



Christopher Bernard

A Gamble, A Paradox . . .

A poem

: despiser of logic,
bearer of lies,
fomentor of life,
dreamer of reality

: a dream of words, what
words will not say

: a slave of love
(a worshipper of goodness,
infatuate of evil)

: emancipator of language,
unleashed from obligation to
fact, free to explore the mind's every
impossibility; it does not, it will not,
it can not "reflect" reality,
it defeats it in the teeth of its failure

: a celebration
of weakness (delicacy,
tenderness, sweetness),
a mutiny against
strength (the power of
weakness
against power), a seizure at
control through frailty
and submission, through
songs of hosanna to the
universal tyranny, the poet
says, "I will perish, but my
words shall burn like a brand"

: an escape from the Real, a
confrontation, eye to eye, it dreams
death, loss, failure, betrayal~
all the things that threaten us with
extinction and unmeaningness; yet producing
(a paradox!), if only for a moment,
all the exaltation of sovereignty,
as if the Poem had invented the reality it
is escaping (it must escape), with a power
demonic and godlike

: sneaky, it works
by indirection: figures, tropes,
lies, it knows that the best way
to capture the world is not always
by the frontal assault prose is
condemned to

(Not so much interested in truth, it
demands reality ~ and its reality
(another paradox!) is a dream.)

: a sigh over the ache
of our mortality and our
ignorance of what we will

only discover
tomorrow

:a piece of organized self-deception, the
greatest poem exerts the seduction that so furrowed
Plato's brow, between cultures, between continents,
between centuries, between millennia: we read, and
we can't help believing ~ even tragedy asserts its "it
ought to be thus" against the shabby violences of
the web, the slaughterhouse of the nightly news, the
ugliness of the internet

: gives our shabby destiny a small
grace,
a blink and nod of nobility and beauty, even
when
demonstrating our limitless fatuousness: as
the
French philosopher noted: part of our
grandeur
is knowing how profoundly insignificant we
are

: a religion, a philosophy,
a morality, in a nutshell, a
religion is the poem of the
universe
written by its divinity
and recited by its prophet

O

The three aspects:

literary/aesthetic, philosophico-religious,
existential/moral:

a charming linguistic box
that bespeaks an ontology, an
epistemology, a logic, an ethics:

what is true? what is
good? what is worthy of
our attention? how
should we live? (Poems
there are that hate

all poetry, scorn any
claim to knowledge and
truth,
have no faith even in
their own faithlessness.

A poem is a paradox
and a gamble.)

: an experiment in the alchemy of dream and
memory, medium and technique, rules and
transgressions, laws and crimes ~ in words and
sounds and colors and shapes and forms and
movements and the body's presence and the mind's
immateriality; a sly means of short-circuiting the
brain to outfox those despots, energy and matter,
natural selection and the massacres of evolution. It
uses the reality of the imagination to defy the dream
of the world, which made us, and thus also poetry,
out of chance and time and phantoms and comets.
It is human will in defiance of the long humiliation
called human life. A poem is a paradox. If life is a
casino, a poet is the angelic fool that bets its whole,
sweet, impossible existence against the bank.
And after losing everything, it stumbles off, like a
drunken Irishman, singing.

Christopher Bernard author of the novel *A Spy in the
Ruins*.