

question as independent of 'physics,' are henceforth confirmed. Cornford had already proposed the notion that the daimons would be scattered particles of Love, mixed, in the course of a series of incarnations, with particles of Strife. It now appears, thanks to this papyrus, that this was indeed how they were and that they participate in the two worlds which succeed each other in each revolution of the cycle. The particles of Love called 'daimons' would gradually invest the four elements giving rise to different combinations: at first, isolated limbs; then complex entities, some monstrous and some normal; and finally their integration in the serene harmony of the sphere. The end of this state of tranquillity would result from 'an incident' which would shake this ideal state and which would concern a fault 'the exact nature of which our evidence does not allow us to discern' (p. 96). Thus the chain of life would once more resume its progressive course of differentiation and separation proper to the ascent of Strife. The daimons who find themselves enclosed there would begin their 'sorrowful journey' and, at the time of that process, the global beings ceding place to jointed and sexually differentiated creatures which people the world of which we were to be 'witnesses and actors,' our present world, and who would take their course towards violence, finally leaving the four elements free to group themselves together according to their proper natures, in accordance with the principle that like attracts like. It is this stage which represents the triumph of Strife which would form a whirlwind with a rapid rotary motion (Dinos), where the daimons are delivered 'from their punishment in the form of exile,' before being the motor in the Love of which they are parts of a new destiny in the direction of Unity, inaugurating a new revolution of the cycle. This status of the daimons is not without consequences for the ethics, ritual, or dietics to be adopted by man.

In conclusion, I would say that Empedocles' 'physics,' thus integrating a daimonology, results in a way of life for man in fact founded on a myth of origin. Thus the unresolved problem is to know whether and to what extent a literal reading of the fragments veils this approach current among thinkers who make use of poetic writings and myths. Moreover, this interpretation of the migration of daimons across the living world and throughout the cycles under the sign of Love, like the 'particles' (I would prefer to say like the 'parts' which are proper to them), brings gnostic pneumatology to mind. Was Empedocles one of the sources of this thought which, we should remember, was widespread in Egypt? It is not impossible. But if gnosticism is itself submitted to a mythic interpretation whose threads today's specialists are attempting to disentangle, it must once more be recognized that the question of myth lies at the centre of the interpretation of Empedocles' thought.

Lambros Couloubaritsis

(translated from the French by Juliet Vale)

Parmenides, *On Nature, or On Being*, text, translation, and commentary by Barbara Cassin, 'Points,' Paris, Ed. Seuil, 1998.

The first impression left by this volume is that this is above all, a new type of philosophical thought. Through her presentation of Parmenides' poem, Barbara Cassin in effect gives us an original work at the philosophical level, where an investigation of the origins of Greek thought is developed under the dominant theme of the classical hermeneutic tradition. It should be made clear from the outset that this book is simultaneously *about*

Parmenides and *on* Parmenides. The two levels, philological study and theoretical reflection, go side by side and remain indissolubly linked. The volume is rich in theoretical and philological suggestions, with its sound unity of concept and method, where examination of Parmenides' text assumes the form of a general interpretative paradigm.

Superficially, the volume appears to follow the classic form of Introduction, Text, Bibliography, and Index. It is accompanied by a Glossary and a compilation of classic texts. The latter (Gorgias, Plato, Hegel) mark other stages in the periodic return of Parmenidean thought in the history of philosophical thought and, in the case of the extracts from Owen and Heidegger, bear witness to differing contemporary approaches to the interpretation of the text.

The Glossary is from many points of view the most interesting part. It constitutes in point of fact the real locus of theoretical analysis of the text, and of the explication of its various theoretical and cultural components, divergences, and ambiguities: its 'untranslatable spaces,' the author seems to tell us. An analysis of most of Parmenides' vocabulary is undertaken here with an examination of semantic, historical, and theoretical criteria. Here, the author places her work at the confluence of two types of experience: philological experience, which secures for her very well documented and perfectly expounded linguistic analyses, but also the conscious experience of philosophical reflection on what escapes translation, this work on the 'untranslatables' which the author has undertaken for some while and which informs her interpretation of the text. Repeated references to the teaching of Jean Bollack and, above all, Heinz Wismann bear witness to this dual inheritance.

In the analysis of the Greek text, the pioneer of the *Vocabulaire des intraduisibles* first fixes her attention on the cruces of untranslatability where no terminological reconstruction can restore the semantic space indicated by the text. None the less, instead of constituting an insurmountable object, this divergence opens the way for philosophical reflection, resulting from comparison of the two different semantic spaces and recovering the structures and forms of a given culture.

The untranslatable space thus becomes the space for action on the part of the reader, which introduces different meanings, sometimes discrepant, often superimposable, into the text. From Gorgias, a generation younger than Parmenides, to the 'creative restoration' of the nineteenth century, reconstruction of Parmenides' work has been the keynote of these displacements.

There can be no question here of providing a detailed overview of the rich analysis, simultaneously linguistic and theoretical, employed to comment upon Parmenides' text. As an example one need only cite how with the glossary entry 'way,' where the Greek has five terms available, *hodos*, *keleuthos*, *amaxitos*, *patos*, and *atarpos*, the author takes up the thread of a challenge to the very letter of the text, where the 'two paths' of research become 'between two and four paths depending on shifts in the text' (p. 237). It is a question, she observes, 'which conjoins as ever doctrinal problems and literary problems.' It is in this conjunction of textual exegesis and theoretical interpretation, in addition even to the originality of the philosophical analyses, that the philosophical interest of the topic of the untranslatable is to be found.

We all like to identify nuances in a text which our immediate perception of the language makes it possible for us to grasp. The author supplies us with an analysis of these, uniting lexical explanation with theoretical selection, returning to the author's thought, his intentions and the theoretical ground which inspired him. This calls the *Aristotle* of

Imre Toth to mind, in this capacity, who serves as a model of such an approach among us, not restricting analysis to the resources of a scholastic philology, but bringing out, from beneath the strictly grammatical, syntactical, and lexical foundation of the text, the intentions, the theoretical aspects which inspired the author, sometimes even unconsciously, and which it is the reader's task to make appear.

Consciousness of the necessarily incomplete character of the text, whence the creative character of reading ('When you read you are doing something,' the Introduction reiterates), all forms part of our philosophical tradition. The author's merit therefore consists in transforming these arguments, habitually the **object** of reflection, into a **method** of theoretical analysis. 'Perfect understanding' the author recalls following Schleiermacher's footsteps, 'consists of understanding the one who discourses better than they do themselves.' In these circumstances it would be impossible for this volume to be a simple edition of the text of Parmenides; it is an interpretation in the truest sense, that is to say, an analysis undertaken to gather the possible theoretical branchings in the text generated at lexical level. To all this the author adds the historical dimension: from Gorgias to Heidegger, the excerpts which accompany the text demonstrate how the transfer of untranslatability lies at the origin of the 'reconstructions' of Parmenidean utterances made by successive exegetes.

By his philosophy of being, the great philosopher of Elea 'instituted philosophy as a linguistic fact' (p. 29). Barbara Cassin, 'philologist and philosopher,' finds here the springing up of the notion of **being**, not so much as a dogmatic position established once and for all, but as an opening of spaces for reflection as a result of the necessarily incomplete nature of the text.

Analysis of the lexical and syntactical structure of the ancient Greek establishes boundaries for the possible fluctuations in the meaning of Parmenides' text. However, and this is perhaps the most interesting aspect, the possible interpretations shed light on the structures of thought crystallized in the language. Analysis of the text thus institutes a space for engagement which brings to light at once the borders of the language studied and those of the language which one uses oneself. With Parmenides, 'the tale told is not only an account **in** Greek, it is also an account **of** Greek, the way in which, form by form, the morphology of a language and its syntax are established, in reflective or decided manner, in the eyes of all' (p. 30).

I shall not linger here on the highly articulated reconstruction of the notion of **being** (**what is**) developed in the Introduction. It seems to me, and this bears repeating more than once, that the interest of the volume consists **primarily** in the method of reading and interpretation which is used there, the category of the **untranslatable** which is at the same time object and tool of research.

More than sixty years ago J. Huizinga wrote that translated words often 'did not occupy the same mental space. And this is the case with many other words, especially those relating to the most fundamental concepts of the mind'. He issued an invitation to 'draw up an inventory of all the concepts on which different languages were in agreement.' Today contemplation of the untranslatable takes the form of an analysis of the reciprocal limits of these mental spaces.

Perfect understanding, we might say: authentic interpretation, one might be tempted to say, one which reconstructs from the text a reality which is absent from it, but without which the text could not have existed.

Thus the parallel between the 'tale of being' and the Homeric epic of Ulysses reveals, besides historical continuity, the radical mutation which from that point onwards made its appearance in the reading of the Homeric text itself: Homer 'is he who teaches how to *hellenizein*, speak (Greek) and act (in Greek). Parmenides gathers up this inheritance – words – but in such a way that he is this very inheritance: that he will henceforth take its place; . . . he teaches how to speak Greek (it is even Greek syntax which tells the tale) and recounts the story of a new, the most recent hero: being, *to eon*, in place of Ulysses' (p. 49). Since Parmenides there has thus been 'a retrogressive movement of the truth: it is no longer the *Odyssey* which gives Parmenides his material, but Parmenides who endows the *Odyssey* with its significance' (p. 55). The poem thus reveals its character as palimpsest, built upon traces of the Homeric epic which it absorbed and henceforth incorporates: 'The poem treats the epic as the ontological *alêtheia* treats the physical and cosmological *doxa*. . . . Ulysses, who constitutes the definition of wandering, is quite obviously the model of mortal wandering: put differently, the epic is none other than the *doxa* par excellence. But Ulysses is also the model of the constituted identity of being: put differently, the epic is an integral part of the truth. The *Poem* makes the epic play a dual role, of situated discourse, past (mortals, like Ulysses, and the organization of their beliefs), and paradigmatic discourse, revealed (the being and the constraint upon his constructed identity, like Ulysses)' (pp. 63–4).

With Parmenides, thanks to the poetic form he adopted, the semantic divergence became a constituent of philosophical thought as such. He did not *institute* philosophy, the author suggests to us, but *opened* for it its freedom of space.

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(translated from the French by Juliet Vale)