

PRESENTATION

Poetry and musing: philosophising poetry

Celia Pedrosa^a 

Patricia Lavelle^b 

Since its origins, philosophy has made poetry and the poetic a subject of enquiry, questioning its essence, and reaffirming and extending the movement by which philosophy defines itself. In the dialogue that sets Socrates against the rhapsodist Ion, Plato suggests, in response, that poetic creation is of divine origin, sustaining an understanding of inspiration or rhapsody that denies the poet any knowledge or capacity to think about reality. Inspired by the Muses, a poet literally could not know what he was talking about or how he did what he did, even as he revealed truth through his verse. In the twentieth century, Heidegger also placed the poetic on a non-cognitive plane, a plane of fundamental ontology. In his essays from the 1930s, it is the being of language – like the divine before it – that speaks to us in inspired poetry. According to his criticism in the essay *Parataxis*, Adorno thus projects his own philosophy onto the poet he features, Hölderlin, without considering this author's effective dialogue with the currents of philosophical idealism present at the time he was writing.

^aUniversidade Federal Fluminense. Niterói, RJ, Brasil.

E-mail: artecelia@gmail.com

^bPontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil.

E-mail: patricia.g.lavelle@gmail.com

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In contrast with this mental schema which Heidegger also adopts in his interpretation of pre-Socratic thinking, the works of Barbara Cassin on Parmenides' poem, Homer and the sophists suggest other more porous traditions for discussing the relationship between poetry and philosophy. Focusing on reciprocal loans and passages between concrete texts, her research, discussed in the interview that opens this dossier, points both to the use of poetic materials within the work of philosophical conceptualisation and also to the plurality of the theoretical and conceptual investigations and instigations contained in the poems. Similarly, in the article "Historia de un Amor Imposible. Escenas Filosóficas del Régimen Poético" [Story of Impossible Love. Philosophical Scenes from the Regime of Poetry], Matias Moscardi focuses on what he calls "scenes from the regime of poetry", in allusion to Jacques Rancière, to reflect on the chronotopic value acquired by reflections about poetry since Platonic thinking, according to which poetry performs the symbolic functions of origin and purpose vis-a-vis philosophy and of setting the limits of its form. These relationships are also seen here as a sign of an unequivocal bond that deconstructs the traditional hierarchy between these two types of discourse.

In a rereading of the philosophical tradition, it is worth bringing to mind some thought-provoking reflections on the interplays and hybridisations of the two discursive registers, such as those to be found in Vico's logic of imagination, in Hamann's metacriticism, in the symbolical presentation of ideas as conceived by Kant in *Critique of Judgement*, in certain Romantic formulations on philosophical style and literary criticism, or even in Nietzsche's formulations on the metaphor in the unfinished essay *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*. But with few exceptions, philosophical musings on the interfaces between theoretical and poetic registers have had a limited and relatively marginal reception within the history of philosophy. Nevertheless, throughout the twentieth century and even today, the number of attempts by philosophers to turn their minds to the relationships between poetry and philosophy, even scrutinising the materiality of their own truths, seen as an effect of different and often unforeseen discursive procedures, has multiplied and intensified.

Accordingly, we are drawn back to the thinking of Jacques Rancière, reviewing positively the unwarranted value attributed since Plato to lyricism on account of the putatively insurmountable opposition between self-expression and epic or dramatic representation. Rancière sets about tackling the emptiness representative of the Self and initially comprehends poetry as a means of subjective investment and movement toward the Other, focusing, in “The Transports of Liberty” and other essays from the book *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*¹, on the different modes by which this was realised in twentieth century poetics.

¹Rancière, Jacques, *The Flesh of Words: the Politics of Writing*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2004.

But as early as 1925, in the prologue to his book on baroque drama, Walter Benjamin presents poetry as a prime genre for philosophical expression. In this essay, he states that “it is characteristic of philosophical writing that it must continually confront the question of representation”², which, he proposes, implies that the historicity of philosophical doctrines in their multiple forms of representation is intersected not just by conceptual constructs, but also by symbolical constellations or “dialectic images”, in the terminology of his constructivist theory of history. It is no coincidence that his thinking has also been embraced in the realm of poetry. In his article “Constelações da Barbárie: História e Memória na Poesia de Paul Celan” [Constellations of Barbarism: History and Memory in the Poetry of Paul Celan], Jorge Benedito de Freitas Teodoro discusses the work of Paul Celan in the light of Benjamin’s ideas, stressing how the experience of his thinking engenders in it a critical reworking of lived experience in historical constellations.

²Benjamin, Walter, “Epistemo-Critical Prologue”, in: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne, London/New York: Verso, 1998/1963, p. 27.

More recently, Hans Blumenberg also addresses the textual materiality and historicity of the philosophical tradition itself, pointing to its “immanent poetics”³. He goes on to propose the historical study of philosophical metaphors based on the hypothesis that they do not just prefigure conceptual formulations, but often defy being transposed into concepts, taking on fundamental positions within philosophical arguments, however systematic these may be. It is in his work that we find the notion of *Nachdenklichkeit* (musing), understood as a way of thinking with no predetermined objective, a dispersed state of thinking that stems from hesitation before certain choices of meaning, object or action. A game space,

³H. Blumenberg. “Sprachsituation und immanente Poetik”, in: *Wirklichkeiten in denen wir leben*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999.

Blumenberg sustains, *Nachdenklichkeit* has to do with the origins of philosophical arguments in the world of life, where it acquires its kinship with poetry. Although he does not quote it, we would hazard to draw a parallel between this hypothesis with the well-known quotation by Sappho: “I know not what to do: I am of two minds”⁴.

⁴Sappho, *The Songs of Sappho*, Larchmont: Peter Pauper Press, 1942.

Blumenberg’s studies of “metaphorology”, sadly little known in Brazil, are contemporary to some important works by Paul Ricoeur on metaphor and narrative and Derrida’s deconstruction project, with which it has much in common. Taking a different angle, Derrida also wrote on the metaphorical dimension of theoretical concepts, while also seeking to draw parallels with works of several poets. In “Perdoar, a propósito de Derrida” [Forgiveness, with Respect to Derrida], Marcos Siscar discusses how the classical issue of hierarchy among genres is questioned and reworked by Derrida in the light of the different modes by which philosophy and art respond to the demand for *deconstruction*. Presenting himself as a poet and long-time reader of Derrida, Siscar shows how the Algerian-born French philosopher blurred the boundaries between discursive registers in his own writing and entered into dialogue with the materiality of poetry. But this essay also criticises Derrida’s approach, with its gaze turned exclusively to the poetic text itself, indicating a kind of idealisation of its truth to the detriment of the intellectual coherence of the thinking contained in a work, understood in an expanded meaning that includes its discursive context.

Contemporary poetry has been particularly insistent on interacting with reflective thinking in different ways: whether through direct or indirect citations of works or texts of philosophy or by incorporating ethical, political or aesthetic concerns into its composition, or even through stylistically hybridising the genres of poetry and the essay. We therefore envisage a critical perspective that takes the enigmatic materiality of poems as its starting point or point of arrival, while endeavouring not to produce a generalized dilution of the philosophical with the poetic which fails to take due account of both the reflective and the imaginative and their specific methods of hybridisation.

For instance, it is interesting to observe how effective an impact Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophical position has had

on contemporary poets, particularly English language ones – a position that shuns any interest in poetic essentialism and turns, rather, to the study, both ethical and logical, of language, understood as a set of propositions whose articulation is homologous to the contextualising articulation of the things of the world. This perspective makes any traditional hierarchy between denotative and connotative meanings of words or expressions outdated, opening the way for the recognition and appreciation of literal procedures – colloquial and not – stemming from literary practice which were responsible for nourishing important trends in the twentieth century.

In “Context is All: the Language Games of Charles Bernstein”, Marjorie Perloff confronts the poetic and analytical uses of language as proposed by Wittgenstein with the work of the American poet, responsible for founding and theorising the self-named “language poetry” movement. In a perusal of one of his poems, Perloff shows us how patterns of comprehension and even taste can be relativised if, by drawing on the assumptions propounded by Wittgenstein, we abandon the distinction between high and low language and learn to pursue meanings in their common, concrete, contextual games and uses. In contemporary Brazilian poetry, the work of Paulo Henriques Britto also shows traces of a close reading of Wittgenstein and other thinkers, as noted by Filipe Manzoni in “Este Poema Ainda Não é para Você – Sobre Paulo Henriques Britto” [This Poem Is Not Yet for You – on Paulo Henriques Britto], in which he focuses on the relationship between deixis and the destabilisation of referentiality, associating them with the recurring use, in Britto’s poems, of the first person and metapoetic reflection. A detailed reading of a single verse by the poet underpins an inverted reflection on the philosophy of language based on the poem, which, the author sustains, serves as its basis.

Paula Glenadel deals with poetic musing in its relationship with visual imagery from a comparative perspective in the article “Paradoxos e Promessas da Natureza-Morta em Poesia: Notas de Leitura sobre a Poeta Brasileira Lu Menezes e a Francesa Suzanne Doppelt” [Paradoxes and Promises of Still Life in Poetry: Notes on the Brazilian Poet Lu Menezes and the French Poet Suzanne Doppelt]. The two poets in question are already recognised for the importance their work gives

to the relationships between the verbal and the visual and, more specifically, between poetry and painting (Menezes) and photography (Doppelt). The text focuses specifically on the still life and the way the poems depict an ambivalent philosophy of the image which invests in the tension between representative value and expressive value. Meanwhile, in “Música e Poesia Pura: o Fim de um Paradigma” [Music and Pure Poetry: the End of a Paradigm], William Marx⁵ probes the relationship between poetry and music, commenting on a theoretical and poetic discussion which involved the abbot and member of the French Academy, Henri Bremond, and the writer Paul Valéry known as the “quarrel over pure poetry”. This episode, considered symptomatic of the crises and transformations in modern French poetry, serves as a motivation for assessing the importance of the relationship between sound and meaning, symbol and thinking, while at the same time considering and problematising the materiality of language.

Moving on, we have an epigraph borrowed from the Portuguese poet Ana Hatherly: “In art, the only reality that is actually possible is the one we make up”. This epigraph, echoing the preceding reflections on image, imagination and representation, serves as a starting point for the article by Edimilson Almeida Pereira, whose title also blends the verbal and visual: “A Realidade – Teia para o Pensamento” [Reality – a Web for Thinking]. In it, Pereira picks up on the ever-thorny issue of the relationship between social reality and poetic language, in which he seeks to identify reflectivity and relative autonomy, for which he draws on poets of different styles and periods and addresses the effects wrought by the acceleration of experiences and information in contemporary digital life. To develop this issue, Pereira weaves a singular web that interconnects the essays of Octavio Paz and the poetry of Sebastião Uchoa Leite, reinvesting in the power of African Diasporic thinking such as that found in the writings of Édouard Glissant.

A finely woven diversity of traditions also sustains the article “Poesia e Pensamento em Herberto Helder: o Saber Extremo Irredutível de um Discurso sem Palavras” [Poetry and Thinking in Herberto Helder: the Irreducible Extreme Knowledge of a Discourse without Words], by Erick Costa. In it, Costa focuses on the convergences and divergences between

⁵This article was originally published in French in the journal *Poétique* (Seuil, September 2002).

poetry and philosophy by analysing the way the performance of the relationship between body, thinking and language, and their metaphorical and rhythmic singularisation, between truth and fantasy, turning for this purpose to such diverse spatial and temporal groundings as those of the Italian Giorgio Agamben and the German Eugen Harrigel, devoted to the study of Japanese koans, as well as the essays of José Gil and Silvina Rodrigues Lopes, both from Portugal.

Motivated by quite different questions, “O Poema-Pensamento em Roberto Juarroz” [Poem-Thinking in Roberto Juarroz], by Gustavo de Castro, analyses the interaction between word, silence and verticality in the Argentinean poet’s “vertical fragments”, based on his existential and ethical comprehension of poetry as “way of living” and “way of being”, for which he brings together the thinking of Heidegger and Wittgenstein. This relationship is also the subject of attention in the aphoristic construction of his texts, which inspire the author to construct relationships between Rainer Maria Rilke and Gaston Bachelard.

Meanwhile, in “Amor Filosófico, Amor Poético: Conformações do Pensamento em António Franco Alexandre” [Philosophical Love, Poetic Love: Patterns of Thinking in António Franco Alexandre] Ana Cristina Joaquim draws inspiration from discourses of different orders and origins to put the book of poems *Duende*, published in 2002, in dialogue with the 1933 speech *Theory and Play of the Duende*, by Federico García Lorca. Associating love with thinking, and thinking about love, Joaquim blurs the line dividing the discursive practices of poetry and philosophy, bringing forth interplays of repetition and difference, identity and alterity, impersonality and biographism in both, for which she draws connections between different thinkers – Parmenides and Heraclitus, Nietzsche, Deleuze and Derrida.

In “A Voz Oracular de Francisco Carvalho” [The Oracular Voice of Francisco Carvalho], Renato Suttana addresses the Brazilian poet’s output spanning six decades, questioning the motives behind its muted critical reception and seeking to identify in it a confluence of modern and modernist tradition and echoes of Portuguese classicism. In this confluence he analyses the relationship between lived experience and a mythical and imaginary elaboration that exerts an expansive

effect on it, also lending it a prophetic or oracular overtone which turns thinking and meaning into movements of opening and questioning, following the influence of Maurice Blanchot's reflection.

Also in a bid to refresh the critical canon, Wesley Thales de Almeida Rocha's text "A Paisagem como Fonte ou Veículo para o Pensamento na Poesia de Cecília Meireles" [Landscape as a Source or Vehicle for Thinking in the Poetry of Cecília Meireles] develops the relationship between poetry and thinking through figurations of nature which inspire metaphysical and metapoetic enquiry. Rocha thereby seeks to expand the connection between poetry and lyricism, between perception, affective expression and reflection, showing the transformation of sensitive experience in a symbolic constellation of meanings. Interest in the notion of landscape and images of nature can also be seen in the article by Alessandra Maia Terra de Faria entitled "Hilda Machado e a Poesia em Movimentos Nublados" [Hilda Machado and Poetry in Cloudy Movements], based on an analysis of the poem "Cabo Frio", from the posthumous book *Nuvens* [Clouds], seeking the subjectifying value of fluidity and spatialisation in the relationship between images of natural and cultural landscapes. Referring to the book's title, Faria draws links between the poem and the Greek tradition of philosophy and theatre, especially Socratic dialogue, the myth of Orpheus and the dramatic work of Euripides and Aristophanes, highlighting the fact that Aristophanes wrote a comedy of the same name as Machado's book and stressing its links with the woman's place in Antiquity and contemporaneity.

The topic of landscape leads us to the thinking of Jean-Luc Nancy. Without completely shunning the tradition of ontology, he invests, among other things, in a reflection on the diversity and similarities of art forms, including poetry, as in *The Muses*⁶, or the differential constitution of the landscape-image, relating it to a political and historical understanding derived from the etymological roots of the term *paysage* and its relationship with *pays* and *paysan*, as in *The Ground of the Image*⁷. When he states that "poetry is essentially more than and different from the poem itself", as in "Faire, la poésie"⁸, he invites the reader to think about the productive paradox that makes this essence or property a synonym for opening

⁶Nancy, Jean-Luc, *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1997.

⁷Nancy, Jean-Luc, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

⁸From the Portuguese translation: Nancy, Jean-Luc. Fazer, a poesia, trans. Letícia Della Giacoma de França, Janaina Ravagnano and Maurício Mendonça Cardozo. *Alea*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 15, n. 2, p. 414-422, jul-dez 2013.

up precisely to what is inherent to it, and to relativise any transcendent identity attributable to the poetic.

This issue of *Gragoatá* shines new light on the parallels and tensions between philosophy and poetry through their diverse perspectives, while also urging us to interrogate the uses that poems themselves make of the tradition of philosophical images, notions, concepts and discourses. The essays written by the philosopher Maria Filomena Molder encapsulate well the productivity of this dialogue by working with motifs that interconnect theoretical and literary texts from different times and cultural traditions.

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Celia Pedrosa possui mestrado (1977) e doutorado (1988) em Letras pela Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, onde também lecionou Literatura Brasileira e Teoria da Literatura de 1977 a 1988. Desde 1988 leciona em regime de DE na Universidade Federal Fluminense, onde exerceu as funções de chefe e subchefe do Departamento de Ciências da Linguagem e de coordenadora e vice-coordenadora do Programa de PG em Letras, sendo hoje Professor Associado IV. Desenvolveu pesquisa sobre teoria e crítica literárias modernas e contemporâneas, tendo sobre o tema o livro *Antonio Candido: a palavra empenhada*, publicado pela EdUSP/EdUFF, e outros ensaios no Brasil e no exterior. Atualmente dedica-se ao estudo de poesia contemporânea, tema em torno do qual desenvolveu estágio de pós-doutoramento na Universidade do Porto (Portugal), além de ter publicado inúmeros ensaios, uma coletânea de ensaios, *Poesia e contemporaneidade*, e organizado sete livros coletivos - *Poesia hoje* (com os prof. Cláudia Matos e Evando Nascimento), *Mais poesia hoje*, *Poesia e contemporaneidade* e *Poéticas do olhar* e outras leituras de poesia (os dois últimos com a prof. Maria Lucia Barros Camargo), e *Subjetividades em devir*. Estudos de poesia moderna e contemporânea, *Sobre poesia: outras vozes e Crítica de poesia*. *Tendências e questões: Brasil-Portugal*, com a professora Ida Alves. Coordena desde 2002 o grupo de pesquisa UFF/CNPq *Poesia e contemporaneidade*, com a prof. Ida Alves. De 2005 a 2008, coordenou o convênio internacional CAPES-FCT com o Instituto de Literatura Comparada Margarida Losa, da Universidade do Porto, integrando professores e alunos de IC, Mestrado, Doutorado e pesquisadores de Pós-Doutorado em torno do estudo comparativo de poesia contemporânea brasileira e portuguesa. Integra ainda o grupo internacional de pesquisa LYRA - *Compoetics*, formado em 2008, a partir do trabalho nesse convênio, junto a prof. das Universidades do Porto, Salamanca, Utrecht, Sorbonne, Florença, Brown, UFF, UNIFESP e UFRJ. Desde 2003, desenvolve trabalho comparativo sobre poesia contemporânea também com professores e alunos das

Universidades de Buenos Aires e San Andrés, na Argentina. Com professores desta última, da Universidade de Rosário, da UFMG e da PUC-RJ trabalhou de 2009 a 2011 em projeto de organização de REDE Internacional de pesquisa e ensino em Literatura Brasileira e Comparada. Desde 2009, coordena, junto com a professora Diana Klinger, oriunda dessa equipe argentina, e agora também da UFF, o grupo de pesquisa “Pensamento teórico-crítico sobre o contemporâneo”, que busca dar desdobramento a essas relações. Entre 2013 e 2015 desenvolveu novo projeto de pesquisa, mediante convênio Capes, agora com a Universidade Nova de Lisboa, sobre crítica contemporânea de poesia no Brasil e em Portugal. Em 2014 coordena, pela UFF, convênio CAPES-Mincyt com a Universidade Tres de Febrero (Buenos Aires -Argentina), representada pelo professor Daniel Link. Tem atuado como consultora *ad hoc* da FAPERJ, da CAPES e do CNPq – do qual é bolsista de produtividade desde 1989, hoje de nível I-B – e de vários periódicos universitários.

Patricia Lavelle professora adjunta do Departamento de Letras da PUC-Rio, atua no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Literatura, Cultura e Contemporaneidade. Tem doutorado em Filosofia pela École de Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales de Paris (EHESS-Paris) e mestrado em História pela PUC-Rio. É pesquisadora associada ao Centre Georg Simmel (EHESS-Paris) e lecionou como professora convidada na École Normale Supérieure de Paris (ENS-Paris) e na EHESS-Paris. Tem livros publicados e organizados no Brasil e na França. Principais publicações: *O Espelho distorcido*. Imagens do indivíduo no Brasil oitocentista (Editora UFMG, 2003), *Religion et histoire: sur le concept d’expérience chez Walter Benjamin* (Cerf, 2008), *Cahier Walter Benjamin* (organizadora, L’Herne, 2013), *A arte de contar histórias* (organizadora e tradutora, Hedra, 2018). Como poeta, publicou *Bye bye Babel* (7Letras, 2018, primeira menção no Prêmio Cidade de Belo Horizonte de 2016) e co-organizou *O Nervo do poema*. Antologia para Orides Fontela (Relicário, 2018) em colaboração com Paulo Henriques Britto.