven to use the distinction between esoteric



Brian Leiter



Wittgenstein

and exoteric reading, which they claim to have arrived at independently of its most famous exponent Leo Strauss, to tide them over some difficult issues. These arise with the very opening of *Beyond Good and Evil* which expresses the view which has led many, including Santayana and, perhaps, Russell, to assume that Nietzsche did not care for truth. The question: “Granted we want the truth, why not rather untruth?” seems to challenge our prizing truth. Readers need to figure this out carefully and those “who have not read the book multiple times” (p32) cannot do so. This smacks of special pleading, as perhaps does the contention that Nietzsche is only mentioning, not raising the question of truth, which would be a very difficult thing to signal at the opening of a discourse. Moreover, if this is so, which I don’t think they establish convincingly, would it not be a defect in Nietzsche that his very opening is so open to misconstruction? They then go on to say that Nietzsche is dealing with two questions which he runs together (is that another defect?): the question of the origin of the premium put upon truth and the question of the justification for that premium.

After this shaky start, the way becomes more clear. They see “the will to truth” as leading to natural science and “the will to value” as leading to metaphysics, which is the ontological claim that truth and the higher things of life have their

origin in a higher world which is the opposite of this one. This is the faith in the opposition of values of this, the lower physical and sensory world (condemned) and that, the higher metaphysical and supersensory world (exalted). This rejection of the two-world view had already been present in a more reductive form in *Human All Too Human*, a work which they perhaps too much deprecate, where Nietzsche in the first section claimed “revered things” were constituted out of lowly ones and used the analogy of perfumes and dyes made from base materials.

What is central to the work of Clark and Dudrick’s reading of *Beyond Good And Evil* is the interesting claim that “the will to value” is rooted more deeply in human beings than “the will to truth.” We are evaluating creatures before we are knowing ones. The baby looks first not just for an expression, but whether it is a friendly expression. Again Nietzsche puts the matter well in the addition to *Human All Too Human* published as ‘Assorted Opinions And Maxims’ in section 98, in which he claims that a purely cognitive being would not prize cognition: “If a little faith, hope and charity did not lead our soul to knowledge, what else would draw us to science? If we had not remained to some extent unscientific, what meaning could science possibly have for us? Taken as a whole and expressed without qualification: to a purely cognitive being



Rebecca Goldstein



Elizabeth Anscombe

knowledge would be a matter of indifference.” To put it popularly, a society of Mr Spocks would not desire it. What Nietzsche objects to in philosophers is their claim that the “will to value” can be rooted in a cold clear rationalism.

Clark and Dudrick in a way endorse Simmel’s view that Nietzsche’s genius is for ethics rather than for metaphysics, but do so without Simmel’s regret at the fact and his preference for Schopenhauer’s antithetical talent for metaphysics. Certainly Nietzsche would be with Wittgenstein and against Russell and Quine in taking the view that philosophy cannot be placed on the same level as natural science, not because it deals with phenomenological qualities (Clark and Dudrick see this view as Brian Leiter’s and reject it), but because, as Kant saw, it deals with problems that are insoluble empirically. Like Wittgenstein too, Nietzsche sees that the application of mechanical causation to the will cannot be carried through (p234). Clark and Dudrick also reject Leiter’s view that in Nietzsche willing is epiphenomenal.

Natural science gives us hypothetical and inferred theoretical knowledge which, of course, can then be applied. Willing, which is involved in ethical actions, willing in itself, so to speak, is a matter of uninferred practical knowledge without ‘internal’ observation of what we are about, for, as Elizabeth Anscombe, following

Wittgenstein, claimed: “Willing does not involve some Cartesian knowing from the inside that one’s willing is going to produce some external action. One just acts and if one is asked can avow what one is doing.” Nietzsche, of course, had not had the benefit of Wittgenstein’s overturning of the Cartesian world picture, with its view that we have private inner worlds which no one else can scrutinise, but in many ways he had emancipated himself from that view. He had rejected the Cartesian *cogito* with its ‘I think’ for ‘it thinks in me’ or ‘thinking is going on’ and taken the view that we do not reach out to the world from our private consciousness, but rather move into our consciousness from our prior engagement with the social world. As he writes in section 354 of Book 5 of *The Joyful Science*: “The development of language and the development of consciousness go hand in hand. It was only as a social animal that man acquired self-consciousness.” It is the public nature of language and the need to communicate that make us what we are.

Moreover, Nietzsche recognises that “Most of our spiritual activity remains unconscious and unfelt” (Section 333 of Part 4 of *The Joyful Science*). He anticipates Wittgenstein in recognising that the very grammar of our language creates metaphysical and religious puzzles. As even Wittgenstein (who has been called ‘a historicist without history’) recognised: “The same historical

problems which were already preoccupying the Greeks are still troubling us to-day....The reason is that our language has remained the same.” Rebecca Goldstein’s recent book *Plato at the Googleplex* is a very good illustration of this.

Nietzsche’s method of genealogy even prefigures the approach of a philosopher of very different religious and moral persuasion, Elizabeth Anscombe. It seems almost a reprise of his views when she accounts for what she sees as the unhealthy and misleading tendency of modern English moral philosophers to conceive of morality as an obligation which trumps all other obligations by identifying it as having arisen from their forgetfulness of the origins of obligation in a divine command. They go on meaninglessly perpetrating a command without a commander. Ethics is concerned not primarily with a command, but with establishing how we can flourish as human beings.

One of the most interesting aspects of Clark and Dudrick’s work is their incisive rejection of the view that Nietzsche held the notion of the will to power as a monistic metaphysical essence. He was concerned primarily with the will as a psychological power and saw willing as complicated rather than as simple. Anscombe wrote: “It is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking.” It is surely greatly to Nietzsche’s credit that he recognised the primacy of psychology for the ethical task and that he made striking efforts to develop a philosophy of psychology.

The etymology of the term ‘psychology’ connects it with the *logos* of the soul, and to conclude I should like to consider Clark and Dudrick’s fascinating and plausible thesis that Nietzsche’s task is a kind of rehabilitation of Plato’s doctrine of the soul for human beings today. After all, the full title of their book is *The Soul Of Nietzsche’s Beyond Good And Evil* and they devote the whole of chapter 6 to the issue of the soul. In a sense we are back to Vaihinger. The soul is a necessary fiction. We act ‘as if’ we had souls. They see

Nietzsche’s idea of the soul as regarding it as “the narrative order of one’s drives”, which, as in Plato, has some analogy to the political order in a community. To establish an order, reasons and norms, not just causes, have to be invoked, as well as the notion of drives (p.150). Epicurus had an anti-Plato drive (p.147). The English psychologists as described in the opening of *The Genealogy Of Morals* had a wish to put “the *partie honteuse* of our inner world into the foreground.” Because “philosophers seek to realise their values in the context of their work” (the will to value), they transcend the purely naturalist standpoint (p.154). They want to impose a normative order, not just resign themselves to a descriptive one. Clark and Dudrick see Nietzsche, this “reversed Platonist”, not as simply accepting Plato’s doctrine of the soul, but as reforming it. Plato’s reason, spirit and appetite are all in play, but somewhat differently. Our lives are rooted in appetites of various kinds and the means to satisfy those appetites can operate independently of judgments of the good (p.166), but in most cases take the good into consideration. Nietzsche, “unlike the naturalists, does not lose the soul.” Drives, even biological ones, are “subject...to shaping by experience, education and culture” (p.168). What Nietzsche, of course, denies is Plato’s influential metaphysical idea of reason as the simple separable part of the soul come into the body from above. This would be to castrate reason, so to speak. There is, moreover, no idea of the good in itself for reason to know. Reason does not come from outside. One of the drives exerts political authority over the others by normative reason. One might say the soul stands to the body as Pericles stood to Athens. Nietzsche puts it as follows in ‘Of The Despisers Of The Body’ in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* Book 1: “Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage....he is called self. He lives in your body, he is your body.” As Wittgenstein says in section 4 of Part Two of *Philosophical Investigations*: “My attitude to him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul,” and “The human body is the best picture of the human soul.”

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You And Me

You and me we both
are born tightrope walkers
balancing the act
of living precariously.

We are trained
to look upwards
towards the blue skies
and the airiness of being.
One glance downwards
could annihilate and
start the spiral to disaster.

Lift your balance stick,
use it, my love,
keep listening
to the applause around us.

We both will meet in the middle
changing places effortlessly.
Judging comes easy when
decisions are dreamlike.



When we do reach
the end of the rope on either side
in beautiful unison,
our somersaults downward
are spectacular and the clapping
is for the indomitable spirit only.

Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws

Religious Thought after Nietzsche

Notes on the Wednesday Meeting Held on 18th of December 2019

PAUL COCKBURN

David Clough talked about religious and metaphysical thought after Nietzsche. He was responding to a paper on Nietzsche presented to the group by Edward Greenwood and serialized since in *The Wednesday*. David explored the work of a number of different neo-Kantians.

David wrote: 'Edward Greenwood spoke about four atheist receptions of Nietzsche where the sociologist Simmel and Heidegger's pupil Karl Löwith were key players. This is an attempt to respond without banal assertions of faith, looking at how Max Weber and Karl Mannheim as alternative German sociologists to Simmel may help Arendt and later especially Ricoeur retain a religious dimension. In particular to test the strength of why early Arendt (1929-34) then in touch with Karl Jaspers seems to find something useful in Karl Mannheim's just published *Ideology and Utopia* and why another Jaspers pupil Paul Ricoeur turned so strongly to this same topic in the mid 1970s.

When Walter Kauffman re-started interest in post war Nietzsche studies as a philosopher other theological voices were looking at Kierkegaard and Buber. Even here though it was mainly the so-called *death of God* theologians of so called 1960's theology that led the way. Despite Greenwood being unimpressed by this interest in Kierkegaard (and Buber) I intend to talk about how it influenced Mark Rothko in the 1950s. Before that in the 1940s Rothko was influenced by Thomas a Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* around the idea of 'living a dying life'. It is relation to his move from figurative art to abstraction - 'the edgeless canvass', which way up it might hang etc. But then although that was the 1940s my so-called description of 'modern interpretations' of Kierkegaard (Kevin Vanhoozer and George Pattison) say that living a sacrificial life is more important than doctrine or belief. Maybe this is still true and not a form of modernism but it might seem to conflict at first

glance, pretty strongly with the 'getting out there', 'be yourself' mood of contemporary restorations or assertions of multiple voices etc. But Pattison and others might differ.

I didn't like Löwith's *From Hegel to Nietzsche* book but his book on *European Nihilism* refers usefully to topics raised in Greenwood's talk. Apparently Löwith thinks his account in *From Hegel to Nietzsche* completely explains German culture before World War One. Barth was the main theologian. Theology really struggled after the war but there are still traces in Heidegger and Jaspers as well as Max Weber and Karl Mannheim. However it might still be argued that this study of religion as the container of moral values is trying to be secular in tone. But Arendt seemed to prefer it to the Marxism of Lukacs or historical materialism in general.'

Nietzsche's Influence

David's talk was followed by a wide-ranging discussion. We noticed that a number of key figures were influenced by Nietzsche and responded to him, among them Karl Mannheim, Karl Löwith, Max Weber, and Karl Jaspers (1883-1960). They questioned the determinism derived from scientific thinking and maintained their belief in metaphysics and/or religion. One aspect of this was the conflicting views on utopia. Another was the study of mental illness and the growth of reductionist ideas concerning human behavior and the workings of the human mind.

Mannheim (1893-1947) in his book *Ideology and Utopia* (1929) wrote that human thought is set in a sociological context, and in analyzing society and trying to improve it we cannot attain purely objective knowledge. Utopian thought focuses exclusively on the aspects of society that contradict an imagined future social order and aims for change.



Karl Mannheim

Max Weber (1864-1920) linked Protestantism to the capitalist work ethic, and looked at the way work was organized. Job specialization was efficient but led to disenchantment as the work was boring. He was more focused on the individual as opposed to Marx and Durkheim who focused on society. He thought sociology needed to take account of what individuals actually found to be meaningful and purposeful. Weber also looked at how religion affected the societies of China and India as well as Europe.

Karl Jaspers (1883-1960) studied medicine and in his early career he worked in a psychiatric hospital. He took a phenomenological approach to psychiatry, he thought you had to take into account what a psychiatric patient is experiencing and feels, and also look at the biographical history of a patient, rather than just fitting an 'off-the shelf' psycho-therapeutic model to the patient. This approach was highly influential on the development of psychiatric thought and practice. He thought scientific knowledge was limited, he believed in transcendence and was interested in mysticism.

Karl Löwith (1897-1973), a Christian philosopher, contrasted the Greek cyclical view of history (no progress) with the modern progressive view, which



Karl Löwith

he thought was derived from the eschatological hope within Christianity, of fulfillment. He thought we cannot understand history through reason. There is a sharp difference between past history and the future. We can look at the past and identify factors in a rational way which caused events to happen, and this does seem to be productive and insightful. But in terms of predicting the future there always seem to be new factors involved which we do not know, it becomes too complex and so we cannot accurately predict the future.

We discussed the view that a belief in God was just a creation of the human mind and therefore did not refer to anything real, as expressed in Nietzsche's book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The view that a belief in God is not irrational, and that there is a deep mystery here, was also expressed. Nietzsche was insightful in terms of his views on 'dead' dogma and the state of the church in his time. However, he always expressed admiration for the actual person of Christ.

In terms of mystery we discussed the spiritual significance of the huge paintings by Rothko, often displayed in what seems to be a religious setting. A chapel was built for his last works. Many people find that his abstract art can bring them to the threshold of the divine.

Tampering

Out of the quarrel with others we make rhetoric; out of the
quarrel with ourselves we make poetry.

W.B. Yeats

Poetry might be defined as the clear expression of mixed feelings.

W.H. Auden

For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its making where executives
Would never want to tamper . . .

W.H. Auden, 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats'

You said to me that day,
'There's nothing you can do',
and spoke of Auden's line:
'Poetry makes nothing happen'.

Duane Niatum, 'Consulting an Elder Poet on an Anti-War Poem'



CHRIS NORRIS

Yeats got it right but not for times like these.
From quarrelling with others we shall make
Mere rhetoric, he said, while poetry's
What comes of quarrels struck up for the sake
Of psyche's anguished pleas and counter-pleas,
Its inner strife when self or souls at stake
And conscience spurns the wish to self-appease,
Unlike the rhetorician whose big break
Comes of the perfect certainty that he's
Entirely in the right (make no mistake!)
And, granted that, self-authorised to seize
The moral high ground while the lowlands quake.



Yeats

So runs the Yeatsian dictum which applies
To his work well enough since you can place
His poems on a scale that finds its highs
Where warring passions vie for psychic space,
As with his Crazy Jane when she defies
The Bishop, while its lows, in every case,
Come when some single passion clouds his eyes,
Demands he brand all others vile or base,
And gives us, lest we fail to recognize
What's good for us, a piece of in-your-face
Or rabble-rousing rhetoric in the guise
Of sentiments all readers should embrace.

Yet times there are when poets choose to stage
A private psychomachia only through
Their over-willingness to disengage
From other urgencies, a will to do
Their own soul-searching thing instead of wage
Verse-warfare of the kind the 30s crew,
Auden & Co, perceived as what the age
Required of them – after the Spanish coup
Presaged bad times ahead – and turned the page,
Pro tem at least, on all that cloud-cuckoo,
Heartfelt or morbid stuff that failed to gauge
In time just what the world was coming to.



Auden

Poetry

Like it or not, that time's come round once more,
A time – Yeats saw it clearly – when 'the best
Lack all conviction' while the dogs of war,
The frauds and demagogues have repossessed
Their old terrain, dog-whistled up their core
Supporters, and made this the acid test
For poets: either keep right on with your
Verse-music meant to soothe the savage breast,
Your lyric complaints and true confessions, or
Take Brecht to heart, kick Rilke out, and rest
Assured we'll think it nothing to deplore,
That pile of juvenilia now suppressed.

Don't take it hard – just hang on till the tale
Reveals another twist as tyrants fall,
Peace reigns on Earth, the powers of good prevail,
And poets grow attentive to the call
Of lyric feelings, words that cannot fail
To move hearts wearied after the long haul
From purgatory. Still it's a trick of scale,
This sanguine view of things, and misses all
The evidence of how 'the serpent's trail
Lies over everything', how some new brawl
Of knaves or nations may yet snatch the grail
And lyric's muse grow mute beneath the pall.

A lesson here: no genre's quite as pure
As tidy-minded critics like to think,
Along with tyrants anxious to ensure
That verse and politics stay out of sync
And lyricists unwilling to endure
The harsher accents or the rancid stink
Of Juvenalian satire. Why abjure
The poet's civic role, the ancient link
Of lyric's power to move with satire's cure
For just those fond illusions that hoodwink
The purist, or exert their strongest lure
On gentle souls poised at destruction's brink.



Niatum



Brecht



Rilke

For times there are when Yeats's sound advice –
 Take issue with yourself alone, don't pick
 Your fights with other people – might entice
 Some tender-hearts to think of rhetoric
 As lyric's sworn antagonist, the price
 For headline 'relevance' achieved the quick
 And dirty way; a snake in paradise
 That uses every language-huckster's trick
 To have sheer heft of utterance suffice
 For truth. Then he who waves the biggest stick
 Will pre-ensure his readers not think twice
 About what ballot-slip his words might tick.

They're wrong, those lyric purists, not to see
 How rhetoric's integrally a part
 Of every poem, even those where we
 Respect the genre-rules of lyric art,
 Then blank our knowledge of them and agree
 To read as if addressed straight from the heart
 Without their aid. Yet what's our guarantee
 That it's from there all genuine poems start,
 And not from the unnoticed ministry
 Of rhetoric whose workings can outsmart
 The smartest rhetorician since the key,
 Each time, may be a trope that flips the chart.

The Wednesday

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Website:

www.thewednesdayoxford.com

Published by:

The Wednesday Press, Oxford

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Up In Smoke



Across the black-screach sky a rocket-sear spills stars,
bangs into darkness and everyone cheers
as if someone hated had just died.

Brightness doomed to fizzle out - you know it -
that is why you are here, predetermination
always makes good entertainment.

The pyre is lit, hands joined in a circle,
faces alight as if flames dole out joy.

The guy is consumed in wreathes of blue smoke.
Pity nobody hears those long-ago screams,
or wonders why fuses are still lit.

David Burridge