

Etymons & Quotes

Or, A Quick Overview of My “Poetics”

I was already done with *Past Mountain Dreaming* when I thought it would be fun, by way of a summing up, to group thematically, as it were, the pertinent etymons through my essays, together with certain quotes (my private mantras) from authors I draw from:

Note: G for Greek; L for Latin, E for English

G / *etymos* - “true”; E / etymon, “the literal meaning of a word according to its origin.”

Thus, the word speaks true, as in “a man of his word.”

L / *lingua* - tongue, language

Thus, the tongue, organ of taste and speech, is a metaphor for language, as to suggest that with our words, we savor our reality.

I. G / *poiein* - “to make”; *poiesis*, “creation”

Thus, a poem is a thing made of words, a verbal construct.

[1] L / *texere*, *textus* - “to weave”, *contexere* - “to weave together”;

E / text, context, texture

Any text then is a word-weave. The end of writing is a perfect wordweave: “the right words in the right order.” (Mark Schorer)

G / *eutaxis* - “eutaxy, or good arrangement”

L / *versus* - “furrows”; E / verses

Thus is implied that the writer works the ground of language even as the farmer works the soil to produce his crop. The writer cultivates his medium which is his Muse - as in the other arts, the medium is the *poetica materia*.

L / *transfere, translatus* - “to carry or ferry across,” whence E / “translate”

Language, in fact, is already *translation*. What we perceive as our reality in our experience we then translate into our words: we ferry or bear across our river of words a thought or feeling without hurt or injury to mind’s import or aim. Thus, writing is translation of a reality perceived or imagined.

G / *metapherein* - “to transfer” (G / *meta* - “after”); E / metaphor: a word or phrase denoting one kind of object or idea is “transferred” (i e, used in place of another) to suggest an analogy or likeness between them.

Figures of speech, figures of thought (Prometheus, Hamlet) are, says John Hollander, “turnings or twistings of sense and reference of words or utterances.” Thus is language itself re-imagined, reinvented, made anew.

[2] G / *agonia*, “struggle, anguish”, ago—n, “gathering, contest for a prize,” from agein, “to lead, celebrate.”

Thus, the writer struggles with his Muse: a contest with language for a prize - the poem or story he has in mind. Albert Camus says, “when the imagination sleeps, words are emptied of their meaning.”

Note: E / forge: from L / *fabrica, faber* - “smith”. The English word has three meanings: to make, form, or bring into being; to copy or counterfeit, imitate, simulate; to move forward, advance.

E / mimesis: from G / mimesis, mimeisthai, “to imitate,” *mimos*, “mime.” Hence, also, E / mimicry.

E / wrought (past and past participle of “work”): “worked into shape by artistry or effort.”

Thus, for the writer, his medium isn't a given, it is *forged*. The written work is *forged or wrought from* a given historical language; thus is the language reinvented or refreshed. Thus, too, an experience, as *lived as imagined*, is *mimed or simulated* in and through a poem, story, or play.

The poem is the real, for what is most imagined is what is most real. The character in story or poem, his action (plot): be that only a thought or a feeling, or his interaction with other characters if any), all these are "the real toad[s] in the imaginary garden" (Marianne Moore).

"The writer's job," says Ezra Pound, "is to make language efficient." And Camus says that a distinctive manner of expression or style renders the "simultaneous existence of reality and of the mind that gives reality its form."

- [3] L / *experiri* - "to try" (akin to L / *periculum*, "attempt; danger")
 G / *empeiria* - "experience" (from G / *peiran*, "to attempt")

From the Latin, we get *experiment, trial*; from the Greek, "empirical." Thus, the *meaningfulness* of the English word, *experience*, from various connotations: to try or attempt; to undergo, pass through, suffer, endure; to fare or go on a journey, where one meets with chance and peril, where nothing is certain.

L / *res* - "thing, fact, what is real"

L / *facere, factus, factum* - "to make, do; a thing done"; E / *fact*

Our "reality" or "world" is only and ever a human reality: our experience, our consciousness, of our environment and affairs; and language -- words, numbers, figures, symbols -- is ever at the edge of it. Robert Frost says that "the humanities are the best description of us," even as science is "our greatest adventure." Albert Camus says, "If the world were clear, art would not be necessary." We make (*facere*) or construct the reality we prefer; e.g., a country's Constitution is the reality a people dream about and strive for.

Il n'y a pas de hors-texte, says Jacques Derrida: "There is nothing outside the text." And perhaps, the elf Puck would gleefully agree: Everything's out there and mocks the text.

Derrida also says: "Perhaps there are forms of thought that think more than does that thought called philosophy." I believe Yves Bonnefoy would agree.

The real is the poem. And -- altogether a different matter -- the poem is the real: at least, the attempt to apprehend and grasp one's experience of reality. "The knowing is in the writing," says Jose Y. Dalisay Jr. Language is, as it were, our writ of habeas corpus on the reality in our experience: thus language evolves.

When one writes, one draws from memory: Mnemosyne, the mother of the Muses. The writer's vocation or calling (from language) is, says Nick Joaquin, "to remember and to sing." And Eduardo Galeano says: "*Recordar* is Spanish, 'to remember,' from Latin *re-cordis*, 'to pass through the heart.'" The profoundest memory, then, is that which has most moved one (be that a most intense sorrow, as with heartbreak), or that which is most cherished.

All else is mystery (G / *mystérion*; *mystes*, "initiate"), even in science. "Everywhere gonads, everywhere eyes," says Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. We may all be "initiates": as T. S. Eliot says in "Little Gidding" --

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

To adopt the title of William Gass' work: the text is "the habitation of the Word." Or, if you will, an incarnation, the flesh of our reality made word.

- [4] G / *kathexis* - cathexis, cathect, cathected - “to invest or endow with mental and/or emotional power or energy.”
 G / *katharsis*, *kathairein* - “to cleanse, purge” / E I catharsis
 G / *dynamis* - “power”
 G / *epideiktikos* - “displaying the skill of the speaker”, E / epideictic, “designed primarily for rhetorical effect,” that is, to persuade and to move.

Thus, the literary work as work of language and work of imagination -- as art -- is basically *epideictic*. Its power to persuade and move its readers is its end, what Aristotle calls the “final cause” of the thing we *call poem* as verbal construct.

All three meanings of the English word, “catharsis” define a literary work’s *dynamis*: “a purification or purgation of the emotions (as pity and fear in Aristotle’s poetics of Greek tragedy) primarily through art; such purgation as brings about spiritual renewal or release from tension; in psychology, elimination of a complex by bringing it to consciousness and affording it expression.”

Horace: L / *dulce et utile* -- Matthew Arnold’s translation: “sweetness and light”; I would translate, “revel and revelation.” That is at the heart of a literary work’s *dynamis*.

Yves Bonnefoy says that the moment of writing, “the poetic moment open[s] the intuition to all that language refuses” or is blind to. The insight is a luminance of thought no idea quite expresses, a radiance of feeling no thought quite conveys.

- [5] G / *krinein* - “to divide [or discriminate] and judge”; thence, E / “criticism, crisis, criterion

A time of crisis then is a time of division and judgment. The criticism of literary works implies differentiation of kinds or types of verbal constructs or structures. Their classification depends on basic principles or assumptions by which a specific kind through its history has been (as one might assume) defined. Experimental or avant-garde writing draws from that history or tradition.

L / *interpretari* - “to negotiate”; *interpre*s - “agent”

The literary work is *already* an interpretation of an experience. To interpret it is to be its “agent.” One “negotiates” with it to come to a settlement of its import or significance. The work, however, has already come to terms, as it were, with itself; the critic then, or interpreter (for as critic, one begins with a possible or plausible interpretation), must respect the work’s integrity. The critic needs to be a “literalist of the imagination.” (Marianne Moore)

Note: there is *exegesis* (from Greek *exegeisthai*, “to explain, interpret”), “an explanation or critical interpretation of a text,” and *eisegesis* (Greek *eis*, “into”), “interpretation of a text by reading into it one’s own ideas.”

[6] G / *theoria* - “a viewing, contemplation, speculation”; E / theory

Any theory then is a way of looking, a viewpoint or perspective. No theory is apodictic (G / *apodeiktikos*, *apodeiknynai*, “to demonstrate”): that is, “of the nature of necessary truth or absolute certainty.” No theory has monopoly of seeing. Even in science, theory has a certain life-span.

G / *idein* - “to see”; E / idea

Note: The word “contemplation” is quite interesting. From L / *contemplari*, from *com* (“with”) + *templum* (“temple”): a space marked out for observation of auguries; hence, a sacred precinct, an observation post. To augur is to foretell or predict the future from omens, auspices, signs, as in the flight or feeding of birds. There are auguries in the field of science, and poems may at times be auguries, too: in either case, what is seen or observed may be a mirror of the future. O brave, new world!

Which brings us to the other meaning of *theoria*: speculation, from L / *speculari*, “to spy out, examine,” from *specula*, “watchtower,” from *specere*, “to look, look at”; and there is also L / *speculum*, “mirror.” (L / *specere* and *spectare*, “to watch,” also give us E / spectacle.)

G / *dokein* - “to seem, or seem good”; thence, E / dogma

L / *opinari* - “to suppose, imagine, conjecture,” E / opinion

An opinion then is something that hovers between fact and fiction, with more or less of either one. And propaganda, I might add, is the propagation of answers which have lost their questions. For, where there is no question, there is no quest.

G / *skeptesthai* - “to look, consider”

E / *skeptic*; skeptical *skeptikos* - “thoughtful”

Note: E / heuristic (from G / *heuriskein*, “to find, discover”; *heureka*: “I have found!” - attributed to Archimedes when he found a method to determine the purity of gold / English “Eureka!”): “serving as aid to learning, discovery, or problem-solving.”

E / maieutic (from G / *maieutikos*, of midwifery): relating to, or resembling the Socratic method of eliciting new ideas from another.

I have said all I have wanted to say. The etymons and the quotes are heuristic and maieutic -- they say more than I have thought. I must end then, with what I began -- Andrew Marvell:

The mind, that ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other worlds, and other seas;
Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade.

Antipolo
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