

IN THIS ISSUE

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It is one thing to claim that explanatory discourse has no special purchase on reality but substantially a different thing to claim that poetic discourse has a purchase on reality to which explanation cannot aspire. These two claims, however, are often mistaken for each other, perhaps because those who make the former would prefer to make the latter (but cannot find a way to do so without self-contradiction). A few have pulled it off, though, and none better than Friedrich Schlegel in 1800. His *Dialogue on Poetry*, published in his journal the *Athenaeum*, where Romanticism was conceived and delivered, opens with his call for a critics' language more in harmony with that of poets, and the *Dialogue* itself is a seriocomic drama interspersed with lectures, given from the various perspectives of four friends. Before the lectures begin, Schlegel in his own voice argues that explication is unable to transmit the sense and feel of a creation, whether divine or human—that just as artworks are recreations of the divine creation, so works of criticism should recreate the artworks with which they interact. “Only through form and color,” he writes, “can man recreate his own creation, and thus one cannot really speak of poetry except in the language of poetry.”¹

1. Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, ed. and trans. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968), 54.

It is this argument that accounts for the inclusion here of an excerpt from “Pøtential Lives” by Camille de Toledo, which takes a good step beyond the argument that Schlegel makes. In his fiction, Toledo incorporates self-exegesis of a sort intimating (a) that only the author of this work can explain it, or (b) that even the author is puzzled by it, and therefore (c) that scholars should keep a respectful distance from it. Suggesting a premise the opposite of Toledo’s, the poem “5 for Gris, 5 for Morandi” by Jeffrey Yang is an acute and exigent contribution to scholarship on the art of Juan Gris and Giorgio Morandi. While Toledo’s fiction invites readers to feel that only its author is positioned to discuss the work and that nonfiction generally has little of value to say about fiction, Yang’s poem invites us to feel that writing about one art in the language of another, however different the two arts may be, is more effective and profound than writing about any art in prosaic prose. It is not that either Yang or Toledo calls on artists to do the work of academics; it is rather that academics are being asked to admit they are aware that the languages of explanation and interpretation, or even those of contextualization and description, are inimical to art and result frequently—one might even say, normatively—in misrepresentation.

Still, poets are called upon, now and again, to do professors’ work. The call comes in two forms, “triumphalist” and “defeatist.” In the latter variant, poets in general are challenged by dissident colleagues to write exclusively didactic poetry, and to write it with the logical, linear clarity and straightforward syntax of rigorous yet easily followed argumentative prose. An example of defeatism, in this special sense, would be Donald Davie’s book *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (1952).² It is defeatist only in that poets are encouraged there to surrender the peculiarities of poetry, at least of modern poetry, in order that Russell and Plato, let us say, could read the resulting verse and pronounce it morally edifying. In the triumphalist variant, professors are challenged to write like poets, modern lyric poets: Jan Zwicky’s essays in the first part of our colloquium on lyric philosophy are samples of this approach.³ *The Birth of Peace*, a ballet libretto that René Descartes, of all people, wrote for a command performance and that appears here in a new English translation, falls into neither of these categories. Descartes was not writing as a poet making a professor’s argument in verse, or as a poet showing professors how to write scholarship poetically, but as a philosopher composing an earnest but amiable poem on a subject that philosophers typically disregard. It is interesting that, when they take it up, philosophers typically do so in a genre of fiction: the greatest modern argument for pacifism, Erasmus’s *Querela Pacis* (1521), represents itself as a monologue in which Peace herself arraigns the human race. It is also interesting, given Zwicky’s criticism of what could be termed

2. Donald Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse*, rev. ed. with postscript (1952; repr., London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967).

3. Jan Zwicky, “What Is Lyric Philosophy? An Introduction” and “Imagination and the Good Life,” *Common Knowledge* 20, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 14–45.

Cartesian procedures of philosophical writing, that the man to whom the adjective *Cartesian* first applied wrote verse of some ambition on a philosophical topic.

What all of these experiments along the frontier between poetry and philosophy—between poets’ and professors’ work—have in common is an aspiration toward what Schlegel referred to as *Symphilosophie*. He wrote of “the poeticizing philosopher, the philosophizing poet” and claimed that each “is a prophet” (*Athenaeum* Fragment 249).⁴ The two poles incline toward each other, he reasoned, because philosophy “is the result of two conflicting forces—of poetry and practice. Where these two interpenetrate completely and fuse into one, there philosophy comes into being. . . . The most sublime philosophy, some few surmise, may once again turn to poetry” (*Athenaeum* Fragment 304).⁵ In the two parts of our colloquium on lyric philosophy, the responses to Zwicky’s essays replicate the range of reactions over the past two centuries to Schlegel’s dream of *Symphilosophie*. Meanwhile, a related argument of Schlegel’s has gone largely undiscussed. Unlike other advocates of experimental mixtures, such as lyric philosophy and “creative criticism,” Schlegel was chiefly interested in historical discourse. He thought that history, like poetry, could be a means of addressing in a nontheoretical way what appear to be theoretical issues. Like the philosopher, according to Schlegel’s character Andrea in the *Dialogue on Poetry*, the historian’s focus is on the nature and definition of things. Unlike the maker of theories, however, Andrea’s historian insists that “things” are nothing but potentialities in flux and that the process-conscious methods of historical scholarship are better able to discern patterns of development than is any other methodology. In the context of aesthetics, Andrea’s main claim is that the appeal for creative criticism is met by the discipline of literary history. In other words, history is the most poetic way of dealing with poetry. I found this argument and conclusion exciting at one time, and even now I would suggest revisiting Schlegel’s *Dialogue* to all the contributors to “Experimental Scholarship,” who, whatever their disagreements, seem agreed that the primary intellectual genres are philosophical and literary, rather than historical, in tendency.

But these days my pressing concern is the relationship between history and pedagogy. Too much history is made in and around Jerusalem, where I live, for any mind to process, let alone to teach or learn. On the night of Monday, August 19, 2013, a firebomb was thrown into the entrance hall of the Beit Jamal Monastery, near Jerusalem—home to the Roman Catholic Sisters of Bethlehem—in what Israelis have learned to call a “‘price tag’ incident.” The perpetrators sprayed the monastery walls in Hebrew with the words “price tag,” “death to the gentiles,” and “revenge.” According to the Tel Aviv newspaper *Haaretz*, “footage from secu-

4. Friedrich Schlegel’s “*Lucinde*” and the “*Fragments*,” trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 197.

5. Friedrich Schlegel’s “*Lucinde*” and the “*Fragments*,” 205.

rity cameras shows fire burning for several minutes, but no vegetation or wooden furniture caught fire and it died out. ‘The nuns are in shock. They’re the most nonviolent people there are. They say they have good relations with the Jews. Why would they do this,’ asked R., an Israeli woman close to the nuns.”⁶ Indeed, the Sisters’ compound includes a section, built by the nuns themselves, designed to be a synagogue, the “Jamal” of Beit Jamal being Rabban Gamaliel I, whom St. Paul mentions favorably in Acts 5:34ff. and who (according to the Gemara, in Shabbat 15a) was the grandson of Rabbi Hillel the Elder and president of the Great Sanhedrin. Gamaliel I and Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr, are both said to be buried at Beit Jamal, along with Nicodemus, a Jew treated with honor in the Gospel of John, chapters 7 and 19.

Earlier in the summer of 2013, on July 1, “a Jewish right-wing activist aged 22 was arrested . . . in connection with a suspected ‘price tag’ attack” on the Trappist Abbey of Notre-Dame de Sept Douleurs at Latrun. The suspect was reportedly from the ultra-Orthodox town of Bnei Brak, near Tel Aviv. “The arson and graffiti found at the Latrun site last September [2012] were believed to have been revenge for the evacuation of Migron, a settlement outpost in the West Bank. Graffiti sprayed on the monastery walls included the words ‘Migron,’ and ‘Jesus is a monkey.’”⁷ “Jesus, drop dead” had been among the graffiti sprayed on an exterior wall of the medieval Orthodox Monastery of the Cross on February 7, 2012 (a second act of vandalism would be committed there later in the year). “Death to Christianity,” “Jesus is dead,” and “Mary was a whore” were scrawled on the Jerusalem Baptist Church, along with the slogan “price tag,” on February 20. The entrance to the Franciscans’ Dormition Abbey on Mount Zion, traditional site of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, was painted with graffiti on October 3, 2012: “Jesus, son of a whore” and “price tag.” Most recently, on October 6, 2013, fifteen tombstones were smashed in a Protestant cemetery on Mount Zion: “especially severe damage” was done “to any crosses” that the perpetrators found.⁸

If acts of vandalism and arson of this type were directed at an Israeli government or military location, at a Hamas position in Gaza, or at a facility owned by a foreign state or an NGO pressuring Israel to withdraw from the West Bank, the label “price tag” would make a kind of sense. But how, in what context, by what logic, could it be considered payback to target Christians—chiefly monastic and European, or anglophone—who have come to live and die in the Holy Land?

6. Nir Hasson and the Associated Press, “Monastery near Jerusalem Defaced in Suspected ‘Price Tag’ Attack,” *Haaretz*, August 21, 2013, www.haaretz.com/news/national/1.542771.

7. Yaniv Kubovich, “Right-Wing Activist Arrested in Connection with ‘Price Tag’ Attack on Monastery,” *Haaretz*, July 1, 2013, www.haaretz.com/news/national/1.533096.

8. Nir Hasson, “Vandals Smash Gravestones of Prominent Historical Figures at Jerusalem Cemetery,” *Haaretz*, October 7, 2013, www.haaretz.com/news/national/premium-1.550703.

In correspondence about these incidents, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Dr. Fouad Twal, has suggested that the perpetrators are poorly educated and that “better education” is the answer—by which I do not assume he means that Israeli young people in general have educations more “refined and well formed” than the vandals do.⁹ Monks and priests in the Old City of Jerusalem are regularly spit at by ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students whose education is, by some measures, peerless. The trouble is that such students, among the many subjects that they are never taught, are not taught history at all, while Israeli public schools almost exclusively teach Jewish history, and even then Jewish history of just the last one hundred fifty years. When students are exposed to “general history,” as it is called in Israel, Jewish persecution by gentiles, throughout the world and at all times, is taken for granted as structurally given. History is presumed, in other words, to be a simple study, half the nouns used in teaching it being accusative and half nominative, with all the verbs being transitive and categorical. This approach to learning predictably instills in students a belief, kept ordinarily tacit, that at last “we” are poised to even the score with “them.” Hence the wholesale quality of the motto “Death to the gentiles.” A different kind of education, arising from a different kind of historical scholarship, is plainly required.

But what kind? If the trouble with education in Israel, and in the Middle East generally, is that students are taught only one historical narrative, along with such facts as correspond to it, then empirical historiography might be a pill worth trying to swallow. Schlegel, however, advised against that prescription. While not an advocate of tendentious historiography, he did write, in *Athenaeum* Fragment 226, against the idea that empiricist neutrality was possible:

Since people are always so much against hypotheses, they should try sometime to begin studying history without one. It's impossible to say that a thing is, without saying what it is. In the very process of thinking of facts, one relates them to concepts, and, surely, it is not a matter of indifference to which. . . . One flatters oneself that one has established a pure solid empiricism quite a posteriori, when what one actually has is an a priori outlook that's highly one-sided, dogmatic and transcendental.¹⁰

Colin Richmond, in this issue of *Common Knowledge*, sets out to show that an empirical alternative to tendentious and interpretive historiography is indeed possible. Richmond is not a historian short on opinions; he has appeared, at times in his career, to engage in present-day combat against the peerage of medieval England. His efforts to evade biases and preempt foregone conclusions are so

9. His Beatitude the Most Rev. Dr. Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, e-mails to the author, August 22, 2013, and September 5, 2012.

10. Friedrich Schlegel's "Lucinde" and the "Fragments," 193.

evident in his latest work, however, that some readers may protest he has left his job as a historian half-done. He suggests, in “The Advent of the Tasburghs,” his own readings of texts and circumstances largely in the form of questions, as if he were writing marginalia for his own later use while reading. Apart from one (apparently irresistible) volley against the Henrician Reformation, Richmond leaves readers uncoerced as they receive by indirection his guidance in examining the texts of the documents he has unearthed. It is mainly Richmond’s title that affects our response to the raw fruits of his research, and then only to the extent that the title “Still Life” might do to a plate of them. “The Advent of the Tasburghs” is as indeterminate—or, rather, undetermining—a name as could be assigned. We know what to expect from studies that bear titles like *The Origins of the English Novel* and *The Rise of the Novel*, but what if Michael McKeon and Ian Watt had substituted *Advent* for *Origins* and *Rise*?¹¹ McKeon’s implication of etiology or teleology, and Watt’s of teleology or triumphalism, would be gone or, at least, diminished. Richmond does all the archival work for us to arrive at our own hypotheses, though as an educator he does indicate where he thinks the import of this material may be found.

Richmond’s article is in all of these ways a gift to anyone interested in how rurality related to urbanity in a certain place at a given time, and perhaps also to anyone interested in the meaning of the word *urbane*. A sufficient quantity of gifts of this description and quality could help in training new generations to teach and study history in less preinterpreted forms. Historiography of this order might be regarded as “postcritical,” even though critique, as Schlegel reminds us, is of course involved in the historian’s choice and framing of research topics. Casper Bruun Jensen deploys the term *postcritical* in his article here, not as implying neutrality and comprehensiveness, but as implying a positive relation to the virtues of hope and faith. What this relationship would mean in the social sciences and how it would read on the page are as yet unestablished but should come into focus as the three theorists whom Jensen most closely examines (Hirokazu Miyazaki, Richard Rottenburg, and Helen Verran) respond to his essay in our Fall 2014 issue. I will be interested especially to see if, in the context of their discussion, *postcritical* turns out to mean *charitable*, even if hope and faith are the only Pauline virtues invoked in Jensen’s article. Being the most pharisaic of the virtues, *charity* is the most likely to have practical consequences, especially if *caritas* is defined in Rowan Williams’s way, as “a room with no view.”¹² Charitable empiricism may

11. Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

12. Rowan Williams, *Silence and Honeycakes: The Wisdom of the Desert* (Oxford: Lion, 2003), 87. See also Jeffrey M. Perl, “Postmodern Disarmament,” in *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), 326–47, at 339–42.

be required in a situation like the one I have described obtaining in Jerusalem—a charitable and imaginative empiricism, for students here, in my experience as a teacher, are short on historical imagination and curiosity. Instead of asking questions like “*What else* could this set of facts and details tell us?,” they ask—I have faced this question, in just these words, on any number of occasions—“Is this everyone, or just you?” That wording, as I have come to understand it, implies the existence of a monolithic consensus with which the questioner identifies before knowing its full contents, and from which there are dissidents that the questioner has no need to mind.

On a more elevated if less consequential plane, I find the same frame of mind operative in academic book reviews. The reviewer, an expert on the same topic as the new book’s author, comes to the task with a ready set of opinions against which the new book is tested. What if, instead, editors chose reviewers whose expertise was less on the topic of any book under discussion than on developing imaginative alternative readings of the evidence presented? What if the reviewer of a work of history or the teacher of a course on history were expected (by editors, by education ministers) to offer readers and students as extensive a range of interpretive frameworks as is conceivable in response to any historical claim or body of research? For a future issue of this journal, I am writing such a review now—a piece of experimental scholarship whose aim will be to test consensual beliefs about the relationship of synagogue and church against whole hosts of unimaginably charitable possibilities.