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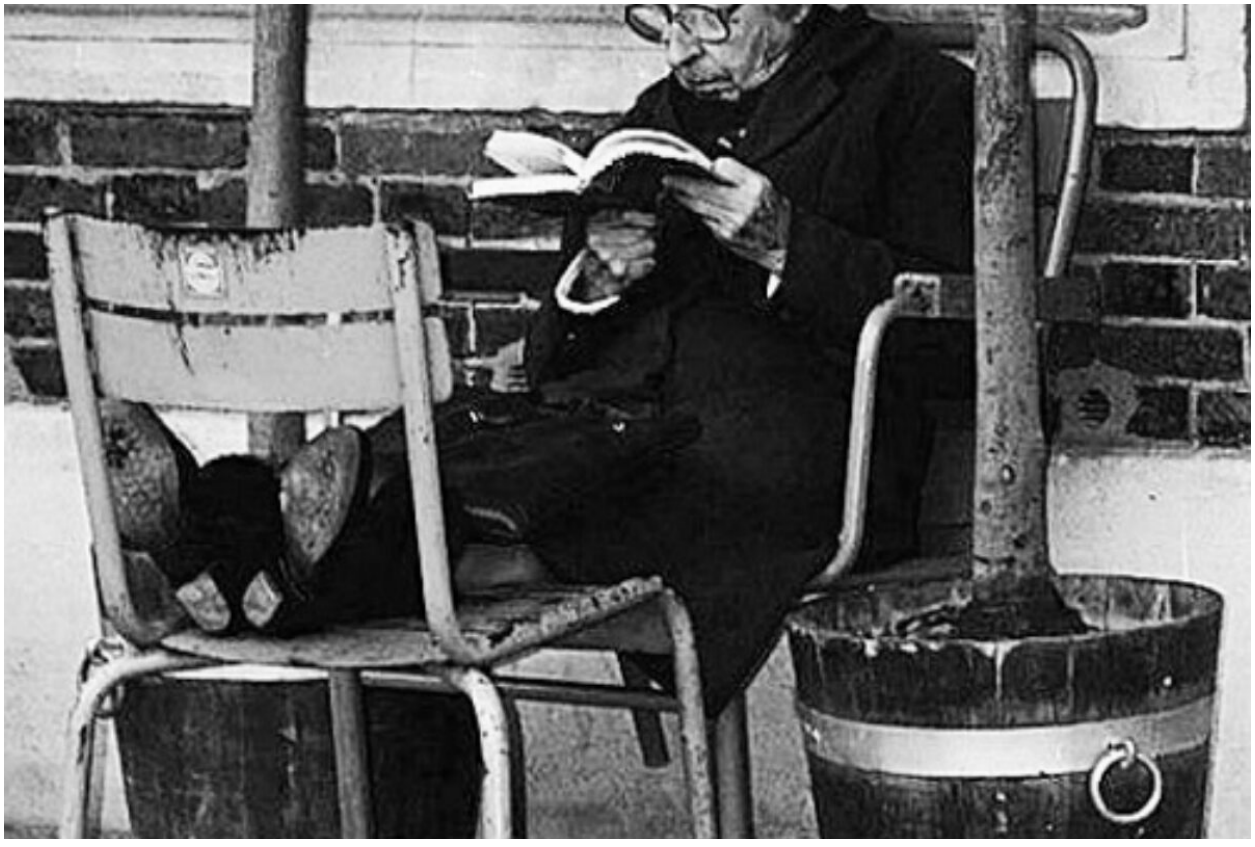

LANGUAGE

Imagining the Real: Poetry, Story, Myth

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LANGUAGE

Imagining the Real: Poetry, Story, Myth

Poiesis delights and entertains us. A novel, a play, a myth retold, even a song: true art is never mere entertainment. In wonder, the poet receives the world for what it is: a *theophany*—and then, with wit and imagination, "fashions a world in the word," inviting the reader to see with new eyes. Thus, literature becomes an education in humanity; myth a call to conversion; theatre the embodied expression of a people's voice; and poetry an invitation to see past the mundane. And it is not only *what* we say that evokes the greatest wonder; the fact of language itself is the mystery, the very condition of our receiving the world.

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Humanum
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FEATURE ARTICLE

Speaking in Tongues: Homage to George Steiner

ROBERT ASCH

> "I will take my place in that vortex of darkness and light that we call the Word."
>
> ~Léon Bloy, *Le Pèlerin de l'Absolu* (October 24, 1912)

I parted company with George Steiner some twenty-five years ago, about the time of my reception into the Catholic Church. I had been an avid reader of his books, finding him an incomparably erudite analyst of the development of modern literary sensibilities—particularly in Britain, America, France, Germany, Central Europe, and Russia—with a unique insight into the other arts and expertise in the many disciplines which shed light on the tangled underpinnings of cultural expression. But at that stage I felt he had little more to say to me. We had different tastes, sometimes to an extent that strained my sympathies. And he was becoming an uncongenial companion. There was something disgruntled, a certain spleen, in his obtrusively Jewish persona that left me—an ardent though not uncritical admirer of the Christian achievement—ill at ease, claustrophobic in his presence.

But Steiner's was too intelligent and civilized a mind to neglect indefinitely. I had made my own way and settled my besetting questions. The regret I felt on learning of his death in Cambridge on February 3, 2020 seemed an apposite occasion to revisit a man I regarded as an early mentor, particularly in this time of an emergent hostility to hierarchies of value, to the Jews, and to free speech. There is in his work considerable emphasis on why the arts demand our most serious attention—something my earlier self had never needed to be persuaded of. Now I find Steiner's voice speaking with an urgency which had not previously touched me.

A controversial figure from the outset, Steiner was ultimately perhaps the most influential humanist of his generation. He was fascinated by the phenomenon of Modernity, which was and is a crisis of human society: highly sophisticated, self-conscious and complex, but tending towards disintegration. He studied how the social and linguistic shed light upon each other in this context. A pioneer of the metaphysics of language, he took the classics of the literary and philosophical traditions as maps of the human spirit. His was a criticism open to transcendence, with language as the privileged locus: for language allows for the transmission

of the greatest intimacy, complexity and concentration of identity, and is uniquely open to the divine. Ultimately, Steiner argued that for meaning in language, as in life, to be possible, God (the Logos) must be a possibility. For Steiner there were many forms of Language: the languages we speak, our social languages—and then there are the Arts, in which he found the highest flow and intensity of meaning between human beings, and above all, the evidence of a unifying transcendence and of God. He was convinced that the study of these many *logoi* could each contribute to our very limited and imperfect perception of the Logos.

For the French philosopher Pierre Boutang, Steiner was above all "someone who knows, and teaches us, how to read a text….now, knowing how to read is a formidable claim."[1] In Steiner's words,

> [T]he critic steps back from the object of perception in order to "get closer to it"…. He establishes and argues distance in order to penetrate. He widens or narrows the aperture of vision so as to obtain a lucid grasp. This motion—we step back to come nearer, we narrow our eyes to see more fully—entails judgement. Why should this be? *Because action* (the critic's motion) *is not, cannot be indifferent*…. The point I am putting forward is not the suspect commonplace whereby there are supposed to be no value-free, no rigorously neutral perceptions…. The critic is an activist of apprehension. (69) [2]

He brought formidable equipment to the task. Alarmingly articulate, perfectly fluent in French, English, and German, he was also conversant with physics, mathematics, and philosophy. I can think of no modern literary critic—in English, at least—whose native acumen was supplemented with such a breadth of knowledge. Predictably, he was occasionally accused of dilettantism by professional scientists, linguists, and philosophers; and he patiently acknowledged his limitations as an inevitable corollary of the meta-critical project he rightly saw as necessary. Again, as a man preoccupied with the crises and complexities of modern culture, he was apt to make pronouncements which will not survive the judgement of posterity. As Oscar Wilde memorably remarked: "Nothing is *so* dangerous as being *too* modern. *One is apt* to grow *old-fashioned quite* suddenly." There is nothing unusual in this; the same can be said of Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot.

It is sometimes hard to determine whether the writers Steiner sees as exemplars of Modernism (Joyce, Eliot, Faulkner, Pound, Beckett) are held up primarily as great writers or great modernists. The preferred language of modernity is difficult, intertextual, self-conscious and self-referential: even hermetic. Such idioms or jargons, which enjoyed the unstinting support of the arbiters of 20th century taste (which is perhaps the main reason Waugh's early novels tended to be more highly regarded than *Brideshead* or *Sword of Honour*)—while distinctive—are no guarantee of genius or endurance (Austen, Pope, Tennyson, and Virgil spring to mind). Yet even here it is evident that it was the character of language which was his primary concern: "The undoubted genius of Beckett, the talents of Pinter, still strike me as essentially formal. In their plays, we find an internalized epilogue to an eroded tragic vision. The brilliance and the grief lie in the language (10)."

Steiner's analysis of language is perhaps his most immediately arresting characteristic; it is highly sophisticated but never superficial, hunting out every subterranean passage, quick to apprehend any significant detail. There is a remarkable passage of Steiner's on O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, which bears out Hofmannsthal's maxim "Depth must be hidden. Where? On the surface."[3]

> Language seeks vengeance on those who cripple it.... [Swinburne's] lines are flamboyant, romantic verbiage. They are meant to show up the adolescent inadequacies of those who recite them. But, in fact, when the play is performed, the contrary occurs. The energy and glitter of Swinburne's language burn a hole in the surrounding fabric. They elevate the action above its paltry level and instead of showing up the character, show up the playwright. Modern authors rarely quote their betters with impunity. (301)

This is revelatory, Steiner's own language reflecting something objectively real, something frighteningly and incomprehensibly alive and free-fighting its way out of the superimposed text.

Steiner traced the emergence of the Modern literary sensibility in part, at least, to the theory of the proximity of Homer and the Psalmists to the birth of language that gained currency among the German Romantics:

> [T]he *model of a lost poiesis* ... spurs on the intuition, widespread after the 1860s, that there can be no progress in letters, no embodiment of private and exploratory vision, if language itself is not made new. This making new can take three forms: it can be a process of dislocation, an amalgam of existing languages, or a search for self-consistent neologism. These three devices do no normally occur in isolation. What we find from the 1870s to the 1930s are numerous variants on the three modes, usually drawing on some element from each. (388)

Steiner implicitly identifies this development with the period increasingly referred to as English Literature in Transition (generally situated ca. 1880–1920; a typical figure would be Henry James). Fascinatingly, he draws Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear into the discussion—men rarely associated with nascent Modernism, yet curiously very Victorian figures who remained popular with Modernists in an anti-Victorian age: "The art of Edward Lear and of Lewis Carroll... is probably cognate with the new self-consciousness about language and the logical investigations of semantic conventions which develop in the late nineteenth century (388)."

He takes this investigation of the half-private language of nonsense poetry further, into anthropological, sexual territory:

> It is likely that human sexuality and speech developed in close-knit reciprocity. Together they generate the history of self-consciousness, the process...whereby we have hammered out the notion of self and otherness. Hence the argument of modern anthropology that the incest taboo, which appears to be primal to the organization of communal life, is inseparable from linguistic evolution. We can only prohibit that which we can name.... The seminal and the semantic functions (is there, ultimately, an etymological link?) determine the genetic and social structure of human experience. Together they construe the grammar of being.... In what measure are sexual perversions analogues of incorrect speech? Are there affinities between pathological erotic compulsions and the search, obsessive in certain poets and logicians, for a "private language"...? (376)

He follows this up with an exploration of the submerged discontinuities between the language

of men and women:

> Men and women communicate through never-ending modulation. Like breathing, the technique is unconscious….Under stress of hatred, of boredom, of sudden panic, great gaps open. It is as if a man and a woman then heard each other for the first time and knew, with sickening conviction, that they share no common language. (381)

This dovetails into a detailed exposition of the art of masters outside the purlieus of most anglophone literary critics; first Racine:

> In every one of his major plays there is a crisis of translation: under extreme stress, men and women declare their absolute being to each other, only to discover that their respective experience of eros and language has set them desperately apart…. I do not believe there is a more complete drama in literature, a work more exhaustive of the possibilities of human conflict, than Racine's *Bérénice*. It is a play about the fatality of the coexistence of man and woman and it is dominated, necessarily, by speech terms (*parole*, *dire*, *mot*, *entendre*). (381)

Then Mozart and Stendhal:

> Mozart possessed something of this same rare duality…. Elvira, Donna Anna, and Zerlina have an intensely shared femininity, but the music exactly defines their individual range or pitch of being. The same delicacy of tone-discrimination is established between the Countess and Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*…. Stendhal was a careful student of Mozart's operas. That study is borne out in the depth and fairness of his treatment of the speech worlds of men and women in Fabrice and la Sanseverina in *The Charterhouse of Parma*. (381–82)

The expert musical reference is characteristic of an Austrian, and raises the question of his cultural identity. It is clear that Steiner saw himself above all as a Jew, but specifically as a Central European Jew. Born in France and completing his education in his adopted country, the USA, his parents and his sensibility were both Viennese. He was a survivor of the double shipwreck of European Jewry and the Habsburg Empire: "I come from the singularly productive world of emancipated Central European Judaism. In its sciences, schools of psychology, in its sociologies and climate of nervous sensibility… the twentieth century in the West, has, in the main, been heir to this world (13)."

Central Europe was a multicultural yet unified reality, a kind icon of the Western tradition; the Jews played a crucial role in this culture, and were uniquely gifted to do so. Christopher Dawson observed that

> the most distinctive feature of all the great ages of Jewish cultures was their multilingual character. There have been many bilingual cultures in history—in fact, most of the great world cultures have been bilingual. But these Jewish cultures of which I speak were trilingual, which is unusual and possibly unique.[4]

These three languages were the sacred Hebrew, the language of intimate communication (Aramaic, then Ladino or Yiddish), and the language of the surrounding Gentiles.

> Now the result of this threefold linguistic relation was to make the Jew a natural interpreter—a "Methurgeman" or dragoman[5] between the two alien cultures with which he was in contact. The intensive philological study that has always been emphasized in Jewish education—especially in the Spanish period—laid the foundation for this development, so that in an age or ages when a large proportion of the population was illiterate, the Jews held a unique position as the one people, skilled not only in many languages but in different scripts, and also in different literary and philosophic traditions.[6]

But Steiner was more than an inspired dragoman to the new hegemonies on either side of the Atlantic. The Shoah had simultaneously destroyed the communities in which he located his deepest self and raised vertiginous questions about the presence of evil in the ties that bind art and community. The Jews, whom he described as "the conscience of man" (277) had been betrayed by "the guardians of…language…the keepers of its conscience" (213). It was a dilemma he felt particularly keenly in music:

> Music, the mystery of music, what Nietzsche called so rightly the *Mysterium Tremendum*, the *Mysterium Tremendum* of the last act of *Tristan*…. it can be an etude of Chopin, it can be a phrase almost in Mozart—speaks to us that there is something else, which paradoxically belongs to us profoundly but somehow touches on a universal meaning and possibility: that we are not only an electro-chemical and neuro-physiological assemblage; that there is more in consciousness than electronic wiring. Music seems to me more than literature —the great force, the hope, of a transcendent possibility.[7]

For a Jew like Steiner, the transcendent—if it exists—is both a mystical and a moral reality. And yet in Nazi Germany, musicians of genius such as Furtwängler had left incomparable performances of Beethoven. Steiner speaks of "a slow movement from a Bruckner symphony to mark the death of the Führer. We have a recording—and it too is fantastic; it's one of the very great recordings….For many, many years I was trying to understand why music does not say No! at certain occasions….Which is a nonsense question. But is it a nonsense question? I still don't know the answer."[8]

Yet the void is never really an option: the numinous ground behind the appearances must exist if the Shoah is to retain more than factitious significance, if the intuitions of Kafka and Paul Celan's halting witness of its psychic devastation were a point of reference to something rather than nothing. Steiner's personal experience made this an impossibility for him—not just temperamentally, but as a matter of utter conviction. Near the end of Kafka's "Before the Law" we find a remarkable, ambiguous passage on the dying moments of a character who has spent his entire life vainly seeking to pass through the gates of the Law: "At length his eyesight begins to fail, and he does not know whether the world is really darker or whether his eyes are only deceiving him. Yet in his darkness he is now aware of a radiance that streams inextinguishably from the gateway of the Law." Might this illustrate Steiner's intimations of the Logos—a Real Presence—streaming from the all-but-inscrutable but inescapable reality of scriptures sacred and profane, those gateways to the transcendent?

For Steiner there is an unbearable enigma in our culture, right at the crossroads of meaning and absurdity, that we must somehow endure. Man is faced with the ultimate questions:

questions which are at once unanswerable and imperative. No man's answer can ever be sufficient, but, like Oedipus, answer he must.

Robert Asch is a cofounder of the Saint Austin Review. His books include The Romantic Poets (Ignatius) and Lionel Johnson: Poetry and Prose (St. Austin Press, forthcoming). He lives in Preston, England, with his wife and children.

[1] Pierre Boutang, George Steiner, "Dialogue on Antigone and Abraham," *Oceaniques*, ina.fr, 1987.

[2] All quotations, unless otherwise identified, are from *George Steiner: A Reader* (Oxford, 1984).

[3] *The Book of Friends* in *The Selected Prose of Hugo von Hofmannsthal* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 362.

[4] "On Jewish History."

[5] An interpreter between Arabic, Persian, Turkish and European languages and cultures. The word has Semitic roots and is etymologically related to "targum."

[6] "On Jewish History."

[7] "What's Next for Music? Superman meets Beethoven," Nexus Conference, June 11, 2010.

[8] Ibid.

Keep Reading! Click here to read our next article, *Writing in Riddles: The Subversive Role of Language under Tudor Repression.*

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FEATURE ARTICLE

Writing in Riddles: The Subversive Role of Language under Tudor Repression

CLARE ASQUITH

In 1933, the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam wrote a short epigram satirizing Josef Stalin. It was later described as a sixteen-line death sentence. Like all Mandelstam's poetry, it was oblique, but on this occasion not oblique enough: the brutal leader in the poem comes from the Caucasus, he sits in the Kremlin: his moustache wriggles "like a pair of cockroaches." Mandelstam was arrested, interrogated, and five years later died in a concentration camp. "Only in Russia is poetry respected: it gets people killed," he wrote. "Is there anywhere else where poetry is so common a motive for murder?"

Tyrants and despotic regimes dread the subversive threat of art forms that the liberal west associates with entertainment: drama, painting, music, poetry. And yet censorship is often counter-productive. Allusive and deniable, the arts flourish under repressive governments. It's even arguable that they have a more profound emotional impact wherever freedom of speech is banned. Artistic expression is rarely as risky and therapeutic as it is in countries where armed police patrol the streets; where theatres and concert halls are regularly raided. We now know that much of Shostakovich's outwardly conformist music contained a veiled critique of the communist regime. The great Somali poet, Hadrawi, spent five years in jail in the 1970s for a poem that covertly challenged his country's military regime. Hundreds of years ago in England, William Collingbourne, an opponent of Richard III, was hanged drawn and quartered for "making a small rhyme" criticizing Richard and his aides.

A recent and intriguing school of scholarship proposes that in England a golden age of this kind of oblique political writing occurred during the period of Tudor repression, lasting from the 1530s to the 1590s. Shadowy political themes have been detected in those many flowery Tudor poems, plays and novels that are almost unreadable now. The same thing appears to be going on in certain neglected works of Shakespeare, in particular his longer poems. Were these people, like Mandelstam, writing during a period when a wrong step was a motive for murder? Is that why their work—dense and knotted, perhaps, with lost political reference—has not stood the test of time?

The idea that the English started writing in riddles as soon as Henry VIII began imposing radical religious and social changes on his country makes their work potentially a great deal

more interesting. The “complaint” tradition, for instance, appears to be a tedious poetic game in which all Shakespeare’s leading contemporaries and predecessors seemed compelled to take part. Their huge popularity in their own time is puzzling.

There are wordy, complicated monologues by the ghosts of fallen women which seem, at first glance, to have little literary merit. That is, until we notice the significance of a curious common factor, not evident in their titles. All of these poetic subjects are the victims of royal rape. They are women who, when young, have sacred, church-like attributes, and who lose their virtue, beauty and status at the hands of a rapacious king. The poetic treatment of this assaulted figure varies depending on the views of the writer. Michael Drayton’s saintly Matilda manages to resist King John’s assault, but is forced to commit suicide. Thomas Churchyard’s royal mistress is pathetically degraded and humiliated. Daniel’s Rosalind laments that her gravestone with its request for prayers is destroyed, like so many in the tide of iconoclasm that swept through the country in the wake of the English Reformation. Instead she begs the reader to pray for her. It gradually becomes clear that these writers are engaged in a long-running, passionate debate on potentially treasonable topics. They include the validity of Henry VIII’s Act of Supremacy, the violent means by which the Reformation was achieved, the acquiescence of the clergy in the takeover.

Towards the end of the period, Shakespeare himself joins in the game. His contributions to the debate were his two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*.

Critics have often wondered why these works made his name. The first admiring references to him are to Shakespeare the poet, not the playwright. In the 1590s they were far more widely published, quoted and anthologized than his plays. Yet to us they appear to be nothing more than over-long, artificial classical exercises. In the lighter and wittier of the two, *Venus and Adonis*, a protesting youth is swept from his horse and pinned to the ground by a sexually rapacious Venus. She fails to arouse him but, indirectly, causes his death. Having finally escaped too late to retrieve his horse, he is killed by a monstrous boar.

The second poem, *Lucrece*, is longer and more ponderous, and was admiringly compared by one contemporary to *Hamlet*. It is difficult to see why. In remorseless slow-motion, and with many asides, it follows the story of the rape and suicide of the virtuous Lucrece by Tarquin, Rome’s tyrannical prince.

Poetry like this appears to have no political relevance if it is set in the context of the traditional perception of the reign of Elizabeth I, the enlightened queen who wisely steered a middle way between the religious extremes that were convulsing the rest of Europe. The stream of protests by victims of royal enforcement have always been read as mere variations on the ever popular theme of greatness brought low. It is becoming increasingly clear however, that they have another, more pressing, political dimension.

We now know that the second half of the 16th century was not an age of contented consensus in England. To the reformers and Puritans, secular supremacy was as repugnant as the old papal supremacy. To Catholics, the wealth of the Church had been blasphemously hijacked by profiteers, and a new heresy had been forced on a contentedly traditional country at the point of a sword. To the aristocracy, the social order had been scandalously overturned: upstart Protestants, enriched by the destruction of the monasteries, were usurping the governing role of the largely Catholic nobility. As a tide of increasingly desperate resentment gathered force under the charismatic leadership of the young Earl of Essex in the early 1590s, literature and drama became a vital channel for the voice of the opposition. It was at exactly this point, the mid-1590s, that Shakespeare published his poems. He dedicated them to the Earl of

Southampton, Essex's lieutenant. Both were to lead a rebellion against Elizabeth's regime shortly before her death.

Building on the earlier "complaints," but deploying far greater wit and precision than his poetic predecessors, Shakespeare's two long poems dramatize all the grievances of the many in England who longed for regime change. Repeatedly, Adonis' predicament at the hands of a predatory queen is aligned with the predicament of young Catholic noblemen like Southampton, by turns wooed and coerced into religious conformity by the queen and her council. The outsize boar that kills him is presented in terms of the enforcers who terrorized anyone—Catholics in particular—who resisted the royal supremacy. A year later, in *The Rape of Lucrece*, Shakespeare widens his historical lens. He adds digressions to a familiar Roman tale to provide cover for his account of every stage of what was then called the "great alteration." He starts with the first stages of Henry VIII's break with Rome and his takeover of a cowed and bullied church, continues through the long period of destruction and plunder, bewilderment and remorse, and ends at the point the poem was published, the year 1594, when a leader steps forward to inspire a broken, divided country to remove a tyrannical regime.

So effective was the historical winners' rewriting of Tudor history that, until recently, it was assumed that Essex was an ambitious loner; and that, apart from a few disgruntled minorities, there was no opposition to speak of. But a quick look at the manuscripts circulating unofficially at the time gives a taste of how violently many subjects objected to the new order. John Donne's satires, unpublished for the next half-century, highlight the brutality of the enforcement, and the impossibility of retaining spiritual integrity under Elizabeth's rule. Robert Southwell's "Humble Supplication," perhaps the finest piece of Elizabethan prose, gives a graphic front-line picture of the sufferings and the despair of ordinary English Catholics. The courtier John Harington, on the surface a conformist, circulated a series of bitter epigrams on the corruption of the new church.

Hints survive that centuries ago, many were aware that officially sanctioned Elizabethan literature was not all it seemed. "The juggling feat of two-edged words," Thomas Carew called it in 1631, "the subtle feat of sly exchanges." He was writing at a later period when the religious question appeared to be settled, and he associates the bad old days of poetic double-speak with the subversive Catholic threat. He hopes that "those old idols"—the phony classical tales, the reference-heavy pastorals—will not be "adored again with new apostasy." Carey's contemporary, the poet George Herbert, felt the same way. There was no need for coded language now. Others can "riddle" if they like, he says, but he would rather speak directly. "Must all be veiled, while he that reads, divines / Catching the sense at two removes?"

As Mandelstam knew, however, riddling is a valve for the release of tension, for the forbidden expression of dissent. Ted Hughes described the "new Puritan spirit and the old Catholic spirit… deadlocked out of sight, forcibly disarmed and forbidden any physical, direct expression whatsoever, inside Elizabeth's crucible." But in the hands of a few bold writers, indirect expression flourished: the country would have done well to attend to what they said. Shortly after Carew and Herbert wrote so comfortably about the new consensus, England erupted into a long and exceptionally bloody civil war, fueled by the bitter religious issues publicly but artfully aired by the Elizabethans. It is worth re-reading Shakespeare in this new light—as an incisive, if covert, political commentator, and master of that half-forgotten Elizabethan art-form, "the juggling feat of two-edged words."

Clare Asquith worked in publishing, writing and teaching before traveling Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 90s with her husband, Viscount Asquith, a diplomat serving in Moscow and Kiev. The experience led her to publish Shadowplay *and* *Shakespeare and the Resistance*. *Her work sets Shakespeare and his contemporaries in the context of a political oppression largely ignored by Western literary critics yet, Asquith argues, crucial to a full understanding of 16th century literature.*

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FEATURE ARTICLE

Why We Should Read Hard Books

CARLA GALDO

Words, be they written or spoken, texted or tweeted, are under intense scrutiny these days. Publicly spoken or written words are met with criticism, anger, and even a rush to censor and punish the person who said them. We bristle, we shake our heads, and perhaps we even protest such unfortunate myopia, especially when we agree with the censored speech. Why, then, in certain Catholic and Christian circles, is the propriety of reading words that come at us from the other direction, from voices that challenge us or clash outright with our sense of morality, truth, and virtue, such an enduring problem? Can it be worthwhile, particularly in the case of literature, to read about a depraved character, or to consider the ideas of an author whose life was less than exemplary? Or must we, on our pilgrim journey towards holiness, simply avoid such literary topics as scandalous stumbling blocks? If our instinctive response to the "cancel culture" is disapproval, and if we think that people who steadily challenge the reigning, secular socio-cultural mentality should be allowed to write and speak, so should we as Catholics or Christians be willing to encounter words that challenge us and press up against our norms. We cannot, in good conscience, enact our own version of "Christian cancel-culture" and remain consistent. Let us, then, consider the propriety and even the necessity of the thoughtful reading of literature that stretches us beyond our comfort zone. Such literature may include objectionable elements and may be written by authors whose worldview, behavior, or experiences may diverge from what is virtuous and moral. Arguably, however, careful readers must encounter such content or risk living in prideful isolation, without the sympathetic understanding of diverse human experiences that facilitates and enables true charity.

Pope St. John Paul II, in his *Letter to Artists,* pointed out some of the key dynamics at work in art or literature that focuses the reader on the darker side of things:

> Even beyond its typically religious expressions, true art has a close affinity with the world of faith, so that, even in situations where culture and the Church are far apart, art remains a kind of bridge to religious experience… Even when they explore the darkest depths of the soul or the most unsettling aspects of evil, artists give voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption.

True art, in his estimation, can serve as a valuable, two-way bridge that enables communication between a culture and a Church that can at times seem worlds apart. But at the core of every soul are regions both resplendent and shadowed, and art has the potential to reveal these, and to draw back the veil on our oft-hidden commonalities. In particular, literary art is able to "give voice" to the cry of each human heart for redemption, whether explicitly acknowledged or not. In characters who disgust or repel us, we find a mediated way to confront and understand the struggles of others. This has the potential to set us on a journey to deeper empathy with others—perhaps before we stumble upon such struggles in the fleeting encounters of day-to-day life. Literature gives us more space for contemplation, and more time to consider how we ought to respond with the mercy of Christ in particularly difficult situations. This provides a sort of literary, along-the-way education in humanity, which is not the sole purpose of reading literature, but certainly a key benefit. It is crucial, for the purposes of both charity and evangelization, for us all to be educated deeply in what it is to be human. "The educational method with the greatest capacity for good is not the one that flees from reality in order to affirm what is good separately, but rather the one that lives by advocating for the triumph of good in the world," asserts Servant of God Father Luigi Giussani. Sometimes, in literature, this may mean witnessing the terrible reality of a life lived without Christ—not to glorify sin, but to illuminate our deepest need for salvation. This side of heaven, there will always be a rift between the world and the Christian ideal. Literature reveals the paradoxical tension of the world to us: we live in a world that is both a "vale of tears" and a wellspring of God's graces, which are conveyed, at times, through the most surprising situations and people. We strive, love, and suffer in this world, yet always long for heaven: while "in" the world, but not "of" it, we must, like the saints, enter into its battered beauty, knowing that God's good will triumph even in the midst of all this, and not in some imaginary land-without-sin that is not our own.

Another important element to notice in St. John Paul II's *Letter to Artists* is that he defends the centrality of not just *any* art, but *true* art. There are mountains of books that are not true art: some books serve only as distractions to pass the time, their details forgotten once the plot has spun to its conclusion; other books only titillate prurient interests or glamorize the basest elements of evil; yet others may use a thinly veiled story as propaganda or to moralize. None of these are true art. This, of course, begs the question of how a legitimately curious reader, cautiously opening the door to challenging books, can know how to discern the difference between literature that is worthwhile—that is "true art" as John Paul II characterizes it—and that which is not. In today's context it can be difficult to know where to begin. Just as a constant diet of chicken nuggets desensitizes the tongue to the nuances of fresh and more complex foods, a constant mental diet of social media, blogs, and viral sound bites desensitizes the brain to the intricacies of more sophisticated literary art. This can lead to the tendency to err too much on the side of caution, avoiding any literature that presents fraught topics or seems dauntingly complex.

Three questions may help readers discern which literature is worthy of their time and effort. First, is the book recommended by tradition? Is it a "classic" in the broadest sense possible? Have great literary thinkers throughout history acknowledged the worth and the artistry of this book? This can be a difficult question when books which have traditionally been considered valuable and worth reading are being dismissed and replaced with other, often more contemporary books of questionable quality. G.K. Chesterton, in his book *Orthodoxy*, explains the problematic error of this trend, particularly when it is enacted as a way of "democratizing" the literary canon:

> Tradition means giving a vote to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors.

> It is the democracy of the dead…Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father. (Chapter 4)

At the same time, it is important to keep the door open to contemporary books that may not yet have had the chance to face the test of history. A second key question to ask, then, when faced with a more modern book is: Does this book illuminate the human in some important way? Does it echo the central questions that enduring classics have asked for millennia: What is it to be human? What are a human person's most fundamental needs? How do we live in a fallen world? How do we cope with death? What gives life meaning?

Finally, whether historic or contemporary, a reader must ask a third question: does this book's style and craft reach levels that might be characterized as excellent or skillful? In Catholic or Christian circles there is often the tendency to excuse lackluster art as "passable" literature on the basis of its virtuous or religious themes. Flannery O'Connor, one of the consummate American Catholic writers of 20th century, frequently took issue with this and quipped: "The Catholic novelist doesn't have to be a saint; he doesn't even have to be a Catholic; he does, unfortunately, have to be a novelist." She pointed out repeatedly in her writings and her speeches that the artistic quality of a book—its integrity as art *per se* and its literary value—must be separated from the author's faith and virtue (or lack thereof). Here she describes excellence in craft for a Catholic author approaching a sacramental topic:

> When I write a novel in which the central action is a baptism, I am very well aware that for the majority of my readers baptism is a meaningless rite, and so in my novel I have to see that this baptism carries enough awe and mystery to jar the reader into some kind of emotional recognition of its significance. To this end I have to bend the whole novel—its language, its structure, its action. I have to make the reader feel, in his bones, if nowhere else, that something is going on there that counts.

The fictional novel (or short-story, or drama) is a unique creation, distinct from catechesis and apologetics, and as such we evaluate it on different grounds. O'Connor explains: "For the fiction writer himself the whole story is the meaning, because it is an experience, not an abstraction." There is, to be sure, a time and place for direct value statements; fictional literature, she points out, is not that place. In fiction—in a consummately Catholic way—meaning becomes incarnate via the complex tapestry of character, plot, theme, language, and setting. Books that accomplish this feat, even if the characters or author are less than saintly, reach the level of meaningful literary art, and are worth a thoughtful read.

Having established that a book is worthwhile, the question then becomes *how* to read—must we, to remain "safe" from any corrupting influence the book or author may hold, stand above the book as a critical judge? Not necessarily. C.S. Lewis emphasizes humility as a key element of good reading:

> The first demand a work of art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way. (There is no good asking first whether the work before you deserves such a surrender, for until you have surrendered you cannot possibly find out.)

We all inevitably come to a work with perspectives shaped by our circumstances; humility while reading doesn't mean erasing these. It may, however, mean loosening our grip on certain preconceptions we cling to a bit too tightly, or setting aside the judge-and-jury part of ourselves that stands always ready to convict a work that suggests opinions contrary to our own. To accept the work as it is, we may even be challenged to visit or inhabit realms which are less comfortable for us. At the same time, the surrender suggested by Lewis comes with a commonsense caveat: if, due to a particular vulnerability, a reader can tell that a certain work of literature might be spiritually harmful due to some still-smarting trauma, with proper self-knowledge and discernment, a reader can elect to set aside that particular book. Perhaps the book may prove worthwhile for the individual with the passage of time. And yet, it bears repeating that the need to avoid a particular work for a season or for a lifetime does not, however, invalidate the importance of this literature for *others*.

Confidence is a second key element of good reading; this is important because sometimes a misguided sense of humility convinces readers that there are certain books too lofty, or too hard, for them to approach. Lack of knowledge or literary expertise need not be a barrier to reading, however. A good general education paired with a quick internet search can give enough bare-bones historical or cultural details to equip us for an initial reading of many tough literary classics. Confidence also helps turn down the persistent cultural murmur that attributes "bias" to each and every identifying characteristic about us, and helps us trust that our own life, with its God-given particularities, is a legitimate starting place from which we can appreciate, consider, and evaluate art. "Anyone who reads," muses Wallace Stegner in his novel *Crossing to Safety*, "is to some extent a citizen of the world." We all have space to grow, of course, but the humbly confident reader knows it's okay to begin the reading journey with the perspective and knowledge we are equipped with right now.

A third and final element of good reading is honesty, particularly honesty about our own woundedness. Stratford Caldecott elaborates on the value of our wounds:

> A wound, if you think about it, is an occasion when what is within us is exposed, when the life-blood is poured out and becomes accessible to others. In Christ's case, what is within him is love, the Holy Spirit. The places where human sins inflicted pain on him are the very places where, because that pain was accepted on our behalf and for our sake, Christ's love was most fully expressed.

Wounds in our own lives can come from other-inflicted trauma, or from personal shortcomings that led us astray. So often we can be tempted to paper over these wounds, because if, as Caldecott explains, wounds expose our most vital selves to others, they make us vulnerable. The parts of ourselves that wounds reveal may be less flattering—or even downright hideous—and we clamor to turn our own eyes and those of others away. In books worth reading, we meet broken, scarred characters living in the midst of the messy world where there are no simple solutions. If we are honest, such characters have the potential to reflect rays of ourselves back at us, and with the safety of a bit of paper-enforced distance, we can watch someone wrangle with their wounds. While some may spiral down into self-destruction, some may come out on top—more empathetic, wise, or brave. Even Christ's wounds weren't edited away from his glorified body; they remain, sacrificial scars that tell a tale of love. Perhaps our own wounds are similar raw material for greatness.

If we are to be a pilgrim people whose hearts encompass the whole world, we can't circle our wagons and set up camp in "safe spaces," listening only to voices that agree with our own.

Certainly, we can take the time to scan opposing media outlets now and then, but even more fruitful may be the practice of picking up a book, perhaps a classic novel of historical relevance, or a more contemporary book, recommended for its craft and literary heft by a trusted source. Many will struggle with what they find between the covers of such books. Whether it is a dense writing style, an unfamiliar time period, or even scandalous characters, there are many stumbling blocks to trip a reader between the beginning and "The End." However, honest, confident contemplation of such literature, tempered with a dash of humility, may equip us with a surprising new appreciation of humanity's common challenges and a new ability to listen, learn from, and engage with those who seem to dwell on the other side of insurmountable divides.

This article is adapted from the Well-Read Mom's "Criteria for Book Choices," crafted collaboratively by Carla Galdo and Colleen Hutt, with assistance from the ideas of Marcie Stokman, Alison Solove, and the other women of the Well-Read Mom Leadership Team.

Well-Read Mom is a national book discussion group that accompanies women in the reading of great books and spiritual classics to encourage personal growth, friendship, and meaningful conversations, in order to explore the human condition and reorient women to what is good, beautiful, and true. Find out more information about Well-Read Mom, and how to join, at www.wellreadmom.com.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

Tolkien's Debt to Fellow Inkling Owen Barfield

SIOBHÁN MALONEY LATAR

In a letter to a publisher, J. R. R. Tolkien once wrote, “I believe that legends and myths are largely made of ‘truth,’ and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode.”[1] This is a surprising and paradoxical claim to us not only because we live in an age in which “truth” and “art” are usually understood as antithetical and foreign concepts, but also because it comes from an author whose genre is *fantasy:* a literary approach that is defined precisely by its innovation, or separation from the real world as we know it. And yet Tolkien was a writer because he took seriously the relationship between language and truth, beauty, and goodness, believing that language has a privileged place in man’s relationship with the world and with its Creator (144, 194).

Tolkien was first and foremost a philologist for whom the very *sound* of words has an aesthetic delight similar to the pleasure others may derive from a fine wine or a good meal.[2] Language, for him, has first and foremost to do with displaying the full reality and glory of things and, therefore, with man’s relation to the world. Language discloses reality through our awareness and reception of it, before it is a mere instrument for communication. And this reverence for the place of *the word* in human life discloses a profound understanding of the human person and all of creation.

Tolkien, though first a Professor of English language and Anglo-Saxon literature, nevertheless approached his own creative writing with the seriousness of a sacred task entrusted to him (145, 231, 413). As early as his preparatory school years, Tolkien formed a community with three fellow students who shared a mission to preserve beauty through writing. They sought to restore “the love of real and true beauty in everybody’s breast” (66) and in this way fight the disintegration and ugliness increasingly permeating their age. They collectively determined to “testify to God and Truth,” inspired by the conviction that they “had been granted some spark of fire… that was destined to kindle a new light, or, what is the same thing, rekindle an old light in the world.”[3] For all of the weight of a vocation that he brought to his writing, it is striking to see the profound humility and reverence he exhibits toward his art, and the reason why he resorted to literature as a means of serving the truth. In his essay “On Fairy Stories,” largely an apology for the genre of fantasy and fairy stories and, therefore, of his own particular focus as a writer, Tolkien insists that fantasy is first and foremost concerned with a true portrayal of the *real*:

> Fantasy is made out of the Primary World, but a good craftsman loves his material, and has a knowledge and feeling for clay, stone and wood which only the art of making can give…. And actually fairy-stories deal largely, or (the better ones) mainly, with simple or fundamental things, untouched by Fantasy, but these simplicities are made all the more luminous by their setting. For the story-maker who allows himself to be "free with" Nature can be her lover not her slave. It was in fairy-stories that I first divined the potency of the words, and the wonder of the things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine.[4]

It is only from this starting point that Tolkien can go on to affirm man's particular task, through his language, of making visible, of radiating or drawing out through his own creative additions, the invisible splendor of things. Thus, he affirms that man's art "may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation," but only when starting from a profound reverence for the original reality that is *given*.

Some of Tolkien's most profound reflections on the nature and task of his art as a writer, as one who deals in *words*, can be found in his letters to his son during the war. In one such letter, Tolkien draws a distinction between the *technē* of literature and the technology of modern scientific inventions. Specifically, he compares the invention of an airplane to the writing of stories portraying men in flight and maintains: "There is the tragedy and despair of all machinery laid bare. Unlike art which is content to create a new secondary world in the mind, [technology] attempts to actualize desire, and so to create power in this World; and that cannot really be done with any real satisfaction. Labour-saving machinery only creates endless and worse labour" (87–88). It would be easy to dismiss such a bold assertion as many critics of Tolkien do, by claiming that he is rejecting the scientific, the empirical, and the technological *tout court*, as if any intervention upon the natural world were already a violence.[6]

It seems crucial to notice here that what Tolkien says is precisely *not* that men, by nature, cannot fly, and therefore should not try to. Rather, he calls the airplane the "tragedy and despair of all machinery laid bare because the "actualization of desire" that it attempts *cannot*, finally, be "done to any real satisfaction." Man's profound desire to fly is finally *so much greater* than anything the airplane can fulfill, that the airplane itself is, in the end, only a "tragedy and despair" in comparison with man's imaginative capacity to create *in words* a much more *satisfying* account of the experience of flight itself. On the other hand, the arrogant assumption that our desire to fly is in the end something we are capable of "fulfilling" on our own also falsifies the project from the beginning.

The airplane can only finally fulfill the merely pragmatic role of getting us more quickly from one place to another; in the process it leaves our desire for a profound experience of flight just as unsatisfied as before. Unsatisfied and also, perhaps more dangerously, *invisible*: we no longer stop to realize just how much our perennial dream of flying is actually left unfulfilled, because we are told, with the invention of the airplane, that the only legitimate element of our desire has been realized. Anything else is dismissed. Thus, not only does this mentality affirm, "what can be done must be done," but "what *cannot* be done cannot, finally, be wanted."

This example illustrates why creativity, "*technē*" in the original sense, *with words* is given pride of place by Tolkien, and why he understood his vocation to be primarily a *linguistic* one: words, for him, are the most fitting place in which all of man's deepest needs and desires as well as the integrity of creation can be affirmed and reverenced most explicitly. For Tolkien, language allows man to fulfill his creative vocation in relation to the world. Thus, creative

writing "represents love: that is, a love and respect for all things, 'inanimate' and 'animate,' an unpossessive love of them as 'other'… Things seen in its light will be respected, and they will also appear delightful, beautiful, wonderful even glorious."[7]

Tolkien's approach to language is heavily shaped and influenced by the thought of his fellow Inkling, Owen Barfield. For Barfield, language is at the heart of the relationship between man and the world because it enables us to grasp and communicate the deepest truth of things in their wholeness, and not simply their immediate appearance, or our use of them. In such a conviction, Barfield stands in a tradition of other noteworthy philosophers and theologians intent upon restoring the deeply classical and Christian conviction of the natural unity between man and the world and the role language plays in the illumination of this.[8]

In an introduction to his collection of essays entitled *The Recovery of Meaning*, Owen Barfield characterized the single preoccupation "that is always being reaffirmed" beneath all of his work as "the importance of penetrating to the antecedent unity underlying apparent or actual fragmentation."[9] Recognizing that modernity is particularly fragmented, Barfield was acutely sensitive to the common assumption that there is a radical separation between mind and reality, an assumption that renders modern philosophy "altogether inadequate to answer the moral and the social, let alone the religious, needs of the actual life of humanity."[10] Why? Because at the heart of modern philosophy is the contention that the world cannot really be known. True, man has sense experience from which he forms concepts, and he can see and touch things and manipulate them, but he doesn't know them in their essence; he never truly knows the world beyond his head. Against such a bleak and alienated picture, Barfield offers an integrated vision of man and the world. Highlighting the place and significance of language, he presents an alternate account of the relation between concepts and things, mind and world, by focusing on what he terms the "evolution of consciousness," disclosed in our use of language itself, which is able to account for the communion between man as a knower and the world which he knows.[11]

For Barfield, then, we can actually come to know the world, but to be in a true relationship with it, with reality, requires more than an aspiration to control it: "…if we want to know the meaning of nature, we must learn to read as well as to observe and describe."[12] Unless we do, Barfield insists, we are left with a situation in which man is "…measuring with greater and greater precision and manipulating more and more cleverly an earth to which he grows spiritually more and more a stranger."[13] If nature is simply viewed as a thing to be changed and perfected, we assume from the outset that it has nothing to tell us, that its very structure and limitations do not communicate a meaning to us. For Barfield, as well as for Tolkien, man's relationship with the world is, in contrast, one of reception and wonder, of received communion. From the beginning, man's engagement with the world is an active *reception*, a drawing out of the truths of things already there, truths that he finds himself in relation to. And it is precisely the very phenomenon of *language* that for Barfield captures this active, dynamic communion:

> all that which we experience otherwise than through the senses, or which (to put it succinctly) comes from within and not from without—is not to be thought of as a series of units encapsulated in a series of human organisms, but rather as the inside of the world as a whole. An inside which, like the inside of anything else, is inseparable from the outside, though the distinction between the two remains obvious enough.[14]

Barfield insists that before the moderns, the communion understood between man and the

world also ensured a communion between *word* and *thing*, between *language* and *reality*: "…the philosophers, from Plotinus to Aquinas, were wont to treat at the same time of words and things under the inclusive topic of 'names.'"[15] Even if never spoken, "For Aquinas, as for Augustine, there are, anterior to the uttered word, the intellect-word, the heart-word and the memory-word."[16] All of these reflect a profound unity and even dependence, not only of the mind on things, but of *things* on the mind: "The human word proceeds from the memory, as the Divine Word proceeds from the Father. Proceeds from it, yet remains one with it. For the world is the thought of God realized through His Word… [Therefore,] the phenomenon itself only achieves its full reality (*actus*) in being named or thought by man."[17] In such a perspective, the world itself becomes "a kind of theophany, in which [man] participate[s] at different levels, in being, in thinking, in speaking or naming, and in knowing."[18]

In this sense, words are not arbitrary names given to things, but expressions of the nature of things themselves as entered into and known by man: they are dynamic realities, the meeting point between man and the world, that mark the relation between the two:

> both phenomenon and name were felt as representations. On the one hand "the word conceived in the mind is representative of the whole of that which is realized in thought"…. But on the other hand the phenomenon itself only achieves full reality (*actus*) in the moment of being "named" by man; that is, when that in nature which it represents is united with that in man which the name represents.[19]

In a beautiful illustration of the fact that there is more going on in a linguistic description than a mere scientific explanation of things, Barfield describes the act of "hearing" thus:

> The two most important things to remember about perception are these: *first*, that we must not confuse the percept with its cause. I do not hear undulating molecules of air; the name of what I hear is *sound*. I do not touch a moving system of waves or of atoms and electrons with relatively vast empty spaces between them; the name of what I touch is *matter*. *Second*, I do not perceive any thing with my sense-organs alone, but with a great part of my whole human being…. When I "hear a thrush singing," I am hearing, not with my ears alone, but with all sorts of other things like mental habits, memory, imagination, feeling and (to the extent at least that the act of attention involves it) will.[20]

Thus there is a mental process that "really is the percipient's own contribution to the representation…."[21] This is what leads Barfield to insist that "[a]n 'idea' is at the same time both mind and nature; it is neither subjective nor objective; or it is both at the same time."[22] And it is our language, if we pay attention to it, which has the capacity to insistently remain true to this reality.

As they do for Tolkien, *words* for Barfield provide a context for man's engagement with the world that enables a true and adequate reverence for the integrity and the *otherness* of things, without negating man's true and good relationship with them. He praises the scientific work of Goethe in this regard, for it took seriously this relationship between man and the world, and the capacity of language to adequately portray the truth of things. "His method," Barfield tells us, "differs from the ordinary method of induction in that the observer, when he reaches a certain point… stops there and endeavors rather to sink himself in contemplation *in* that phenomenon than to form further thoughts *about* it."[23] This betrays a radically different

method from the empirical one: “It implies a certain—if one may use the word—*chastity* of thought, a willingness not to go beyond a certain point. The blue of the sky, said Goethe, is the theory.”[24] Barfield maintains that things are intelligible in relation to a paradigm we find *given*, not originating from us, and yet one which at the same time demands our participation. Things exist and are knowable before we encounter them, but yet only reach their full actualization when they are known.[25]

In summary, Barfield’s contribution to an understanding of the relation of man and the world is to draw attention to how the nature of words themselves reveal the deep communion between person and world, in a way that reflects man’s active engagement in the drawing of things to their fulfillment. Barfield’s engagement at the more technical, philosophical level with the role of language in effecting this correspondence between mind and world in a reverential way served as the basis for Tolkien’s own literary art. The insights of each call us to recognize and appreciate more deeply the task of language in maintaining a true relationship with the world, a task that the philosopher Ferdinand Ulrich saw at the heart of our human vocation: “It is only in the word that [man] has the world, that he is in the world and the world is with man and ‘through’ him… Man comes out of himself once again into the world ‘through’ the word. The word is man’s path.”[26]

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[1] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 147. Subsequent references to this work will be noted by page number embedded within the text.

[2] Tolkien, *Letters*, 25.

[3] Tolkien, *Letters*, 10. See also Lisa Coutras, *Tolkien’s Theology of Beauty* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 10-11.

[4] Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories”, in *Poems and Stories* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), 68

[5] Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” 79.

[6] See Ralph Wood, “J. R. R. Tolkien: Postmodern Visionary of Hope,” in *The Gift of Story*, eds. Emily Griesinger and Mark Eaton (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006), 333–34.

[7] See his essay included with “Smith of Wootton Major,” 1967.

[8] See Ferdinand Ulrich, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Martin Heidegger, among others.

[9] Owen Barfield, *The Rediscovery of Meaning and Other Essays* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), 3.

[10] See Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: a Study in Meaning* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), 54–55.

[11] See Barfield’s *Saving the Appearances.*

[12] Michael Di Fuccia. *Owen Barfield: Philosophy, Poetry, and Theology* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016), 18.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Barfield, “Two Kinds of Forgetting,” 1–11.

[15] Barfield, *Saving the Appearances*, 84.

[16] Ibid., 85

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 92.

[19] Ibid., 85

[20] Barfield, *Saving the Appearances*, 20.

[21] Ibid., 24.

[22] Di Fuccia, *Owen Barfield*, 83.

[23] Barfield, *Romanticism*, 34.

[24] Ibid., 34. It seems Barfield intentionally uses this image of “chastity” in contrast to Bacon’s frank admission of the need to “rape” nature in order to acquire her secrets.

[25] Barfield, *Romanticism*, 150–52.

[26] Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 407.

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BOOK REVIEW

Shakespeare Pronounced the Old Way, M'Love

MICHELLE BORRAS

David Crystal, *Pronouncing Shakespeare: The Globe Experiment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

David Crystal's *Pronouncing Shakespeare: The Globe Experiment* is an engaging account of the Globe Theater's 2003 production of *Romeo and Juliet* in original, Early Modern English pronunciation. It contains a brief prologue by Tim Carroll, the Globe's Master of Play, which encapsulates the tone of the book. In his tribute to Crystal— the self-described "aging historical linguist" who introduced the Globe actors to the intricacies of original pronunciation (OP), provided the necessary phonetic transcriptions, and generally made possible this once-in-a-theatrical-epoch event—Carroll writes that the linguist's clarity regarding "what he knew and what he didn't" and "example of humble inquiry" reminded the play's actors and managers "of what it is so easy to forget: that the heart of the enterprise is not display but discovery."

Crystal's account of the process of staging *Romeo and Juliet* in OP, from the fledgling idea to the audience's final applause (directed at himself, the "bearded academic," no less) is indeed a description of multifaceted discovery, but not primarily of an archeological nature. The latter would have made for a book of only historical interest. Instead, the book recounts the discovery, not just of language as it was spoken 400 years ago, but of language itself: flexible, relational, and alive, influenced by and influencing everything from our bodily posture to our sense of class—in short, a source of wonder. Indeed, the number of times the sentiment appears in the comments of actors or theatergoers at the three OP performances is striking: "I was amazed," says one actor; while, alongside confessions of the actors' terror at seeing the phonetic transcription of their lines, another voices his "surprise" and "delight."

In Chapter 1, which introduces the setting, that is, the Globe Theater (London), Crystal is quick to note that there can be no pure archeology with language, theater, or customs. The modern Globe itself is testimony of this. It is an attempt at reproduction, but a modern reproduction is not the original, with "so little…known about theatrical practice in Shakespeare's time" and "the modern environment" that "inevitably makes its presence felt." That this architectural version of OP is nonetheless a liberating, fruitful enterprise can be gleaned from Crystal's reflections:

> It feels right…. Or, at least, it feels like nothing else in the modern theatrical world. The Globe, despite its contradictions … has presented a challenge to modern theatrical values…. Would a modern theater audience be willing to stand for three hours to watch a play? Would it interact with the actors, when invited to do so? Would they interact when *not* so invited…?

It would be an affront to the conventional modern notion of theater to be put on the spot, or as Thornton Wilder might say, to be *convicted* by a play and to find that the lines between the fictional stage and the theatergoer's life are blurred. But as Crystal notes, "One of the most interesting outcomes [of the building of the modern Globe] has been to draw attention to the process of dramatic interactivity." He describes the audience chanting in support of Caliban in a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and comments, "I had never expected to be placed on the spot by Hamlet, until I found myself responding aloud, along with everyone else, to Mark Rylance's full-frontal question, 'Am I a coward?,' in the 2000 production." Evidently the Globe's architectural foray was more than mere archeology. It broke down modern presuppositions, and so freed the play to speak to the audience in a new and more direct way.

Something similar happens in the experiment within the wider Globe experiment, the production of *Romeo and Juliet* in OP. What do those involved in the production discover? As Crystal details the story of his own involvement in the play, from coming up with a semi-phonetic transcription in record time—giving a brief but linguistically fascinating account of how linguists reconstruct an accent that no longer exists, in the process—to the explosion of interest in OP occasioned by the performance, some of the wonder and delight is predictable. Puns, assonances, and rhymes that simply don't rhyme in modern, "received pronunciation" (RP, think the BBC or the British royal family), suddenly come alive. A line as seemingly innocuous as the Nurse's comment about Juliet, "I can tell her age unto the hour," is considerably less innocuous when one realizes that in OP "*Hour* was pronounced in exactly the same way as *whore*."

The plot thickens, we might say, as Crystal begins to describe some of the less predictable discoveries. Smaller words that tend to receive stress in modern RP, such as *in*, *my*, *thy*, remain unstressed in OP, so that, for instance, Romeo's characterization of Juliet as "my love" is much less *my* love, than m'*love* (i.e., the stress is on the love rather than on the fact that she is his). Tim Carroll expresses "bliss" at hearing the "modern actor's insistence on stressing personal pronouns at every opportunity" suddenly disappear, while the actors, marveling at how language alone could make a character feel "more muscular and immediate." "Reducing word-stress…had an intensifying, sharpening, and tightening effect on the show," Carroll's assistant notes, while another actor explains, "The show went much quicker [the performance was 10 minutes shorter due to pronunciation alone]…. Words felt like fireworks again."

Through these small transformations, perceptible in the play's sense of time, in the directness and muscularity of the action, and in the loss of the sense of the "preciousness" of Shakespearian language (for OP contains resonances of what to the contemporary ear would sound like forms of rural or regional speech), what begins to emerge is a discovery of language as, above all, an *embodied* reality. That the individual actors color OP with their native accents and attitudes, as actors would have done in Shakespeare's day, is predictable. But that the accent would color the comportment and bodily bearing of the actor? Crystal reports that the Globe's Master of Movement "noticed that the actors' movement became more fluent during the OP performances," while Carroll's assistant remarks,

> I was fascinated by the effect on the actors' bodies. Capulet's second line is a

> good example, where Montague "flourishes his blade in spite of me." In OP, *blade* sits lower and wider in the body than the RP version, and in sounding dangerous (the RP equivalent sounds very correct and polite) it makes the actor look and feel dangerous.... What OP has revealed to me is the extent to which Shakespeare's language "bodies forth" his characters.

The actors and their dialect coach note that "the accent had made everyone feel 'more grounded;'" the language became less intellectual, more immediately expressive of pleasure, play, action, or threat. Or, to summarize various comments from the post-performance "talkback" sessions, this experiment made language appear more incarnate, more *real*.

More real also means more relational. This relationality appears first in the intriguing glimpses Crystal affords into the process of the formation of language, as he describes the process of the actors beginning not only to rehearse and master sounds individually, but to "accommodate to" each other, as people do in real speech. "When friends accommodate, their accents converge." Or as people (in this case, the actors) speak to each other, the individual, halting accents begin to merge; the speakers unconsciously correct and influence one another until "their OPs mold into convincing discourse," a coherent language with which they can address an audience.

This "discovery" of the embodied relationality of speech enables a closer connection with the audience. One might expect that a 400-year-old accent would resonate poorly with a contemporary audience. Yet most audience comments reported in the book are some variation of a teenager's exclamation when Crystal questions a school group at one of the performances: "So what do you think? 'Cool.' 'Wicked.' Why? One fifteen-year-old lad, in a strong south London accent, piped up. 'Well, they're talking like us.'" This accent, which no one now speaks, is "the ancestor of [all] the accents we hear in English today," and in this sense the schoolboy is right: he does not talk like the BBC, but he can recognize something that genuinely belongs to him in this ancestor whose voice he heard speaking to him for a moment in Southwark. (Incidentally, Crystal credits this facet of OP for its ever-increasing popularity in American theater.)

In Crystal's description of the three performances, it is as if the divide that has grown up between words and the body, actor and audience contracted for a moment so that participants and onlookers might have a taste of words at play, words directly incarnate in action, words liberated from the sense of social or intellectual class that is associated with Shakespearian productions today. The actor who played Nurse remarks that after such an experience with a language that is at various points labeled "gutsy" and "earthy," going back to RP "seemed suddenly a bit prissy."

But one gets the sense that this actor, like others across the Anglophone world who have become interested in this linguistic "voyage of discovery," will carry what he discovered into his relationship with the language he speaks every day. For, as this foray into Shakespeare's English ultimately reveals, language as such is agile and alive, something we can feel at home in and in which we can play and delight. It is a fundamental dimension of our embodiment and a primordial expression of ourselves.

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BOOK REVIEW

Why Church Music Is So Awful

MARY CATHERINE LEVRI

Thomas Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing* (Crossroad, 2nd. ed., 2013).

At the end of the semester, as respite after many long weeks of studying important, yet often stale, ecclesial documents on sacred music, I always assign to my students *Why Catholics Can't Sing*. It reads like a humorous essay, and with no dates or authoritative directives to memorize, it affords a fun end to the semester in the weeks leading up to the Christmas break.

I preface our study of *Why Catholics Can't Sing* by telling my students, "Remember what this book is not: it is *not* a history book, and it is *not* a Church document. What's more, it is *not* a theological work." Reading it in the year 2020, however, made me re-think the last part of my *caveat*. I wonder if *Why Catholics Can't Sing*, written by a musicologist, published in 1991 to *much* hullabaloo in the church music world, and updated in 2013, is really a deeply theological work—or at least a deeply spiritual one. Let me explain.

Why Catholics Can't Sing (formerly subtitled in its first edition: *The Culture of Catholicism and the Triumph of Bad Taste*) was written by Thomas Day, a professor of musicology at Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island. Dr. Day's credentials—which he mentions in passing throughout the book—are impressive, including studies at Columbia University, work in Europe as a Fulbright scholar, and experience and training as a knowledgeable organist. Dr. Day is also a practicing Catholic, and so this book primarily comes from the viewpoint of a member of the Church who has observed, Sunday after Sunday, a strange combination of enthusiastic effort from leading parish musicians and blank-stared indifference from the people in the pews. Knowing the Church's great treasury of music and the priority she has historically placed on the cultivation of art, Dr. Day has good reason to be puzzled by the musical predicament in parishes. German Catholics sing very well, he observes, and many Protestant churches boast congregations that can raise the roof off a place with the way they sing a hymn. Why, then, are so many Catholic congregations, particularly in the United States, so disengaged from musical worship?

Day's answer to this question is multi-faceted, and though it is highly speculative, it reflects a great deal of clear-headed dot-connecting. Perhaps the most intriguing part of the book is

Chapter 3, “The Irish Way—the Green Mainstream.” In this chapter, Day hypothesizes that mainstream American Catholicism found its liturgical identity primarily in the Irish Catholic mentality. This mentality is defined by a disdain for anything lengthy, florid, or demonstrative in the way either the priest or the people participate in Mass. This disdain was born from the centuries of persecution suffered by Catholics in Ireland at the hands of the English; for over two hundred years, while the bell towers and congregations of Anglican churches in Ireland would ring out in song, the persecuted Catholics would gather secretly for Mass without the luxuries of music or effulgent ceremony. This is the history that the Irish Catholics brought with them to the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus, the efficient worship of the Irish, involving no visible or audible signs of enthusiasm, became the “mainstream” mode of liturgical worship for American Catholics.

But Day does not stop there. He argues that the “real Irish music” of the mid-20th century shared the same aural ethos as the sweet and pious Catholic hymns of the time. According to Day, the feeling and fervor of “My Wild Irish Rose” moves on the same wavelength as moldy oldies such as “To Jesus’ Heart All Burning” and “Mother, at Your Feet Is Kneeling.” (I spent some time with my students diving into available YouTube recordings of Irish-American tunes and Catholic hymns of the same era. My opinion: Day is on to something.)

Day draws an even *further* connection, and I’m sure this is the one that provoked such ire in 1991: he likens the folksy Irish-American tunes and the saccharine Catholic hymnody of the mid-20th century to the music of the St. Louis Jesuits and the “folk”-inspired songs that are still with us today, mostly found in hymnals such as *Gather* and *Glory & Praise.* For instance, at one point, Day points out the striking musical similarities between “My Wild Irish Rose” and “Dwelling Place” by John Foley, SJ. (I checked on YouTube—Day is not wrong.)

For someone who regularly scratches his head when hearing songs like “Here I am Lord,” and “You Are Mine” in a Catholic parish and asks, “How exactly did we get here?,” Day provides a viable explanation that takes into account where the American Church has been for the past century and a half. No other Catholic or concerned musician has had the imagination, smarts, or guts to propose the kind of theory that Day has, and it’s worth buying the book to read Chapter 3 alone. In my opinion, it is what makes *Why Catholics Can’t Sing* a classic.

This time around, though, something else about *Why Catholics Can’t Sing* has struck me. During this reading, it became obvious to me that beneath his biting wit, musical expertise, and professorial knowledge, Thomas Day was troubled by a loss of the sense of the Faith, the mystery and presence, that used to make Catholic churches feel different from any other kind. And he is not timid about laying blame at the feet of individuals. In Chapter 6, he subtitles a passage, “The Experts Will Transform the Mob,” and explains that it was liturgical experts who set up the framework and plan for the full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful. The widespread expectations placed upon the faithful concerning their duty to sing (and enjoy it!) after the Second Vatican Council were not the result of a prayerful assessment of the engagement of the faithful in worship, but of the imposition of a vision held by the “elite,” those who were intent on shedding the Roman liturgy of its medieval “baggage.” What Day recognizes in these experts is a disdain for—and anger toward—the people in the pews. What makes them angry? The tendency for “the people” to become attached to the “liturgical clutter” of worship, like decorative excess, ancient language, glorious music—what we might also call, in its best instances, Beauty.

In other chapters, Day skewers the egoism and personality-centered worship that has seemed so prevalent at the Catholic Mass for the past fifty years. Chapter 5 is titled “Ego Renewal: Presenting Father Hank and Friends.” While Day slams the familiar and friendly manner of

celebrating Mass that has crept into the *ars celebrandi* of many priests, he also criticizes the "I"-centered texts that have filled many modern hymnals and provides a list of what he sees as the worst offenders. His biggest pet peeve, seen throughout the book, is "Mr. Caruso," the cantor who is more interested in supplying an abrasively amplified solo performance for the congregation than leading them in sung worship. What Day referred to as "bad taste" in the subtitle of the first edition might be more aptly dubbed "egoism." Catholics—be they priests, musicians, or congregants in the pews—have lost a sense of reverence, awe, and the transcendent nature of the ritual of the Mass. Though Day's primary focus is music, it is clear that he sees the musical crisis as part of a much bigger problem.

So, as a reviewer of this very good book, I maintain the first part of my initial *caveat* to my students: be aware that it is highly speculative. I do not agree with all of Day's comments on the nature of the Church's problems, and I think he would be the first to admit that in his writing of *Why Catholics Can't Sing*, he delves into areas outside of his expertise. It is worth taking seriously, however, his concern for the deeper problems in the worship of the Church that have *caused* the crisis in Catholic sacred music. It is the concern of someone who has respect for the Catholic genius and who cannot fully fathom why we seem to have lost so much of it.

There is an awareness of a spiritual crisis rumbling beneath the wit and wisdom of Thomas Day in *Why Catholics Can't Sing*. Lend your ears to his particular voice in the wilderness. You certainly will be the wiser, and you will have a whole lot of fun in getting there.

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BOOK REVIEW

C.S. Lewis and Myth

MEREDITH RICE

Charlie W. Starr, *The Faun's Bookshelf: C.S. Lewis on Why Myth Matters* (The Kent State University Press/Black Squirrel Books, 2018).

What is myth? And what role does myth or, more broadly, story, poetry, or fiction play in human knowledge and communication? Though none of these literary categories is simply synonymous with myth, they share certain elements in common, including the understanding that human language is not merely propositional or informational. In coming to know another person, we often rely in a significant way on the stories they tell about themselves; in studying a culture or civilization, we look to the stories it tells about its origin and understanding of the world. In both of these ordinary examples, we see the foundational role that story and myth play in conveying meaning.

In approaching the question of myth, the writings of C.S. Lewis form a particularly rich source of insight. As a professor of literature, Lewis spent a lifetime in formal study of myth and story as a source of meaning. As an author of world-building fiction (in the Narnia books and his space trilogy) and more explicitly apologetical Christian tales (e.g., *The Great Divorce* or *The Pilgrim's Regress*), he was himself a creator of myth. Lastly, in his own life of faith, he considered ancient myths, both pagan and Christian, to have been crucial in his conversion, or reversion, to Christianity as an adult. All three of these elements play a significant role in Charlie W. Starr's *The Faun's Bookshelf: C.S. Lewis on Why Myth Matters*.

Starr takes his title from a small incident in Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*: Lucy Pevensey's perusal of Mr. Tumnus's bookshelf when he brings her to his home for tea during her first visit to Narnia. She notices four titles in particular: *The Life and Letters of Silenus*, *Nymphs and Their Ways*, *Men, Monks, and Gamekeepers: A Study in Popular Legend*, and *Is Man a Myth?* Starr argues that these (fictional, which is to say, non-existent) volumes are an interpretive and organizational key to understanding Lewis's use of and thought about myth. Although initially a pleasing idea, Starr's reliance on sometimes tortuous speculation as to the contents of these titles can obscure what Lewis has said explicitly about myth. When Starr allows Lewis to speak for himself and Starr's own evident breadth and depth of study in Lewis's writings to draw connections among Lewis's personal experience and fictional and

non-fictional work, this small volume offers substantial insight into its title's question: why does myth matter?

For Lewis, a concrete and deeply personal reason that myth matters is the role it played in his Christian conversion. Beginning as a small boy, Lewis was conscious of a "desire for some nameless thing" beyond everyday experience, a "longing accompanied by such intense, sweet pleasure that Lewis named it 'joy.'" As a boy and young teenager, he was "stabbed with joy" upon reading the Norse tales of Baldur and Siegfried, and "experiencing [that joy] again became the most important desire of his life," pursued through nature, romance, and literature as a young man. If experience of the "worshipful awe" inspired by the myths of the Norse gods helped to open Lewis to the transcendent, it was an intellectual encounter with myth that helped him to believe in God and then assent to the Christian faith. On the brink of accepting Christianity as a young adult, Lewis experienced the pagan myths of the "dying and rising god" in the stories of Adonis, Osiris, and Baldur as a "delight to the imagination" and "suggestive of meanings beyond [his] grasp," but did not experience the same depth of meaning in the Gospel narrative of the crucified and risen Jesus. Starr recounts that it was only when Lewis came to understand (through a lengthy, late-night conversation with J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson) the story of Jesus as a "true myth," in which "God [is] expressing Himself through what we call 'real things'"—in contrast to the images and stories of pagan myths that were "'lies, though lies breathed through silver'"—that Lewis was able to come to accept the Christian faith.

Unusual an experience as it may be for "near paganism" to play a foundational and explicit role in conversion to Christianity, Lewis's understanding of the origin and function of myth illuminates the relationship between the two. Especially in the face of the modern reduction of nature to "mere machinery," the trappings of myth—the naiads, dryads, and gods of nature—open human perception to the possibility of a "world of abundant life" and of personality "behind all living things." Moreover, Starr observes, Lewis sees in the actual content of ancient myths "'gleams of celestial strength and beauty'" through which "God spoke to pagan peoples" about the truth, even though the pagan gods are false. These stories allowed glimpses, though often distorted and darkened, into what is true about the world and the divine and inspired a longing for beauty until God spoke his own "story" through salvation history.

Alive as he was to the ability of myth (either traditional myths or story-telling more broadly) to communicate truth and shape the imagination, Lewis reflected deeply on the way myth works as a mode of knowledge. To know something discursively requires us to "withdraw ourselves from reality," to stand alongside what is real to speak abstractly about it. What is said may be true, but it is not the same as reality. Lewis proposes that "what flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality" because myth gives us an experience of "being caught up in the real." Myth "acts on our imagination like an experience" rather than a proposition, and it may get us closer to reality itself: in receiving a myth "you were not knowing, but tasting; but what you were tasting turns out to be a universal principle. The moment we state this principle, we are admittedly back in the world of abstraction. It is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely." Thus, Starr concludes, myth can work on the imagination and sentiments in a way that opens human understanding to meaning and transcendence in a more direct way than propositional truth. In his own mythical invention for example, Lewis's *Perelandra* offers both a riveting adventure in interplanetary travel to an unfallen world and a depth of experiential knowledge of the beauty and wisdom of innocence, the profound loss entailed in disobedience, and the providence of God over creation even beyond our own world.

Starr unpacks these and other insights into myth at greater length and also offers a helpful discussion of Lewis's fellow Inklings, specifically J.R.R. Tolkien on creating myths and Owen Barfield on language. Starr also sheds light on Lewis's understanding of the meaning of sexual difference, the relationship between Lewis's own mythical writings and the ancient myths he loved, and Lewis's reckoning with the possibility that myths can also *deform* our imagination and experience, if they are not transparent to what is really true (or truly real).

In Starr's estimation, Lewis helps us to see that myth matters because it can form us to perceive reality truly, which leads us to the moment when "myth *becomes* fact—the most real thing there is," the Incarnation.

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WITNESS

God and the Poet

SALLY READ

Why poetry?

As a young woman, I worked as a mental health nurse with elderly people from all over Europe. For many of them, World War Two was a still-living reality. Spoken during afternoon tea, Hitler's name could create an abyss of silence, or a simple, desperate wailing. Other patients had less dramatic stories and were simply depressed. Others had organic brain conditions that meant the patient next to them looked like a ginger cat, or memories that were so damaged they couldn't remember if they were married or had children. Some had lost the ability to recognize objects like coins. Some had a lifetime of listening to unwanted voices, and were white with weariness. Every day we were grappling with chaos and its consequences.

On the short tube ride from Camden back to the center of London every morning I read poetry. I read as I sat, as I walked and people pushed past me. Sometimes I had to finish a page on the station platform and was late into work. One volume I always had with me was T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. I could make little real sense of it, and yet I knew it contained the deepest sense. Its wisdom, lyricism and startling images reminded me of something I almost knew.

With my nurse-manager's blessing, I started up a poetry group with some of the patients. I'd spread out as many books as I could on the table, and give twenty minutes or so for them to choose something to read aloud. Sylvia Plath's poems were often chosen, and when they were there was always trouble. A woman from London stood up and yelled at me about *Among the Narcissi* and its depiction of age. I was taken to task by my boss for the upset caused by a reading of *Mary's Song* (which is about the Holocaust). One Irishman asked me to read Yeats' *Easter 1916* and cried quietly as I did so. Those who couldn't remember what they did yesterday could recite stanzas of Kipling, Wordsworth or Edward Lear. Lines of Shakespeare lay in the drained gutter of memory like a golden key. Many nodded when we read Stevie Smith, and repeated the line *Not waving but drowning.* One lady scrawled the words on a piece of paper and put it in her handbag. The few initial protestations of "I don't understand poetry" were silenced in the face of poetry understanding them too well.

By then I was writing my own poetry, and my only ambition in life was to give form and music to chaos as the poets we were reading had done. As an atheist, I saw poetry as the

transformative engine through which life could be made bearable.

I began attending workshops for aspiring poets, and soon became aware of rules to which I would need to adhere if I were to be published. End rhyme (*So long as men can breathe or eyes can see/So long lives this, and this gives life to thee)* was out. Abstract ideas were verboten. "Nature poetry" was generally seen as old hat. The more every-day, urban, and subjective, the better, the world of poetry at the beginning of the century seemed to say—or at least the groups which I attended. There was even a vaguely tongue in cheek "List of Banned Words" that circulated, which from memory included *transcendent, Jesus,* and *soul.*

Still, I managed to "become" a poet, publishing three books of poetry. On the U.K.'s Poetry Archive I'm quoted, from before my conversion, as saying: *Poetry gives voice to what has no voice, and form to what has no form…* I was still trying to give voice and form to what I'd witnessed as a nurse, and in my personal life. But, in my more honest moments, I knew that contemporary poetry largely did not inspire me. In fact, a few fine poets were grappling with the transcendent and breaking the "rules"—sometimes with stunning results, but often with what seemed a foray into fog and a sort of philosophical vagueness. As an unbelieving writer, I was left with a sense of clipped wings.

The Poet

Then, during the Spring of 2010, at the age of thirty-nine, I came to believe in God, and simultaneously knew him as a Poet. As I sat on my bed on the first tentative night of belief, perhaps it was my sense of being *seen* by a Creator that gave me this knowledge. I had never guessed that it was possible to be so *beheld*, and for that beholding to know and give such meaning to a life. I felt as though I'd been pounding on a suffocating roof, only for it to be abruptly lifted, and infinity to come into view.

God is, of course, a poet in the usual sense: the Bible holds swathes of poetry.

But I also saw that every poem I had written attempted to *see* in ways that were not ordinary. Through image and metaphor I was trying to grasp the interconnectedness of everything. Gerard Manley Hopkins saw connections everywhere—in skies, cows, trout, and fields. Sylvia Plath's genius also lay in her astonishing ability to see elements touch, reverberate, and collide: in *Nick and the Candlestick* shadows are shawls, homicides and plums! I think of Keats' green hill hidden in an April shroud representing melancholy. And the wild and darkening night as a symbol threatening to tear Emily Bronte away from whom or what she loved. Through poetry I (like a multitude before me) was trying to articulate silences and offer another dimension; to make the reader see as they had never done, and to understand anew.

As I stood at the back and watched during Mass in those early days, it became clear that liturgy made similar use of metaphor, connection, and representation. At Mass the poetry lives: the incense rises like prayer; the altar is like a table for feasting. But the symbols of the Church, I would learn, go further. The blood issuing from Christ's side *is* mercy; the Church *is* the Body of Christ. But we go further. The wine is like blood; but it *becomes* blood, and the bread is like flesh, but *becomes* flesh. Sitting at many tabernacles and knowing Christ's real presence, I realized that Christ the Word made flesh *is* a poem: the definitively ineffable (God) given form and human voice, and walking in the world. God is a poet, Christ is the poem.

God's Grandchild

I spent the first years after my conversion to Catholicism lamenting, vaguely, that the pact between God and artists had broken. Once faith was emptied, at least in part, from the world then the ignition went out of the creative engine. Many poetry readers and visitors to modern art galleries feel cheated by what they encounter—poetry with no apparent form or resonance; art "installations" that might be as artless as Tracy Emin's unmade bed.

Centuries ago, Dante Alighieri called poetry *God's grandchild.* In the poet's tour of hell, he is actually being confronted with the consequences of usury, but it is made clear to him that industry or art of any kind that evades labor is fatally defective—our sweat is needed, Virgil says, in order to advance. But even more: artists are called to a creative process much like the Father's initial act of Creation:

First, artists begin, like God, with formlessness—that is, with chaos: *the earth was a formless void* (Genesis 1,2). Poets begin, as God began, in contemplation (God is, after all, pure contemplation). Have we, I wondered, become so disdainful of the transcendent that our contemplation as artists is necessarily limited? Perhaps our inspirations and conclusions have for too long been shackled by our belief that there is nothing more than ourselves. If we contain within ourselves both the question and the answer (and within a poem there is always, in some manner, a query and a response) then the poem will suffocate.

Second, the Creator of the world labored: *God made* (Genesis 1,7). He gave the chaos form and named it. Only then did he rest. Whatever sweet inspiration the poet may receive, there is no escaping the hard labor of writing, drafting, and revising.

So, what about the poem as crafted work?

Let's be honest: many lament the fact that poems don't rhyme anymore. There's a sense among the general readership (often rightly so) that poets are dishing up chaos into chaos, or simply chopped up prose. It's true that there has been a belief among poets (and many great poets, like Eliot) that the standard forms of yesteryear are too simplistic to bear the weight of the complexities of existence. But it does seem that some poets have thrown the baby out with the bathwater of traditional forms. Authentic free verse, if that's what a poem calls for, should have everything to do with labor and form. It asks the poet to find a *unique* form, just like a sculptor finds a shape within a block of marble.

When most people speak of rhyme they mean end rhymes. In fact, many of the ancient greats, including Homer, including God himself, do not use end rhymes. The psalms—the most sublime poems of all time—do not rhyme, as most would identify the notion, in the original Hebrew. Rather they use devices such as parallels, the repetition and reformulation of images and ideas, to give new dimensions to our understanding.

Rhyme is a complex thing. It can exist within lines, not just at the end; it can suggest itself through half-rhyme. It can elucidate and expand a notion through the rhyming of ideas, just like in the psalms. And music can also be conjured by uniting ideas or feelings through alliteration, assonance or rhythm (*And death shall have no dominion,* Dylan Thomas; *Not waving but drowning*, Stevie Smith*; I will not, cannot go*, Emily Bronte). In true poetry there is always music—and it is both elusive in the writing, and inescapable in the reading. When caught, it highlights the connections between different elements. Visual images work in the hearer's mind in a similar way, and rhythm, and word choice. Even the ordering of words plays its crucial part. Poetry is about surprising the reader with a reality that they had not

hitherto grasped. It is another way of seeing and hearing. Which is why the Bible is full of poetry. And it is why true poetry—whether "traditional" or not—is always about graft.

Perhaps, I wondered, some poets had been so intent on deconstructing tradition that they had forgotten about the essential nature of this music and form? But no. I think the lack of music and form in some (by no means all) contemporary poetry is also about the problem of contemplation that I talked about, above. Contemplation goes a long way in creating the music—and that is a mystery for which I have no formula.

In the final stage: *God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good* (Genesis 1,31). The poet who has contemplated and labored will finish with a crafted entity that makes its way in the world. If a poem is authentic (and this is rare enough in any age) it will pass into eternity.

Has the pact between poets and God been broken? There is mystery in the writing of poetry that almost any poet, religious or not, will attest to. Theodore Roethke felt the vivid presence of what he perceived as his dead poetic antecedents when the muse struck, and he fell to his knees in gratitude. Others will speak of poems coming from "nowhere." All I can say is that prayer and poetry are sisters in contemplation—both require absolute attention and detachment from the world and its clamorous concerns. In any age, if a writer is too caught up in the world's gaze, the world's applause, and the world's reward then the work will ultimately fail. Like Adam, we are given a great gift, and then asked to till. Like Adam, we're called to do so in the gaze of God alone.

A Catholic Poet

A Catholic poet doesn't necessarily write about God. And yet a poet can only write well about what obsesses her. In my early years as a Catholic I could only write about this new and all-involving love affair with my Creator. As someone known for outrageous and sometimes graphic poems, I had no idea what my future in poetry would hold—would I be read, would I be published? I tried to labor for God alone, and wrote the poems in my first collection as a Catholic for feast days, to give image to my own thirst for God, and to illuminate what I gleaned of a hermit's contemplative life and solitary night-time prayer (I am attached to a hermitage as "poet in residence").

Through those years of formation, I wrote in the voices of Saint Anne, Saint Mary Magdalene, Saint Peter, the bleeding woman who Christ healed, and a soldier who nailed Christ to the cross. I wrote of Saint Elizabeth, Saint Veronica, and to Saint Joseph. Most of all I wrote about Our Blessed Mother, especially at the moment of the Annunciation, during her pregnancy, and as the mother of a young child.

My soul magnifies the Lord, Our Lady sang. And the converse is also true—there is not one part of our existence that is not given meaning and clarity by the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is the reader that makes sense of our existence. He gives voice where there is no voice, music where there is no music, and form where there is no form. In these ten years since my conversion, my poetry has united, in an obvious way, with the poetry of God—Christ himself.

My relationship with poetry has always been intense (idolatrous, I would say, when I was an atheist), and the ruminations I have tried to outline here have been sometimes slow and painful. For a time I even rejected the label of "poet." I wearied of poetry's lack of readership. I loved the immediacy of readers' responses to my non-fiction. But, in mysterious ways, I kept

getting called back to poetry. There is a sacred vein there that I can't turn my back on. There is music in poetry that might—like prayer—confuse people at first with its seeming indirectness. Like prayer, it asks us to listen without struggle and the need to immediately understand; and to try to see the world, in some small way, as God sees it. It seems to me that the Catholic Church is the natural home of the poet and the natural home of poetry readers: Catholics live poetry every day of their lives.

Sally Read is poet in residence of the Hermitage of the Three Holy Hierarchs. Her most recent book (non- fiction) is Annunciation: A Call to Faith in a Broken World (2019). Her first collection of poems since her conversion to Catholicism, Dawn of This Hunger, *is forthcoming.*

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WITNESS

The Mystery Beyond Words: The Poems and Thoughts of Rita A. Simmonds

RITA A. SIMMONDS

A contemporary Catholic poet of note, Rita A. Simmonds has published several collections of poetry, among them Souls and the City *(2013),* Bitterness and Sweet Love: The Way of the Cross and Other Lenten Poems *(2014), and* He Called: Selected Poems *(2020). Her poetry—spare, incisive, and steeped in silence and prayer—has garnered multiple accolades at the annual Catholic Press Association Awards and appears regularly in* Magnificat *magazine*.

Mrs. Simmonds was interviewed by Humanum *in December of 2020. Her thoughts on the creative process, the role of silence in her poetry, and the mystery that underlies all of reality, as well as three of her new poems, appear below.*

The Fourteenth Station: Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

The Word

has weight

pondered unbroken

carefully carried

quietly placed

solemnly sealed

remembered

awaited

revealed—

The Word has

weight

seeded

and sown

each step

on its own is

The Way.[1]

How did you first come to write poetry?

I started writing in fourth grade. My teacher gave us an assignment to write a poem. Of course, she never explained what a poem was, gave no instruction. I remember that I looked out the window: it was the first snowfall of the year. I just sat down and wrote about the snow falling. When I handed in the poem, she called me up to her desk and accused me of plagiarism. When I denied it, she sent me to the principal's office. He believed me right away and told me that the poem would be published in the school newspaper. And once it was published, I was thrilled and started writing a lot of poetry. I showed another poem to the same teacher. She looked at it and said, "This is enough. Just stop." She thought I was copying all of my poems! I was humiliated and mortified. And that was it. I never talked about it and never wrote poetry after that, except maybe a little bit in college and then, years later, when I fell in love with a man who had written some poems for me. I started writing poems for him, and I kept writing even after we broke up because I enjoyed it. A writer friend of mine took a look at some of my poems and told me that they were very good.

At what point did you recognize yourself as someone who was no longer writing just for yourself, but for a larger public? What was that turning point like for you?

I met the community Communion and Liberation, a Catholic lay community founded in 1954 in Italy by Monsignor Luigi Giussani. He passed away in 2005 and is now a Servant of God. I was reading a lot of his writings, and they made me see that there is a mystery behind everything. I started looking at reality more intensely and intently. That made me write a lot of poetry. I understood that reality was the vehicle to the mystery, and poetry was the way I expressed that. I started writing a lot. Words just flowed out of me for a long time.

One day, my friend Father Peter Cameron, who was the editor of *Magnificat* magazine, was looking for actresses to be in a play he had written about the life of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, "The Sacrament of Memory." I auditioned for the play and asked him whether I could read some of my poetry instead of a monologue. He agreed. For me this was a way of seeing whether it was any good. After all, he was an editor. He loved the poems. I read poem after poem during the audition and he just kept on asking me to read more. It was a great moment I will never forget. I got the part—I played Pauline Martin, Thérèse's sister. I also got my poetry published in *Magnificat*. He then started asking me to submit more regularly on given themes.

How do you decide what to write about?

When I was younger, I used to write about my feelings. Now, when I am given a Scripture passage or liturgical season to write about, it's almost like a commission. It's like God is asking it. I have a lot more confidence if I'm being asked to write.

Also, I try to pay attention to what's in front of me; reality always gives me things to write

about. There's always something. I just have to try and understand what is going on. Sometimes life can be dry and it feels like you're always looking at the same things. It takes an effort. You have to sit with things for a while and try and understand what the mystery is that's revealing itself through them.

Cornered in the Crying Room

I talk to Our Lady every morning—

Our Lady of Sorrows,

Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.

She's the same lady.

I ask her to help me

to be a good mother.

I ask her for the graces

no one wants.

This morning

Joey from the adult home

bursts in on my prayer.

His presence is not uncommon,

but always a surprise.

He hugs me tightly around my neck;

his cologne assails the air.

He begs my forgiveness

for telling my boys, "I'm happy

that your father died."

I smell his cologne on me.

"Let's sit down and pray," he says,

his rosary swinging from his hand.

I remain standing; he doesn't leave.

"Pray for us sinners," Joey's words

trail mine from a tongue

too big for his mouth.

We pray the Second Sorrow of Mary—

The Flight into Egypt.

My mind drifts to the desert

where twenty-nine Coptic Christians

lie gunned down in the sand,

their pilgrimage to Saint Samuel's Monastery

in Minya brought to an uncharted end.

They would not give up

the Child in Mary's arms.

Their souls are lifted

from the sand

by the Little Child who

found refuge there.

Sand falls like water

as they rise,

blessing the assailants,

comforting the innocents

they leave behind.

Their souls have eyes

that see into mine.

They see across centuries.

They see through shifting land.

I pray they pray for me.

I pray for their families

and enemies. I pray

they pray for mine.

"*Now,*" Joey says—

His cologne ascends

like frankincense

"*at the hour of our death*"

in the crying room sky.

So often your poems are about a single, specific event that opens up to greater depths. A wonderful example of this is "Cornered in the Crying Room." It describes a single moment that transports you to a different time and place. How do you identify the instances that give way to deeper reflection?

A moment is given, and if it's a striking moment—like "Cornered in the Crying Room," which was a very striking situation—I really want to make sense out of it. What did that mean? The best way for me to make sense out of it is to write about it. I try to understand the meaning of what just happened to me, the meaning of what I saw, if I saw something beautiful and it strikes me… When I read the Gospel and meditate on it for an assignment I have been given, I read and read until something strikes me. What is it that is calling out to me from the words, from this event? Thank God that I'm usually asked to write about an event from the Gospels, because for me, if I can't see it happening, I can't write about it. I really do have to see it. I can't write about ideas.

When it comes to your creative process, how do you know a poem is finished?

Sometimes you write more than you need to write. In poetry, you really have to get to the essential. Sometimes I'm a little vain; I like the way a line sounds, so I want to keep it. There are lines I have to cut because otherwise I lose the meaning. And I really think about it: what is really essential here, in this poem? Sometimes it takes years to get it just right.

Your disciplined use of words—weighted and sparse—as well as your intentional spacing of lines force your readers to slow down and to dwell in the silence in which the words resound. Can you talk about the role of silence in your poetry?

The poetry that I write is born of silence, so I guess it would make sense that you can hear the silence because that is the birth place of the poetry. There is an event that happens, but to understand it, you need silence. If I weren't living that silence, that recollection, I would probably miss some of those events I write about in my poems, or I would think about them differently. I am really looking for that meaning, that mystery in reality which requires a certain silence. I don't give meaning to what happens. It's like Advent—you're watchful, you're waiting, you're receiving what's given. If you hear the silence, that's what you're hearing.

I'm more economical with my words now than I used to be. I know you don't need to say everything. You need to give people some breathing space, some room. You don't have to sew everything up in the end. I'm more comfortable now with being uncomfortable. As long as I can see the mystery, then I think that's enough. As long as the mystery is present, then I think I have something to say.

The Pipel's Execution

from Elie Wiesel's *Night*

The young boy

with sad angel eyes

is tortured but will not give names.

He is hanged with two others

who die right away.

But the gentle boy is light;

his noose doesn't take.

He writhes before all

in the silent roll call square.

The sun sets to escape.

Men who've not cried in years

erupt into tears.

Sorrow reigns

as the innocent child

gasps and sways.

"Where is God? Where is God?"

The prisoners say

as they're forced to march by

and look on at close range.

"I am here in the gallows

dangling in pain."

Your poetry often challenges the reader. "The Pipel's Execution," for example, is deeply unsettling and calls for a new perspective, an interior change. Is this something you strive for in your writing?

I don't live in a very comfortable place, because I am so ambitious about my own conversion. In my poetry, I am telling you what happens to me, and I am trying to be honest about it. I have to be unsettled—I'm personally unsettled by what I see and hear, and I desire the change it brings. I want to be converted. But you are not converted if you don't tell the truth. If you tell

the truth, then you're not going to be comfortable because we know we don't completely correspond to what is good, beautiful, right and true. We know we don't have the answers. I think the Covid pandemic has taught us that if it's taught us anything. So I'm comfortable being uncomfortable, because I know there's a change that's happening. That's what I desire even though it hurts.

To go back to "Cornered in the Crying Room," what Joey, the disabled man, did to my kids—telling them he was happy that my husband had died—that was rough, but I started out with a prayer to Our Lady, to help me to be a good mother, to give me the graces that no one wants. And then I realized she answered both of those requests with Joey. But it wasn't comfortable. I didn't want to mother that Joey. I didn't want to forgive him. I didn't want to pray with him. I felt cornered—he cornered me. And yet I said okay. This is where I am now. I was able to be who I was and work through all of the discomfort that was in that moment.

Now, as for "The Pipel's Execution," it came from reading Elie Wiesel's *Night*. I was floored and I wondered, "Where is God in all that horror that happened to those people?" I had to really ask that question. And once I was willing to really look for God—because I know God is there, the mystery is always present but you have to be willing to look—it was so obvious to me. I had to write about it because it is just too important.

The Word Made Flesh

I

Nothing comes before you

whom nothing came before.

Your being, a silent orb

spinning into darkness,

fire to a cold star,

earthquake to sea,

tsunami to land,

invisible blast

over everything made

through you

to the sound of your voice—

a promise posed,

a tuning fork.

Minds enlarge,

kings engage

a constant course.

You re-enter time to await.

Word suspended

on a Virgin's acceptance—

II

Yes, and you enter

infinitesimal

into her darkness—

the space you created.

Your emptying unites

to her purest cell

the size of a seed

clinging to her wall.

It forms flesh,

curls around a red flame

fanning fingers and toes,

liver and lungs,

your blazing heart beats,

feeding on your mother's blood.

Her water breaks.

For the first time, you cry.

What can you know,

you who knew everything?

It's cold.

You have no memory,

lost in your mother's eyes.

You, the reason for everything,

must grow to the age of reason

and leave your family grieving

when first you hear

your Father’s call.

III

“Why have you done this to us?”

Your mother asks.

You speak strange yet simple phrases.

You say you say what you hear.

It is not your time

when the bride and groom

run out of wine.

Yet you bend yourself,

spend yourself

at your mother’s request.

The best is for last.

She enters your darkness,

the space you created for her.

“Father, forgive them.”

Your heart beats

beneath the beating,

flares at each fall,

combusts as you’re lifted up

on the dry wood.

You thirst. You burn.

The Father’s voice—unheard.

For the last time, you cry.

Your flesh hangs.

Your mother folds.

Blood and water explode

from your side.

Your spirit descends

into the depths of time

to free the prophets and kings,

the enlightened minds.

Your flesh is lowered

into your mother's lap.

How well she knows

your fingers and toes,

the shape of your eyes, and

Yes, the blood from your veins

that blankets your flesh.

There is nothing left

but to rise.

Could we talk about the relationship between your poetry and your prayer? "Word Made Flesh," for example, felt almost like a rosary in miniature. Could you comment on it?

I was not satisfied with "Word Made Flesh" until I started addressing the Word. Then it really took on a beautiful shape. It's very much a prayer. You could say that that is how I see things, how I pray. Also to think about Christ as a tiny embryo—a theme that always comes back to me—to think about God himself who became something so small. I am struck by the humility of God. He's so humble to become one of us, to be dependent on us. And wherever Christ is, there is Mary. She is very much a part of everything that I do and think and write.

Your poetry calls the reader to see the world anew, to convert, yet you never start out with a didactic purpose.

I am worried about my own change. If someone can change because of my change…That's what I mean about telling the truth. I think the truth speaks for itself. I don't try to tell people they have to change. I try to allow myself to be changed by what happens to me, and if people can benefit from that, then I offer myself, I offer my life, as an agent for change. I guess that's where vulnerability comes in.

I am by nature a somewhat bossy person. But with poetry, silence is the space you have to give people. That's where their freedom comes in. Sometimes I think that a poem has to have a lot of air—it has to have doors and windows for people to come in and out. I don't like to tell people what to think. I like to present something truthfully. People often want some kind of a resolution at the end, but I am happy to strike a nerve and allow them to fill it in themselves.

Sometimes I am preachy, but I don't want to be—that's not the way I see the mystery. That's not the way that I see Christ. I see him as a person, not as a lesson that's being driven home. I want people to *meet* him, to meet the mystery, to see the mystery, to love the mystery. I think my poetry is a failure if the reader doesn't say, "Something's behind this. Let me dig…"

[1] Rita A. Simmonds, *Bitterness and Sweet love: The Way of the Cross and Other Lenten Poems* (2014), 15.

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RE-SOURCE: CLASSIC TEXT

The Life-Giving Word

GUSTAV SIEWERTH

Gustav Siewerth (1903–1963) was a significant early twentieth-century Catholic philosopher who brought the metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas to bear on modern thought, above all German Idealism and phenomenology. His philosophy had a notable influence both on Hans Urs von Balthasar and Ferdinand Ulrich, the latter of whom adopted principles formulated by Siewerth even as he critically reinterpreted them within his account of being as love.

The present selection is taken from a late work by Siewerth, his Philosophy of Language *(*Philosophie der Sprache [*Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1962], 60–64), a compilation of four interrelated essays that treat the theme of language from various angles, from the grounding of the word in images drawn from corporeal experience to the refinement of speech in poetry and praise. The following excerpt is found in the last pages of the volume's second essay, "The Senses and the Word" ("*Die Sinne und das Wort*"), where the author develops aspects of Thomistic anthropology in a mode that is marked by his reading of Heidegger in the thirties and forties on the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin.*

The selection was translated from the original German by Erik van Versendaal.

Giving Names

Where does the word end up when it dies away (*verhallt*)? It does not "go under" into empty nothingness, but resonates (*hallt*) there where the vibration (*Hall*) of speech was directed. That is, speech is either kept in the heart of its addressee, wondrously gifting him on its winged couriers, or else it reverberates in the very things it invokes, in the natures to which it refers. What this means is clarified if we unfold the metaphysical essence of the mother tongue. If the perceiving child safeguards the images of his world, these nevertheless remain enveloped for him in a shadowy silence. But when the mother bestows her loving speech on the child, she sends winged words that appeal and refer to things like intimate messages of love. These words vanish in being sounded, only to let their spirited pictures, drawn from the heart, continue ringing in the things they bespeak. In this way, things themselves become familiar and even homelike to us in the love-breath of maternal speech, and are endowed with the graciousness of its words, which whisperingly caress these things and call them into life. From

now on the child sees the “chair” or the “puppet” when it is spoken of, and he cannot turn toward any nature without that maternal word chiming along with it as its name. To give things their names means to reproduce them (*sie einzeugen*) in the life of the heart. Only insofar as something is born-forth and attested to (*bezeugt*) in being named can it be for us a familiar thing (*Zeug*) with which we dwell and work.

The Poetic Word

Through the word’s kenosis into the thing and its rising as the name, speech proceeds in “unison” with the thing and the thing with speech. The word *is* the thing. Since we today write the word on paper and so perceive it as an image out of letters, we have forgotten that at one time the word only rung out in the thing and that the thing was only vibrant in the word. Thunder truly quakes in being uttered, and lightning shoots and shocks and blinds with rending force when it is said. In speech’s care for the essence of beings lies the truth that the word shows forth the thing itself. So just as God created the world out of nothing, the poet fashions a world in the word. It is not our envisaging that imitatively reproduces whatever is poetic in a poem, but rather the words of the poem are that which give life *to us*. The gleam in the appearance of things that stems from our own imagination plays only a lesser role when, for instance, we hear:

Therefore, since all around us are heaped

The summits of Time,

And the most beloved dwell nearby, wearing away

On mountains most separate,

Give us innocent water,

O pinions give us, with minds most faithful

To cross over and to return.[1]

The poem is its own word. Everything that would be brought before the imagination beside and beyond the words we hear will be misleading and distracting compared to that which is called upon in the word itself—that which the word gathers before our vision, for our encounter, and as an event.

The Essential Wealth of Speech

So the perceptive gathering of linguistic reason unifies the living tree of our sensory power with the tree of the world, whose summit is the luminous sky, whose ground is the dark soil, and whose trunk comprises trees, mountains, the air, people. But reason transcends all of these into being, which pervades, unifies, and grants all things, and indeed in its unifying abyss of light and its godly night everlastingly releases itself from all things earthly. Being is the “absolute” or the “released” (*das Abgelöste*), just as it is at the same time that which is most resolutely near. Being is the revelation of God himself in his “images,” which at once profoundly conceal him.

Because the power of being as released and releasing prevails in speech, the expressive word holds the thing fast, opens it up into its truly abiding unity, and brings it within reason’s firm grasp. That which the word holds together and grounds it also places into the freedom of the

“absolved,” so that the collecting power of the logos repairs what is broken, refers in its judgments to being qua being, and in being itself lets existing things stand-forth and remain themselves, giving birth thereby to metaphysical discourse. Insofar, however, as being itself comes into language, every sentence will be pervaded by being’s essential, grounding, unifying, and exhibiting power, and the natures it names will refer in the darkling light of unmoved being to God, the ground of all principles. When language is carried out in accord with its own proper character, it places all images and appearances into the essential, rendering them into sensory signs that point the way to God. Language thus endows the poet with the illuminating power for the truth and goodness of natures. Because the poet is inspired by God, he can bring to expression essential and ontological depths in the word’s vibrant reflection of reality. The poetic proclamation is lit-through by the truth of being, provided the word has gathered up the clarifying strength to penetrate and mirror the world within reflective thought. The poet thus lives out of the wisdom of language, and its inner power “to espouse” (*Vermählungskraft*) what is.

The Essential Light of Images

What releases the image into the essential and divests its appearance is the “shine” of being, whose original and revelatory radiance is distinguished by way of the word from superficial vagueness and deceptive seeming, and in this word is brought into its essential manifestation. All beholding clears itself out in its unveiling into the truth of an essential vision, whether this be the metaphysical word that says being or the Word of God that calls for a decisive judgment. He to whom the image yields the disclosure and arrival of being in its abiding, along with the collected peace that comes with the simultaneous extroversion and introversion in the act of beholding, lets the word of being prevail over every step and in every domain of understanding and instruction. He it is who attends silently and perceptively to the word of the poet, recollecting himself in the quiet of the heart’s listening—for “the word’s power waxes as it sleeps.”[2] As Hölderlin later sings:

He must suffer beforehand;

but now he names that which he loves most.

Now, words for it must, now,

Rise forth like flowers.[3]

Gustav Siewerth (1903–1963) was a German philosopher.

[1] Friedrich Hölderlin, “Patmos,” trans. Michael Hamburger, translation slightly modified.

[2] Friedrich Hölderlin, “Bread and Wine,” stanza 4.

[3] *Ibid.*, stanza 5.