# So Much Truth, so Much Being: Poetic Provocations to Philosophical Musings

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This bricolage of verses and prose, addresses the themes of poetics in and of philosophizing, and brings poetic provocations to philosophical musings. The authors muse on what it is to philosophize in the mood and mode of poetics, and why that matters for education. Preliminary incursions are made into the issues of entrenched dualism between intellect (mind) and senses (heart), and ensuing privileging of the former over the latter. A collegially written introduction sets the general framework.

#### Framing Our Bricolage

The ancient quarrel between philosophers and poets as portrayed by Plato (1966) in the Republic is still very much alive today. Of many forms of animosity the quarrel takes, there is first of all the separation of philosophy as a "rational," "logical," or "left brain" activity from poetry as "non-rational" or even "irrational," "non-logical," or "right brain" activity. It also takes the form of separating intellect from emotion, science from arts, facts from values, fight of debate from flight of fancy, argumentation from reverie, analysis from intuition, and so on. Not only do we separate these functions, but also we then proceed to privilege one side of functions over the other. Philosophy, once known as the "Queen of All Sciences," still behaves like one today and has identified itself with the rational side, with an unbecoming pride of place. But philosophy is far more than and far greater than this one-sided portrayal. Philosophy need not be and must not be only identified with the rational, logical, and analytic side, notwithstanding Plato's mission of banishing poets from the Republic of Philosophers.

Erizim Kohák (1984), the Czech ecological philosopher, reminds us about the birth of Ancient Greek philosophy: that she was the daughter of techne and poiesis. He likens techne to the bright daylight that shows everything in clear and distinct details. Techne, representing the masculine aspect, brings to the world "the precision of analysis and the artifice of constructs" (Kohák, 1984, p. 32), rendering it fit for human action and manipulation. In contrast, poiesis, the feminine aspect, is likened to the soft darkness of night-time that fuses all shapes into vast oneness. In the world given to us by the night vision, "[n]othing is left to do, to say: a human can only stand in silent awe and thanking devotion before the immense wonder of it all" (Kohák, 1984, p. 32). Night is the time of poetry—of deep dreams. Philosophy, Kohák tells us, takes up the intermediate vision between techne and poiesis. Such vision is best had in twilight. Yet, twilight is typically not the light condition of the academy, whose patron saint seems to be Descartes with his rallying cry of clear and distinct ideas to be revealed

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by the bright searchlight of logical analysis, notwithstanding the irony here of his own propensity to have vivid dreams and exalt poetry! Our effort in this piece shall be an attempt to tone down the blindingly bright light of the academy and its shrill intellectualism so that we can philosophize in twilight and "see and grasp the *sense* of being" (Kohák, 1984, p. 33) and the intrinsic worth of beings (Bai, 2003). We shall learn to soften our gaze and open our consciousness to the evocative presence of Being.

Our proposal to bring poetics into the *heart* of philosophy is, of course, not new. Both in East and West, we encounter numerous examples of philosophers who practiced and advocated poetics in philosophizing. Socrates was never too far from the evocation of the *Daimon*, and was seen not infrequently in a state of trance. In the Far Eastern philosophical traditions of *Dao* and *Zen*<sup>1</sup>, philosophy and poetics never separated, for they merged in the Daoist practice of nonduality (Bai, & Cohen, in press). Consider the Lao Tzu's (2003) text, the Dao De Jing: is it poetry or philosophy? To say it's the former would be tantamount to denying that the ancient Chinese had philosophy at all! What an error of judgment that would be! Fast-forward to our own time, Martin Heidegger (1971) worries about our increasing instrumental relationship with the world and ensuing alienation. He contends that for humans to make sense of this universe and to feel "at home", we need to *dwell poetically*. Gaston Bachelard (1969) is another Western philosopher who gives a demonstration of poetic reverie as a philosophical (phenomenological) method.

What follows is a textual bricolage of three fragments that were presented as a panel at the Annual Conference of the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society (as part of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education conference) on the theme of poetics in and of philosophizing. Our panel was an attempt to bring poetic provocations to philosophical musings. Each of us three panelists mused on what it is to philosophize in the mood and mode of poetics, and why that matters for education. In the introduction to our presentation, we declared: "Our panel will do more than discursively invoke these poetically dwelling philosophers and traditions; we will theoretically frame our session and argue for the integration of poetics into philosophy. Evocation will follow invocation. We on the panel are poets, practitioners of *Zen* and *Dao*, and denizens of the margins, who live the life of poetics. We will bring to the panel our own poetry and inspired words to evoke the poetics of philosophy. This proposal itself is a piece of reverie, and we shall see what fantastical opportunities to philosophize emerge from it."

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Not many are aware of the original meaning of '*zen*'. This Japanese word consists of a Chinese character, 禪,that is derived from the Sanskrit word *dhyana (jhana* in Pali), meaning 'the state of absorption' as in trance or meditation (see Nyanatiloka, 1946/1970, p. 70).

# Toward a Pedagogy of the Imagination

Daniela Bouneva Elza

"To begin with

all words do an honest job in our everyday language, and not even the most ordinary among them, those that are attached to the most commonplace realities, lose their poetic possibilities as a result of this fact." —Gaston Bachelard (1964)

"Words— I often imagine this are little houses, each with its cellar and garret. Common-sense lives on the ground floor. ...To mount and descend in the words themselves this is a poet's life. ...Must the philosopher alone be condemned by his peers to live on the ground floor? " —Gaston Bachelard(1964)

"the image is an emerging of meaning" — Paul Ricoeur

"five lines become eight fourteen the movement of a river rushing to sea." —Zhang Er

# emergent river of meaning<sup>2</sup>

<i>the image</i> in the eye	<i>is an emerging</i> of the sunset.	
taking off left	the footprints in sand	
(in the thickness of		
	imagining	
fresh fallen leaves— the pulse of		hands taking the earth.
(	opens a gap	
in the logical		and we are
	the egret	
lifting off	the pageholding	
	our breath	
	in forms	
5 0	fourteen ment of a river	rushing to sea.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> emergent river of meaning was first published in *Contemporary Verse 2, 29* (3), 41. http://www.contemporaryverse2.ca/home.html

"a single word might fill the air with birds" "... twilight, the river, a late mirror" —Pain not Bread

### an introduction to semantic collapse<sup>3</sup>

of the literal inside the collapse through play emerges proximity semantic through deviance a single word might fill the air with birds clarity \* Semantic twilight, the river, a late mirror lacuna throw a word in the gap (a proposition the fireworks watch this (seeing as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> an introduction to semantic collapse was first published in *Contemporary Verse 2, 29* (3), 42. http://www.contemporaryverse2.ca/home.html

"The image offered us by reading the poem now becomes really our own. It takes root in us. It has been given us by another, but we begin to have the impression that we could have created it, that we should have created it. It becomes a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses; in other words, it is at once a becoming of expression, and a becoming of our being."

-Gaston Bachelard (1964)

# (of non-verifiable truths 3

each one of us is	5	the begi	nning
of a city.	we cann	not ignore	
to dwell in it. pyramids the existence of	of needs temples		language justify
and order. the stone makes what a word has out of thin air	alreadys	visible stolen	
out of thin air			
we fall		(a snow	flake
our words ) re-drawn to live	re-const	re-interp ructed b (as if	preted y other.s
one snowflake m		vinter we do—	-
a slow down to earth in palms and mirrors of cherry blossoms. the way knowing holds		melting (a round	d memory on the tongue (knowing
the transformation	on		in the holding (the blooming after.

"Space that has been seized by the imagination cannot remain indifferent." —Gaston Bachelard (1964)

	opace that ha	is been seized by the imaginat	—Gaston Bachela
shifting	point	(a triptych <sup>4</sup>	-Gaston Dachela
wait. watch your mouth.	hold Now how wind	this way. pointing is in poplars.	
yawn: void	and in this watch	gaping how much	
our crows	hands on snow.	can say blink.	
and it is	a willow by a brook.	bubbling	
such prior to	luminous surround our	arcs us	
naming.	sparrows in urban	vanishing	
lymph in sorrow.	light. mourning	crumbs axioms of	
myths span with loss as if caught missing	our damp doubt. of sound. in a throat colours.	sky such clouds consonants as if	
(in— out.	sight	turning	
twisting	strings	crows of light.	

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> shifting point (a triptych first appeared in Existere, 26 (2) as first place winner in their contest "can we exist without Es" http://www.yorku.ca/existere/

"... not only poetry but literature in general implies a mutation in the use of language. This redirects language toward itself to the point that language may be said, in Roland Barthes' words, to 'celebrate itself' rather than to celebrate the world."—Paul Ricoeur

"He loved this part of the city, the evening streets an extension of his limbs."-Michael Ondjaate

## in the skin of the city

"The poet speaks on the threshold of being." —Gaston Bachelard (1964)

"The lamps are broken time."—Alan Davies

<i>he loved this part of</i> the tap-tap of on cardboard	of rain	<i>the city</i> drops on copper
on roof tops on street lights	reverberating	through walls
	(in-sight—	
the movement	of rain	
the emptying a deepening	(in-words)	of streets dichotomy.
	(is poetry	
<i>a mutation</i> where the lam	bs are	in language? broken time
the image between side-	of rain walks	caught
of distances bridging the spl	it- the streets.	reference—
he loved this part of the poet speaks	of the city	(the evening) on the threshold
a space where washes away	(of being	rain repeats itself his footprints from
right underneat	h	him. streets of his limbs.

"I hear the cane falter on a step of the stairs, the body that makes itself secure, sighing, the door opening, the dead man coming in. Between a door and dying there is little space, and there's hardly time enough to settle in," —Octavio Paz

#### a meta eulogy<sup>5</sup>

<i>the dead man</i> how small		coming in.
		a metaphor is
to start such		contradictions.
I hear the cane falter on a step	of	the stairs
inside words		our small gestures
the body that makes itself secu	re,	sighing
the breath of		lyric distances
	invites	
	the door	opening,
the dead man coming in Ren	membering	that
which ne	ever happened	
between a door and dying there is		little space
a yellow threshold	where	The image
raps its rhythms with a wooden spoon		
calls us by (	(name	
and there is hardly time enough		to settle in.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> *a meta eulogy* was first published in *Contemporary Verse 2, 29* (3), 43. http://www.contemporaryverse2.ca/home.html

#### The Call to Respond, the Call to Responsibility

#### Robert Manery

Lately, I have been thinking about the ethical dimension of literature. There have been a number of theorists who have written about narrative literature and ethics (e.g., Nussbaum, Ricoeur), but it seems few have examined how lyric poetry (especially the modern lyric) contributes to ethical understanding. However, there are a couple of exceptions to this silence that suggest possible openings into a dialogue between the lyric and ethics. Both Levinas and Gadamer have found a contemporary exemplar for their philosophical inquiries in the poetry of Paul Celan. Predictably, their responses to Celan have been radically different.

Gadamer wrote a number of essays on Celan's work. Though he did not explicitly discuss ethics, these essays suggest an ethical relationship between the "I" and the "You" of the poems that Gerald Bruns names a "Poetics of Intimacy" (Bruns, 1997, p. 15). Gadamer's reading of Celan's "Atemkristall" cycle investigates the question of address in these poems. Gadamer maintains that, while the "I" and the "You" of the poems are not elided, the reader must occupy, at times, the position of the speaker of the poem, to become "equally implicated" (Gadamer, 1997, p. 69) in the poem.

Levinas also wrote on the work of Celan, though his attention is focused on Celan's "Meridian Speech," Celan's most sustained discussion of poetry and art, rather than on Celan's actual poetry. Levinas saw Celan's work in terms of Levinas' own conception of ethical alterity. The poem reaches out towards the Other, "for-the Other," a reaching that necessarily involves a "responsibility for the neighbour" (Levinas, 1987, p. 100). For Levinas, the address of the poem is first and foremost an ethical relation, one that calls one to responsibility.

Bruns regards Levinas' discussion as a reductive "appropriation" that is explicitly opposed to any account of the poem couched in a Heideggerian ontology. Bruns (1997) claims the importance of Gadamer's study is that "it helps us to understand the reductions in each of these appropriations," (p. 26) reductions to ethical alterity or to Heideggerian ontology, since Gadamer's account requires neither ethics nor ontology. It seems a difficult task to see Gadamer's readings as being in any way independent of an ontological account of the poem. Despite this opposition, however, I want to look at Gadamer's readings of Celan's poems alongside Levinas' to create space for these "appropriations" as possibilities rather than reductions. Both accounts are concerned with the question of address. For Levinas, the relation toward the Other is always already an ethical relationship where one is called to responsibility by the Other (Levinas, 1981). For Gadamer, to allow oneself to be addressed by the Other (the poem) is to put oneself in a position of responsibility toward the Other (Grondin, 2003, pp. 100-110).

For the remainder of my fragment, I want to create a mosaic of words by juxtaposing passages from Levinas, Gadamer, and Celan in order to present the ethical relation involved in the reading of lyric poetry.

#### Gadamer on Celan:

Readers of lyric poetry always already understand in a certain sense who I is. Not just in the trivial sense of knowing that it is always the poet who speaks, rather than a speaking person introduced by him. Beyond that, readers also know what the poet-I actually is. For the I pronounced in a lyric poem cannot be conclusively limited to the I of the poet, which would be different from that of the I-pronouncing reader. Even when the poet is 'cradled in his characters,' expressly separating himself from the 'instantly mocking' crowd, it is as if he no longer means himself, but rather also includes the reader in his I-character, separating him or her from the crowd in the same way he knows himself to be. This is especially true with Celan, where I,' you,' and 'we' are pronounced in an utterly direct, shadony-uncertain and

constantly changing way. This I is not only the poet, but even more so 'that individual' [jener Einzelne], as Kierkegarrd named the one who is each of us. (Gadamer, 1997, p. 69)

Now, Levinas on Celan:

A language of nearness for nearness's sake, more ancient than that of the truth of being – which it probably holds and upholds. The first among languages, an answer preceding the question, a responsibility for the neighbour, making possible, by its for-the-other, all the wonder of giving. (Levinas, 1987, p. 100)

Now, Celan: "Letter to Hans Bender":

Only truthful hands write true poems. I cannot see any basic difference between a handshake and a poem. (Celan, 1986, p. 26).

Celan, again: "Atemkristall"

BY THE UNDREAMT etched, the sleeplessly wandered-through breadland casts up the life mountain.

From its crumb you knead anew our names, which I, an eye similar to yours on each finger, probe for a place, through which I can wake myself toward you, the bright hungercandle in mouth.

More Celan: "The Meridian":

The poem intends another, needs this other, needs an opposite. It goes toward it, bespeaks it. For the poem everything and everybody is a figure of this other toward which it is heading. (Celan, 1986, p. 49)

Back to Levinas:

The inescapable: the interruption of the playing order of the beautiful, and of the game of concepts of the jeu du monde; the interrogation of the Other, a search for the Other. A quest consecrating itself in a poem to the Other: a song rises in the giving, in the one-for-the-other, in the very significance of the signification. A signification older than ontology and the thought of being - and one which knowledge and desire, philosophy and sexuality, presuppose.

(Levinas, 1987, p. 104)

#### Back to Gadamer:

Who the You is cannot be determined because it hasn't been determined. The address has an aim, but it has no object - other than perhaps whoever faces up to the address by answering. (Gadamer, 1997, p. 69).

Back to Celen: "Atemkristall":

STANDING, in the shadow of the stigma in the air.

Standing-for-nobody-and nothing. Unrecognized, for you alone.

With all that has room therein, even without language.

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## Academic Death<sup>6</sup>

Avraham Cohen

I really do think with my pen, for my head often knows nothing of what my hand is writing. —Ludwig Wittgenstein (1998, p. 24)

#### Academic/Death Comes Running

The news arrives, | will be dying.

> *I run The sweat pours off me.*

| must finish my work. The academy becomes very human, Special arrangements are made.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> All poems by the author in this part of the manuscript were previously published in the author's doctoral dissertation (Cohen, 2006)

I feel my body move.

Even the President of the University All there... Death creates human flesh out of the institutional skeleton. I die before | die.

Feeling deep emotion.

Join me here In the heart of the matter ...

> Learning to hear the sound of my beating Heart, Engaging senses, Smelling the Blood of my Heart, Tasting the Blood, Becoming Blood...

#### In the midst of the silence of the Way...... —a. cohen

Leonard was kind enough to respond:

Dear Roshi, I'm sorry that I cannot help you now, because I met this woman.

Please forgive my selfishness.

I send you birthday greetings, deep affection and respect

Jikan the useless monk bows his head. (Cohen, 2006, p. 23)

#### **Ranting Against the Storm**

Was school ever fun? When did we forget curiosity and replace it with knowledge accumulation? Is job readiness really the most important learning outcome? How and when did security become equated with wealth accumulation? How did teachers come to forget about awe and delight and become the minions of the state and technology? Of course, I'm not talking about all teachers. There are still a small minority living out and beyond the margins, who prefer, or choose, or who have no choice, who live dangerously.

Against the storm of institutional and systemic pressure, some teachers work and live courageously; holding true to an inner compass and reaching for the hearts of their students. In my

other life as a psychotherapist I see teachers in my private practice. The truth is that those who have support from educational leaders within their schools do not come to see me about their pain related to teaching, but within my experience these are the rare exceptions. And, educational leaders who come to see me are almost invariably speaking about the personal and professional cost of supporting a more heartfelt and poetic environment in their school. In the tradition of Socrates there are still a few educators who can and do stir up the youth and the youth-fullness of the elders; a rewarding and potentially life and career threatening endeavor.

To live poetically does not require that you be a poet. It does require honesty about yourself, authenticity, and a willingness to be seen in the beauty of your own nakedness. Poetic educators are vulnerable, which does not mean that she is a walking wound. What it means is that she is open, receptive, and feeling. These teachers, like poets, are in touch with the Muse. And like poetry well done, teaching well done is not done at all. It emerges. The Muse stirs. The poet/teacher is the vehicle of delivery. Her job is to step aside and allow the muse to sing. Many educators have lost touch with their Muse. The systemic pressure against musing and reverie is immense. And, there are teacher educators such as Carl Leggo (2006):

I invite other teachers who pursue studies at the University of British Columbia to engage in researching their daily experiences by writing creatively and narratively and poetically about their lives, to research their lived experiences in order to pursue creative processes of transformation.

(Leggo, 2006, p. 2)

I too wait and watch, my image upside down in the smooth river, all the world topsy turvy but still in balance, learning to be still, even in a vertiginous world.

this is the teacher's way (Leggo, 2006, p.5)

The life force may be covered but surely its pulse is still throbbing. Here is a little haiku-like poetry to accentuate the throb rate:

## Opening

The Gateway opens A subtle breeze comes through The World changes, Forever. —Lao-Tzu's Mother<sup>7</sup>

<sup>—</sup>a. cohen

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> These lines, including the *source*, emerged spontaneously during my regular practice of meditation on the morning of March 19, 2006. Meditation is for me a playful and creative practice.

*The Fine Line* On one side of the edge or another Each person resides.

From one side everything is known And taken for granted. —a. cohen

*On the Edge* Feelings are troubling, vision unclear.

# On the far side Another person emerges And the unseen world

And the unseen world |s seen. — a. cohen

# N/o/ne is More

No chícken, No egg, No flesh, No bones,

No Nothing.

—a. cohen

# No-Thing

| was no-thing | will be no-thing | am no-thing. Who writes? —a. cohen

# One

The sound of one hand clapping |s not so awesome as it used to be. | now listen for the sound of Ten thousand hands clapping as One. —Lao-Tzu's Protégé8 —a. cohen

### Wind

A student says, | feel a still warm wind, and My longing reaches toward you.

An educator says, | feel a still warm wind, and My longing reaches toward you. —a. cohen

## Breeze

| blow through you Leaving no trace Yet you know |'ve been here. -Lao-Tzu's child<sup>?</sup> -a. cohen

I have no words, and yet above lie my words, while something called *me* sits *here*, below.

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## Concluding, together: Being and Non-being in Saskatoon

The structuring of our dwelling places is interactive with our individual and collective consciousness and guides and shapes the way we interact with each other in the visible world. The way we practice philosophy articulates our relationship with the world and our purpose in it, as well as our numerous and diverse response to the 'other.' It was a pleasure to philosophize poetically at the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society's meetings. Whoever thought that we could philosophize by reading our poetry in these philosophy sessions? But we knew philosophy was so much more than discursivity

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> This emerged from the same source as footnote number 3, also in March, 2006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Also, from the same source as footnote number 3 in March, 2006.

and argumentation. Philosophy is, as Hadot (1995) reminds us, *a way of life*. At the early hour of our morning session, the room was filled with life: breath added to the energy of images, laughter, a sun beam at the right time, a red wall, and a bit of magic bound those in the room together in Saskatoon. "And what is more," Bachelard reminds us, "the imagination, by virtue of its freshness and its own peculiar activity, can make what is familiar into what is strange. With a single poetic detail, the imagination confronts us with a new world" (1964, p.134). For those who were not there (you will just have to take our words for it), we have offered you above the textual form of our musings and now this haiku:

Being and Non-being in Saskatoon Prairie land flat We see far. On-line text Outer reading/inner seeing.

This Becoming.

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