

Mentor's Introduction

KENNETH R. BEITTEL
The Pennsylvania State University

For Beauty is nothing but the beginning
of a terror that we are still just able to endure. . .

Rilke

Statement 7 of Wittgenstein's Tractatus says: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." Heidegger would agree, except that he would affirm our need to create a new language as a guide to our dire need for wholeness of being.¹ Scott Meyer and Bob Troxell have broken silence and responded to this call for a new language before the ineffable nature of art. To do this within the tradition of the Ph.D. thesis is no easy task.

It has been said, largely in light of the teaching of Eastern religions, that there are three ways to face this awesome charge: (1) the analogical, (2) the negational, and (3) the injunctive; or in this case, (1) what art is like, (2) what it is not, and (3) what we must do to get to it or experience it. Although there is no precise category implied, Scott's orientation is largely analogical or poetic, while Bob's is largely negational. Both, however, could also be called injunctive, because we draw closer to the experience of making art or responding to it through the Zen-like character of their ostensive language—that is, language which is "showing, revealing, betokening." Steiner² has further clarified the nature of language which thus aims at "qualitative disclosure": "It is not really a descriptive use, but rather. . . a pointing to or suggesting." And this inclines toward literature and the poetic, where our understanding travels a path of experiencing in a cumulative and growth-like manner, obliquely at times, then again like falling through a concealed trap door—whatever it takes to bring us to a new place, the place where art is.

This place, in Scott's study, is that imaginal realm of poetic reverie wherein we find the angelic presences of those friendly archetypes of the poet-artist: The anima, the cosmic, and universal childhood. The spirit guide for the poet through this realm is not Virgil, but Gaston Bachelard and Henry Corbin; and the fruits of our sojourn are seen in the poetic reveries brought back over the threshold of that home of undifferentiated spirits dreaming.

On the path with Bob Troxell, we learn more clearly what language can not do, how it politicizes our experience and confounds sound and bogus meaning with the true artist-philosopher's stone. We say our best words and catch ourselves falling short; we polish our words, but they fail to become gems. We skip them playfully over the deep waters of artistic silence. And we dance. We dance to music of the iconic mode. We "body forth" (in Burke's phrase) the choreography of art; and we read, reflexively and reflectively, what rhetorical tropes and poetic cycles the art-life-earth-world stage and the audience of the immortals have led us to act out.

In one sense, the "voices of silence" are their own spokesmen; they are that language of wholeness for which both Wittgenstein and Heidegger yearned. So "doing it" is also speech. And having the courage to create, as well, a new speech and a new speech awareness serves our endangered search for wholeness of being in this dark age. At least that is how, ostensibly, it seems to me.

¹Jacob Needleman. The Heart of Philosophy, New York: Bantam Books, 1984.

²Elizabeth Steiner. "The Qualitative Arts in Educational Inquiry." Aesthetic Education, 15 (1), 1981, pp. 107-115.