

KINESIS OF NOTHING AND THE OUSIA OF POETICS
(PART REVIEW ESSAY, PART NOTES ON A
POETICS OF AUTO-COMMENTARY)

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Wildfire: A Verse Essay on Obscurity and Illumination. Brady, Andrea. San Francisco: Krupskaya, 2010. [Paperbound] 79pp. ISBN 978-1-92860-31-7.

i.

Andrea's Brady's relatively recent book *Wildfire: A Verse Essay on Obscurity and Illumination* contains Brady's own "Note On the Text" at the end of the book, which before anything else, explains that "*Wildfire* is a verse essay" (71). And then Brady explains that the book's primary concern involves what at first glance appears as a material history of *fire* (defined in a flickeringly multivalent and capacious manner):

It [the book] is trying to persuade us, to recognize that certain catastrophes and felicities are not inevitable. It concerns the history of incendiary devices, of the evolution of Greek fire from a divine secret which could sustain or destroy empires, into white phosphorous and napalm; the elliptical fires of the pre-Socratics, Aristotle's service to Alexander in the fashioning of pyrotechnics . . . [of] mechanisms to project fire, to make it burn on water and stick to wood and skin, the keep if off the walls of besieged towns, and what those mechanisms (projection and defense) have done to geometry . . . (71)

Brady's list of these combustions, which she says drive her book, continues. The organization of this list seems to hover not only around a particular distaste for assuming that the inevitability of this

history (or what or what certain theoretical discussions would refer to as the *necessity* of a history) is so driven, but also a desire or even a hope that one might somehow, even with writing, intervene in it: “I was tired of trying to position ‘us’ on the ground, like actors in real carnage, where being ‘implicated’ is also a way of sharing the spoils. I wanted not allegory but the recovery of material history” (71). And yet Brady does not allow her book or her readers the simple escape to a paranoid criticism which would assume that to shed light on this history would effectively expose its contingencies, or ‘do enough’ to look for alternatives. Rather, she implies that the wildfire she writes with is not merely a ‘material’ phenomenon—no matter how material its history—but one that, following those “elliptical fires of the pre-Socratics” is an elemental problem which, whether counted with the causes or the results of history, spreads hungrily into whatever comes to appearance.

For Brady the writing that would write of such a history must reckon with its own elemental relation to fire. Recalling the old convention of an ocular poetics and epistemology, Brady raises the figure of the firelight of exegesis and commentary, and investigates how they produce the flames whose light illuminates a text, what they burn, and what their smoke obscures—if in fact they do not consume the text to which they bring light. So as much as the book attempts to produce and inhabit “an etiology of [fire] metaphors, ‘shake-n-bake’ and whiskey pete and phantom fury,” the book is also an auto-commentary, setting out to gloss such fire with additional fire, with the burning light of commentary and the darkness of its collateral effects: “It is also an argument about obscurity and illumination: WP [white phosphorous] does both, smokes the bright air and sings the night with trajectories. And so an interrogation of writings which fume as much as they enlighten” (71).

The book itself appeared first as a hypertext poem at *Dispatx.com*, cross-referencing and glossing its various citations, a veritable auto-glossed edition.¹ More directly, Brady elaborates the link between

The author wishes to thank several persons without whom this essay could not have been written: Ada Smailbegović and Meagan Manas for careful and sustained reading and comment on this essay as it developed; Jeff T. Johnson and Claire Donato, for productive conversation concerning the ‘verse-essay’ and the problems of the so-called “American Hybrid”; and, not least of all, The *Glossator* editors for the assignment, and Nicola Masciandro and Ryan Dobran for careful and helpful reading and critique.

commentary and a certain kind of illuminating fire in book by claiming that “The poem is throughout a commentary on itself, on culture as revolutionary praxis, on the transcendent still lurking in poetics which attribute to specific poems (or to themselves) the power to illuminate or obscure” (72). It is because of this felicitous confluence of commentarial concerns that this essay, as much as it attempts to review Brady’s book, also unfolds as equally concerned with emphasizing and elaborating the problem of fire as a problem of commentary and the question of commentary as a question of fire. As commentary and self-commentary swing infinitely closer to pure autocommentary (the autopoiesis of the gloss itself, bracketed, perhaps even without text) this essay will not hesitate, in excess of its capacity as ‘review,’ to collect notes towards developing a productively enunciated poetics of autocommentary.

Commentary, if it operates like fire, in addition to sharing the capacity for light-production and intentional or unintentional obfuscation from the spread of ‘smoke,’ would conventionally be thought to need fuel for its combustion: a text. Brady ostensibly begins with texts such as this history of fire elaborated above, and more immediately, her own “verse-essay” as that on which the “commentary on itself” comments. It would seem that “self-commentary” always requires some text which precedes it, and to which it can, in beginning, always refer. But, to be syllogistically crude for the sake of exigency, what if the commentary which in some way *is* fire comments on a text which, in advance, already calls itself fire (and if fire is commentary, already a commentary)? What if the supposedly ‘first’ text to be glossed is already about a world and a history which seem driven in turn by fire—as Brady puts it, “the globalisation of a fire that feeds on life” (72), again already a collection of a single global gloss—what burns then? Adding up these claims of the book in what seems at first a crudely literal manner points towards the vertiginous limits of commentary appearing somewhere in the neighborhood of ‘pure autocommentary’; as flames burning on nothing but flames themselves (the Bachelardian reverie of fire).² One might assume that commentary (no matter how much it

¹ See <<http://dispatx.com>>. I have had consistent trouble accessing the site at the time of the completion of this essay apparently because it seems to be undergoing some kind of reconstruction.

² See Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*, trans. Daniel Russell (Boston: Beacon, 1969); and *The Psychoanalysis of*

dilates out from the text on which it comments while riding on its own energy) still begins with that prior text on which it comments: a commentary ought to have a text in order to be a commentary and not, say, an essay or a poem or a sacred scripture.

Yet it is the former, more difficult, upshot of the reading of *fire* as a name for a not-necessarily material but certainly substantial and ontological element (or at least elemental principle) of how a world, or a poem, unfolds, that is immediately enacted by the very title of the first section: “Pyrotechne.” The neologism insists on fire as a principle of building, or as a principle of how what-is comes to appearance. The second section, similarly, opens by implying fire as elemental to the book’s ontology even in advance of its self-commentarial function, as the book slyly announces, in a small stanza set about half-way across the page from the left margin “Remember I am / on fire / cannot be trusted” (13). The book points to itself and claims that the wildfire of its title is literally what it is, points to itself with the fire of commentary and glosses, “Wildfire.” At the same time, the line break immediately after only the verb-phrase (“I am / on fire”) recalls us to the divine name itself according to Torah as Y-H gives it to Moses, and as God appears in flames which illuminate but do not combust the bush they surround—even as the famously riddling verbal gloss of Y-H (*I am . . . I am that I am*) again slyly

Fire, trans. Alan C.M. Ross (Boston: Beacon 1964). What is most important here is the sense of the comment dreaming of itself, and of its text ahead of the appearance of both of them (text and commentary). When Bachelard asks “if fire, which, after all, is quite an exceptional and rare phenomenon, was taken to be a constituent element of the Universe, is it not because it is an element of human thought, the prime element of reverie,” he does so with the confidence that “the dream is stronger than experience” (*Psychoanalysis of Fire*, 18-20). It is by a dialectical process of idealization that Bachelard sees fire and light coincide as love, illumination, annihilation, and thus for Bachelard’s spiritualism, life (cf. PF 106). The divine fire, or that of reverie is in contrast as well from fire which appears spontaneous combustion, but is deceptive: “Thus story-tellers, doctors, physicians, novelists, all of them dreamers, start off from the same images and pass on to the same thoughts . . . From the flames which emanate from the *brûlot* they fabricate men of substance. In all cases *attribute values*; they call upon all their own passions to explain a shaft of flame. They put their whole heart into ‘communicating’ with a spectacle which fills them with wonderment and therefore deceives them” (PF, 98).

obscures the nature and original origin or ‘reference’ of the flames themselves.³

So the question of autocommentary will then hinge on the extent to which Brady’s text can consider the possibility of a burning without fuel, something like the pentecostal divine flame of commentary which operates with the structure of divine fire but without the perhaps dangerously gnostic or esoteric element of the divine flame: these would bind commentary to give light to texts in order to produce knowledge about a text as ‘salvation’ from a flaming world, and which also obfuscates a text for all but the initiate and thus darkens the world—or even leaves it to burn all in its own, caring more for the so-called divine word. Thus Brady seeks the structure of the divine fire without the divinity and its attendant contempt for the world when she recalls a particular story from 1 Kings. She asks, “Was the god talking, or pursuing, / on a journey, or asleep?” (19), recalling a competition between Elijah and four hundred “priests of Baal” to see whose god would call down fire from heaven to consume a sacrifice without a human setting fire to it. The assumption of the competitors is that “the god who answers by fire is indeed god,”⁴ and so Elijah taunts the priests by asking if their god was perhaps busy with something more important, like sleep, sex, or even reliving himself, as the priests desperately cut themselves to try to entice their god to perform—before Elijah swiftly soaks his own alter with water (three times for effect) and God sends down fire from heaven which consumes the bull, wood, and even stones of the alter, after which Elijah is authorized to slaughter all four hundred priests of Baal: divine fire’s contempt for the world. Still, having exposed the violence which follows the contempt of the divine flames, the poem then commits to entering into this supposedly transcendent fire in the very next line nonetheless, as if to force the hand of its supposed necessity: “The only way out a sea of flames” (19).

Can Brady find—and how will her book look for—a step beyond the self-commentary (“commentary on itself”) that she desires for her book: pure autocommentary as fire which, without trying to escape the world into the burning light of gnostic ‘salvation,’ can burn without combusting a text: pure autocommentary as commentary which comments on nothing but its own comments? This would

³ Exodus 3, NRSV.

⁴ 1 Kings 18:17-40, NRSV.

require flame without fuel—a disturbance in the order of the inevitable, a decidedly worldly turning of flame on itself which, instead of granting respite to the expectation of an otherworldly ‘salvation’ in ‘going up in flames to high heaven’ and out of the world,⁵ turns in on itself as a way of surprising the orders of necessity in the world without leaving or coming from elsewhere: burning without lightening or darkening—genuine elemental *kinesis*. If fire is a necessity, can the poem go ‘down into a burning ring of fire’ without burning up itself, disturb what appears as fire’s inevitable course towards a contemptuous burning of that same world whose appearance fire, as elemental principle, seems to make possible?

ii.

Patient attention to *Wildfire*’s claims about form and relation to form as verse-essay will eventually link Brady’s investigation of the inevitable in the history of an elemental/ontological operation of fire to what emerges as not only the problem of, but the need for, autocommentary as a response to the finding oneself amidst such flames. But also—even if only as an aside—such a procedure will help review one way to place the book within more specifically recent work in poetics.

The claim to have written a verse-essay immediately works well with the book’s bent to critically interrogate statements which register less as lyrical than philosophical, or even didactic since the ‘essay’ may at first glance appear an obvious form for such functions. Brady’s own recent work and apparent alliances within the current poetry scene would suggest that her readership would be set up to expect a work that is theory-friendly, politically- and philosophically-engaged, and what at least some New York poets might call *avant-garde*, experimental, or even ‘conceptual’—although I do not here

⁵ See Paul A. Bové’s critique of gnosticism in the humanities, especially as recently exemplified in writing by Slavoj Žižek, in *Poetry Against Torture: Criticism, History, and the Human* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008): “The new wave of Gnostic or near-Gnostic ambitions, coming after a generation that took seriously the idea that there could be no poetry after Auschwitz, that ruin was inevitable, reflects nothing less than an inability to stand in the face of human self-knowledge stripped of the comforting error of divine infusion. Politics seems unable to redeem time, and so the Christ appears, ready at hand to those with certain kinds of partial memories, ready to comfort us once more” (4-5).

have room to avow or disavow such labels. She is well-known for working between early modern and contemporary poetics as a lecturer at Queen Mary's at the University of London (in which capacity she has published a book on English funerary elegy in the seventeenth century),⁶ and directs the "Archive of the Now," which bills itself as "a scholarly, aesthetic, social and political resource for writers and readers of *innovative* poetry" [emphasis mine].⁷ Krupskaya, the publisher of *Wildfire* announces on its website that it is "*dedicated* to publishing *experimental* poetry and prose" [italics mine].⁸ Brady's past books poetry include *The Rushes*, *Embrace*, and *Vacation of a Lifetime*, which too hail from presses known for publishing experimental work, like Salt, for example.⁹ With Keston Sutherland (whose *White Hot Andy* has been of some importance to the American avant-garde in recent years) Brady also edits Barque Press, which has published distinctly experimental or avant-garde poets including J. H. Prynne, Peter Middleton, and Brian Kim Stefans.

Yet Brady's book resists being innovative or experimental as facile program. Specifically she resists a procedure which sets up a false dilemma between two temporalities or literary genres, pretending they are wildly different or indeed even 'opposites' and mutually exclusive, and then simply mashes them up against each other with the assumption that this is innovation. The mixes of genre and temporality, first of all arriving from historical need and not random pairing in the name of experiment, register as at a level of basic responsibility, as an imperative for a book ambitious enough to take on a problem of global proportions like fire. So *Wildfire's* willingness to engage so-called 'philosophical discourse' is not only unstinting, but ambitiously turns towards the very dawn of western philosophy in the Heraclitian fragments which Brady renders as

⁶ Andrea Brady, *English Funerary Elegy in the Seventeenth Century: Laws in Mourning*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁷ Andrea Brady, *Archive of the Now*, "about us," at <<http://archiveofthenow.com/about/index.html>>, accessed 19 September 2010.

⁸ KRUPSKAYA web page, "about us," at <<http://krupskayabooks.com/about.htm>>, accessed 19 September, 2010.

⁹ Andrea Brady, *The Rushes* (Hastings: Reality Street, 2012); *Embrace* (Glasgow: Object Permanence, 2005); *Vacation of a Lifetime* (Cambridge: Salt, 2001).

All things are an equal exchange
for fire and fire for all things,
as goods are for gold and gold for goods . . . (9)

And, more than simply mashing up contemporary poetics and the pre-Socratics, the book allows Heraclitus' fragment to infiltrate the whole of these poetics obsessed with thinking the limits of poetry as liquidating flames.

Certain segments of Brady's readership less disposed to ancient philosophy and expecting what they will want to call innovative or experimental work might be tempted to think of the production of such an essay in verse which includes reference to ancient philosophy as an innovative experiment. But however much we expect to read in justified paragraphs and complete sentences when we encounter either the kind of 'philosophy-writing' from our own era concerned with Heraclitus or critical work under the sign of the 'essay,' we must remember that the pre-Socratic dawn of western philosophy including Heraclitus appeared first to the Greeks in verse in a tradition that would last at least far into the Middle Ages. Along the way to refuting the conception that Parmenides' and Heraclitus' ideas were fundamentally opposed, Martin Heidegger in fact insisted on the importance of poetics to the founding of western philosophical thought.¹⁰ Nor is verse historically foreign to 'scientific' or didactic thought, to which Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* bears witness. Verse and essay are not even opposites which run into each other at their limits (an idea that will return later in this essay), but are simply compatible forms and modes of a certain poetics of serious historical thought in a tradition which has brought them together whose deep-time (with respect to a human) history makes their employment not innovative or novel, but historical and needful.

Brady not only disavows such facile 'novelty,' she also attempts to demonstrate the imperative for using such a form as part of inhabiting the long tradition she wishes to read in order to look for alternatives within it. Her "Note On the Text" insists on the

¹⁰ Heidegger notes, "The thinking of Parmenides and Heraclitus was still poetic, which in this case means philosophical and not scientific. But because in this poetic thinking the thinking has priority, the thought about man's being follows its own direction and proportions." Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 144.

importance of the verse-essay to the ostensible object of inquiry as historical: in “Tracing a globalisation of a fire that feeds on life” (72), as “an interrogation of writing practices that fume as much as they enlighten,” and as in fact a “recovery of material history” (71). And, Brady does include a fascinating outward-pointing list of sources, even if they are herded into odd categories that are—in a way at odds with the deft posing of genre in the book’s title and body—sometimes historical (Ancient and Early Modern) sometimes ‘genre-based’ (“Poetic”).

Part of the interest of the book for this present journal, however, will appear less in its more restricted claims pertaining to the genre of the ‘verse essay’ than what appears in Brady’s poem as the urgent need to tend not only the poetic aspects of philosophical thought, but their potential—or necessity—for an auto-commentarial surrounding shape, and how the less-desirable aspects of a history of fire and fire-arms ironically make this clear.¹¹ Thus Brady opens the section of the poem, “Crude,” with

This is automatic fire.
This is automatic fire, a token ring.
Each extruder talking English to themselves.
The technology driven since 4 BCE . . . (45).

The first announcement (*this is automatic fire*) immediately gives way to a second which, in a paratactic but seemingly restrictive clause modifying the complement “automatic fire,” comments on it as a “token ring” thus glossing whatever “this” points towards as the very

¹¹ We can accordingly place *Wildfire* within more recent literary history in noting that for Brady’s book the term ‘verse-essay’ provokes questions on a slightly different trajectory than that of a work like Charles Bernstein’s “The Artifice of Absorption.” See Bernstein, “The Artifice of Absorption,” in *A Poetics* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press), 9-89. The essay seems to claim itself as both essay and verse by what seems to be a lineation of what is for the most part rather prosaic syntax of the Academic essay as part of the experiment in “artifice.” The essay, it should be noted, is of great interest on its own terms as well, and has been formative for a whole generation of an English-speaking poetry avant-garde which has both appropriately and inappropriately imitated and appropriated it. Following the trajectory of its inquiry into form as it regards the ‘verse-essay’ is by no means prohibitive of following Brady’s, and vice-versa.

round structure of a commentary encircling a page in the margins, a ring: “this” is an autocommentary. This sense is furthered by the capacity of a ring of fire or of ‘extruders’ (are these men or oil mining machines?) to appear equally as the automatic fire of an auto-commentary (an autopoiesis? a glossator mining sense from herself or oil from Iraq?) since they are, after all, “talking English to themselves.” And yet, that these fragments which hauntingly suggest a *longue durée* history for the M5 rifle also register in a shape and syntactic structure recognized by the student of commentary as the glossed page—this makes equally imperative the need to tend to the auto-consuming of a language and substance of flame in which

Though the danger of the instability of our weapons
sometimes results in friendly fire consumption
of the whole deck, we stick by our strategies,
or stick like melted candles to the table (50).

And the need for autocommentary on a language that is fire spins out centripetally as well, so that writing as fire must also be understood as commentary on the globe itself, as in this sentence which successfully risks the ostentation of capitalized nouns “Fierce Feavers must calcine the Body of this World” (42). Thus Brady acknowledges the link of the verse-essay as a form to that of commentary as more than simply an attempt to acknowledge some predicable minimum threshold of reflexivity.¹²

The force of Brady’s title locates a site where essay and verse coincide in our present historical moment not as a predictable all-too-tired genre-crossing between the supposed difference of poetry and prose, but as authentically emerging in this very particular swoon of at once embracing and rejecting fire as not only a figure for, but also as the literal *ousia* of, a contemporary avant-garde poetry. Specifically because of its relationship to fire, such poetics must also conceive of its task in relation to the world as commentarial even to the extent of becoming auto-commentary. Another way both to figure this problem of the verse-essay in its relation to commentary and fire, and to feel its needfulness in factual historical relation is to recall a moment of Dante’s piece of poetics, the *Convivio*, in which the vernacular appears

¹² Regarding Bernstein’s essay (see above note), the play of “obscurity and illumination,” however, has affinity with that of “artifice” and “absorption”—in both cases each turns into its supposed opposite.

as a kind of poetic prose (a sense perhaps going back to Augustine), or poetics burning within the house of prose (which would of course predate James' house of fiction, and perhaps slide more swiftly into appearing as the house of Being, aflame):

If flames of fire were seen issuing from the windows of a house, and someone asked if there were a fire within, and another answered in the affirmative, I would not be able to judge easily which of the two was more deserving of ridicule. No different would be the question and answer if someone asked me whether love for my native tongue resides in me and I replied in the affirmative.¹³

Here the vernacular, the house, is aflame with the fires of the poetic tongue in which Dante obviously loves to speak and write (and thus for Dante, that in which he loves to write poems, to love and praise). Needing to point out such obvious love would be ridiculously redundant. And yet, Dante does in fact commit this redundant implied deixis, with the force of an elaborating gloss issuing from the analogy to the burning house. The vernacular, which in and of itself, and in one's love for it, apparently needs no gloss (unlike, of course, a supposedly global high and poetic language, a language of scripture which demands exegesis) and yet cannot help but glossing itself, even when it is most aware of the supposed redundancy. The verse-essay, similarly a vernacular sort of poetics, verging on the didactic, redundantly needs no gloss and yet somehow, on close inspection, might consist only in glossing itself.

While all the whole of the above citation of Dante is here helpful, what is perhaps most important for the moment is again the historical force it brings down upon the exigencies of Brady's form as it consistently links the history of the thought-attempt (or essay) in verse both with commentary and with fire. More succinctly: what I want to praise about Brady's book depends a great deal on the possibility that a verse-essay would be possible at this moment to the extent that poetry at once is elementally fire and the escape (as water, or what element?) from the inevitability of fire as total

¹³ Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, trans. Richard Lansing, in *Digital Dante* on the Columbia University Website, Book 1, Ch. 12, accessed at <<http://dante.ilt.columbia.edu/books/convivi/convivio.html>> on 19 September 2010. Thanks to Nicola Masciandaro for the reference.

exchangeability, and the extent that, realizing this, it accepts what Derrida once called “the necessity of commentary.”¹⁴ Throughout our questions will have to ask if autocommentary helps with the problem of exegesis as a flame which illuminates a text on the condition that it, at the same time, pass into its opposite and obscure the World.

And these lines from *Wildfire* already quoted which seem to veer towards autocommentary also seem to form part of a notable rhythm which moves refreshingly between complete sentences—whether cited, parodied, or moving towards something like ‘direct philosophical statement’—and the kind of disjunctive syntax which avoids certain traps of boredom and lost energy, thus negotiating this problem of supposed oppositions. While brilliant, challenging, and necessary in its L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E incarnations such as Silliman’s sentences, Clark Coolidge’s strings of broken self reference (e.g. *At Egypt*) or Bernadette Mayer’s broken and constantly re-breaking recursivity,¹⁵ such practices are all-to-often appropriated not as innovative composition but as depraved calculation resulting in a canned “disjunctive syntax” that easily becomes either a crutch for an avant-garde (for those times it remains unwilling to truly dismantle lyricism and/or simply lacking the commitment to maintain the energy or patience and a critical thought beyond the span of a string of two or three words), or, alternately, an easy excuse for the now Norton-anthologized ‘American Hybrid’ whose proponents, again, in depraved calculation, would like to believe that *lyric + disjunctive syntax = redemption of lyric*.¹⁶ But Brady’s verse works hard to offer alternatives to such dead-ends without running back into the safety of the prosaic. For that would merely consist of one of the obvious

¹⁴ Cf. Jacques Derrida, “Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 67.

¹⁵ See especially Mayer’s and Coolidge’s sentences going productively clashing with and cross-infecting each other in the only recently published collaboration (although written long previous) *The Cave* (Michigan: Adventures in Poetry, 2009).

¹⁶ See Jeff T. Johnson’s recent review “The New Hybridity: *Bird Lovers, Backyard* by Thalia Field and *Floats Horse-floats or Horse-flows* by Leslie Scalapino,” in *Fanzine*, 6 September 2010, on thefanzine.com accessed at <http://thefanzine.com/articles/books/461/the_new_hybridity_bird_lovers,_backyard_by_thalia_field_and_floats_horse-floats_or_horse-flows_by_leslie_scalapino>, 9 September, 2010.

manifestations of fire and commentary as mutually problematic by which Brady is deeply troubled: the conversion of one thing into its opposite through some common element, what the very syntax of lines such as these both point to and resist at the pole of ‘the complete sentence’:

Anything organic can be drawn, calcined
for days on the stove, from this need for gold. (24)

But these lines are gloss and are glossed by, on the very next page, a syntax that breaks roughly mid-line and across enjambments, sloughing together strings of logic via the poetic metonymy of the page and not the math-logic prosaic syntax:

Is this labour, pinks
unfading perennials, tarnish its aim:
by return to uncover what in the composition—
that nothing turns on illumination . . . (25)

Here is the syntax which just for a brief moment might appear, given its confusion of which words operate as verbs and which as nouns, which seems to lack a subject, which conjures the specters of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E-schooled verse à la Clark Coolidge, Lyn Hejinian, or Barrett Watten, or at very least their late-sixties predecessors. Trying all its joints in the syntax of a question which breaks off without resolving in an up-intonation of the question-mark, the verse itself becomes the object of its deixis (*Is this*). And this turn to point back at itself is notable not only because we do not know what exactly is calling attention to itself, but also because this pointing is elaborative: these verbs of alternating conjugations (*pinks*, sg. present tense; *tarnish*, pl. present tense) elaborate a sort of olfactory surface (giving us whiffs of color and chemical reaction, oxidation, without telling us exactly how they register) while they wrap about we know not what subject—save the one around which they swirl in elaboration—as *autocommentary*.

iii.

Brady's "Note On the Text" additionally states (in terms which acknowledge the ambition of such a statement)¹⁷ that her book attempts "to persuade us, to recognize that certain catastrophes and felicities are not inevitable" and that "It concerns the history of incendiary devices, of the evolution of Greek fire from a divine secret which could sustain or destroy empires, into white phosphorus and napalm; the elliptical fires or the pre-Socratics . . ." (71). Such a pronouncement accounts for what a reader quickly recognizes as the book's attempt to constantly register disquiet at the extent to which it finds a certain lay reading of the debates of the pre-Socratics sadly *adequate* to representing the problem of writing as illumination in a world where it is flaming oil fields which give light to the scholar headed for Mesopotamia's plundered museums, and writing itself is an instrument of enlightenment only insofar as it allows the world to be obscured by the smoke from incendiary precision bombing or the screens of secret prisons: "But for the apocalypse they give us freedom / of information act, and for 2d five sparrows: that nothing / concealed will not be revealed" (57). That is, the book wants to resist a state of affairs in which the pronouncement that change and motion are impossible is an adequate assumption when describing the history in which "the irenic languages of love, philosophy, and poetry are so indebted to fire; why we burn, melt, smoulder, are pierced with burning arrows from flaming eyes and in repose are lit by the light of nature" (72)—and the book wants to wrestle with the knowledge that poetry tends to fan these flames as from them it borrows its very substance.

The virtue of Brady's book is in its willingness consider, at very least thematically, the extent to which the auto-commentarial might head off the burns of obscurity and illumination as some kind of authentic movement, a way of trying to—as John D. Caputo puts it in his *Radical Hermeneutics*—"read the *kinesis* back into *ousia*, to read *ousia*

¹⁷ Brady's notes on the text indicate that she in fact had attempted to write about war in Iraq and *Gilgamesh* in which "Epic fragments were transported by Penguin Classics to a nook in London then back out to a pixillated field sewn with cluster bomblets and the shards of the Nemean lion." She then admits, "Although its aims are equally immodest, *Wildfire* was somehow more possible to stick to" (72).

back down into its kinetic components.”¹⁸ Brady strikes out for the margins with words that confuse what is at stake as a way of raising the stakes.

Light is everything, is the opposite of fat, is relish
without coping

Law promethean, expectation
bound not binding. (56)

Is this light the problem of the burning of human bodies, or a ridiculous revision of the Presocratic debates about the elements (adding lipids to the usual earth, fire, water, etc.), or is it the problem of *relish*, of enjoyment itself, now reframed as a plume of oily smoke from flesh? Does this “relish/ without coping” register the hope of shaking-up a cosmos built on fire? What is that which is ‘bound but not binding,’ that light adds to our bodies only as burnability, as mere savory relish to the brazier of human existence? That it is in fact ‘relish,’ but without ‘coping,’ is exactly what makes her text a movement towards motion, and what makes it commentarial.

Remembering that a text is bound but not binding, as well as reading the word ‘relish’ may remind of Nicola Masciandaro’s claim, in his manifesto concerning the spiciness of commentary as geophilosophy, that

commentary, which happens in proximity to and not (as in the case of its bastard offspring the annotated critical edition) in parenthesis from the text, which moves from this proximity as the very ground of its truth, and which is saturated with its own event in the form of the *extra* or outside presence of its essentially deictic gesture, may be called the *savoury circulation of the interruption of our exposure to the otherwise*.¹⁹

The commentarial, after all, follows the text as if a law in an inevitable course while not following the necessary path, striking

¹⁸ John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 1-3.

¹⁹ Nicola Masciandaro, “Becoming Spice: Commentary as Geophilosophy,” *Collapse VI: Geo/Philosophy* (2010): 48.

digressively out to the margins even as it is bound to stay with the text, bulking up the volume as it goes along. For, when one asks of her own poem “How long can this long / advert get through / a history in which all events are the same? (7), in a time when a certain debased version of negative critique in the Academic discourse *can* appear dangerously indulgent or intoxicating, when, “Now / negation is so sweetly irresistible” (68), a movement toward something ‘extra’ is needed—a movement that commits no flight to transcendence but maintains the inevitable path in the shape of the World of finite beings even as it works to unravel inevitability and necessity. A hip performative metaphoricity added to a negative critique would not more exempt it from the problem—one is merely burning up:

And if I were to use that language—a mode
that absorbs its screening mass from the atmosphere
of commerce, politics and waste, from the family . . .

. . . have I scored a blinder, or run blind
myself in all this vapour quickly spending
its burn I think I’m seeing the future? (51)

Neither ‘workshop’ craft nor canned disjunctive syntax applied to a current global concern can simply be added as if in a chemical formula to yield any authentic *change*—the accidental aesthetics of bygone experimental or avant-garde poetry too easily pass through fire and into their opposites. Unexamined ‘oppositional’ form as well will only provide more fuel for what burns up all the world so that the inevitability of war is reinforced. This is why throughout the text Brady echoes Nietzsche’s musings on a *Chemistry of concepts and sensations* in which

At almost every point, philosophical problems are once again assuming the same form for the questions as they did two thousand years ago: how can something arise from its opposite, for example something rational from something irrational, something sentient from something dead, logic

from illogic, disinterested contemplation from willful
desire, living for others from egoism, truth from error?²⁰

Brady writes:

Clearance of one organisation to its opposite
is known as no man's
land is all the difference
between loyalty and hate (50)

and then underscores that “the logic of elemental opposition has reached its end” (50)—that in some cases illicit mutual complicity of phenomena no longer bothers to even appear in terms of opposites in order to mask its non-movement with façade of authentic change. This is why *Wildfire* desires a movement out towards the margins for something ‘extra’ as commentary, but attempts this in a turning inward on itself (autocommentary: looking for its marginalia within itself), a stirring capable of disturbing: a stirring within itself as a stirring up of a movement, a shake-up as a something ‘extra,’ and a stirring-*in* the extra ‘spice’ of commentary. In this turning-in what gets added is a movement: a *kinesis* in/as the *ousia* of poesis, as the poesis of the autocommentarial. Such is one way this piece realizes this mode, just as the positions in the book of the question referred to above beginning “How can this long / advert get through” and the statement that “Negation is sweetly irresistible” might be reversed, as if the early question which would seem to demand some kind of alternative is the gloss, laid up in advance, on the self-indicting comment which comes at the end—a self-enfolding movement whose flip and fold we hope generates a ripple in the stream of the same. In fact, upon re-reading, Brady’s claim that the text comments on itself is realized, whether or not in compositional technique, at least in the experience of finding the entire contents of her book as miraculously ‘extra’ without letting us for a second have an answer to the question ‘extra to what?’

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, vol. 1, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 3. 15-16.

iv.

More of the ambition of *Wildfire*:

the poem stems from a desire to counter legal and extra-legal violence not with the naive pacifism that demands only (only?) ban to the worst weapons or the end of all war—but with an understanding of our deep affections for fire, fires that consume, obliterate, stick and burn clear, that transform, catch, and outshine. (73)

To do this, Brady is even willing to risk the Eliotic attempt to move towards poetry as direct philosophical statement, but without telling us exactly what she's philosophizing about, so that the effect, again, is an attempt at a necessary superfluity as an alternative to burnability: a desperate attempt to produce something that will leave a residue once the flames have subsided, and yet without the sense that what is to be added might come from elsewhere. What is extra must somehow get produced from within the curve of the World and the Finite, such as here, with the combustion of the human body:

With the powder dry references scatter,
but we began with somewhat that belonged
to the body of man . . . (38)

But since such residue only comes *after* violent death, and since we recall that the problem of fire remains *global*, such violence cannot help get at, from the very start, what is extraneous.

So where does one begin? Perhaps the clearest exposition that one aim of Brady's book consists of a hope that the commentarial path of circumnavigation—a rehearsal of the same folding in on itself—might generate some alternatives are these lines found early in the poem:

I have tried to make in a month what the sun
accomplishes in a year as in the brass sphere,
an excess, believing

if in fire we are in our element
then something can displace us,

that the hope is in
the recitation

I might find not fire
but thick water (10)

Yet in this formulation of autocommentarial poetics as a desire for an 'extra' resulting from movement, Brady here stumbled on the above-noted difficulty to which Derrida refers in writing of Edmond Jabès:

The necessity of commentary, like poetic necessity, is the very form of exiled speech. In the beginning is hermeneutics. But the *shared* necessity of exegesis, the interpretive imperative, is interpreted differently by the rabbi and the poet. The difference between the horizon of the original text and exegetic writing makes the difference between the rabbi and the poet irreducible. Forever unable to reunite with each other, yet so close to each other, how could they ever regain the *realm*?²¹

Among those confronted above, a difficulty in claiming an autocommentarial poetics in a poem which both recognizes and rejects the notion that everything is, so to speak, for fire equally exchangeable and understands the challenge of facing the Same, is that such a commentary might begin or end anywhere.

It is a problem of ignition. Where, after all would a poem have to begin to consist entirely of pure autocommentary? What words could the poet start writing? This is perhaps an unfair question to take this poem to task for, but one the poem to its credit, provokes. Autocommentarial verse-essay as a poem about nothing thus takes on everything and anything, and, paradoxically, remains very specific. A final digressive comment borrowing once again from philosophy will be necessary for this oddly long review to even begin to consider how to ask a question about this problem.

We could easily say this book begins, if anywhere, on no ground other than a certain kind of ambition, such as at the head of

²¹ Derrida, "Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book," in *Writing and Difference*, 67.

the section titled “Love’s Fire,” where the very title takes part in this motion, as well as its first lines:

Smothered in bitter wine or mud, heart’s fire
your moist air *immo fomento alitur umberrimo*
an altogether different poison revised with kerosene
that enlightens the closed garden where she sits. (61).

Even with the word “kerosene” which literalizes the ‘burning’ of “heart’s fire,” these lines risk indictment not only for alluding to whole histories of conventional and canned love-poetry, but also for their critique of it in terms no less obvious than echoes of that room in Eliot’s *Waste Land* in which the “flames of the sevenbranched candelabra” are reflected in a depiction of the rape of Philomel on the wall (foretelling the ugly yet tepid rape of the woman in the next section of the poem).²² But the attempt of the verse, its essay-quality, *is* thus its own self assertion. It consists in this willingness to attempt to produce a poem without washing one’s hands of the world, or the possibility of writing a ‘bad’ poem. Even if the material means of production are peeled back by pointing out the chemical source of the flames of love in a gas lamp in this particular garden, and this is opposed to the conventional relationship of fire and love in western verse, the effect of leading with “bitter wine” is irreversible: nothing says “I am a poem” to a lay-reader more than wine or fire, no matter what context is revealed in close reading. Such ambition declares the assertion of a poem, of ambition itself, by beginning with an assertion

²² See T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (NY: Harcourt, 1963), p. 56, lines 77-93. The scene takes up the bulk of part II, “A Game of Chess,” and is worth recalling more fully as an important point of reflection and pervasive allusion (along with Eliot in general) of *Wildfire*: “The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne, / Glowed on the marble, where the glass / Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines / From which a golden Cupidon peeped out / (Another his eyes behind his wing) / Doubled the flamed of the sevenbranched candelabra / Reflecting the light upon the table as / The glitter of her jewels arose to meet it, / From satin cases poured in rich profusion. / In vials of ivory and coloured glass / Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes, / Unguent, powdered, or liquid-troubled, confused / And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air / That freshened from the window, these ascended / In fattening the prolonged cangle-flames, / Flung their smoke into the laquearia, / Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.”

that doubles as a gloss, both which read, “this is a poem.” Yet even here, there is only the ash of a failed poetic idiom to assert, the autocommentary could not have arisen from anything. Eliotic fire is thus deeply troubling to and troubled by Brady’s book, and indeed in this light her rendering of Heraclitus cited above (*All things are an equal exchange/ for fire*) is equally filtered and colored by Eliot’s “death of fire,”²³ and equally concerned with the apparent no-where out of which a first-spark seems to appear. It may seem that the autocommentarial, as the commentarial capacity of Brady’s poem would begin with some prior substance (the text of the ‘verse-essay, for instance), unless, again we rigorously and very literally take and temporalize *autocommentary* as not just what automatically comments on itself, but what appears at once as only comment as such with only itself as comment for a text. Before it begins, pure autocommentary at its limit has nothing to comment on.

Autocommentarial verse would consist in just this ambition of making a move to turning-in-on-itself when there is nothing in particular there yet (*pace* Rilke, “Be—and yet know the great *void* where all things begin, / the infinite *source* of your own more intense vibration” [*italics mine*]).²⁴ This first turning-in is thus turned-in in a

²³ You know the lines, both those concerning how “Water and fire succeed / The town, the pasture and the weed. / Water and fire deride / The sacrifice that we denied. / Water and fire shall rot / The marred foundations we forgot, / Of Sanctuary and choir. / This is the death of water and fire,” and those lines in which “The dove descending breaks the air / With flame of incandescent terror . . . The only hope, or else despair / Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre— / To be redeemed from fire by fire.” See Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, p.202 & 207. Moreover of course the final Dantean lines of the *Quartets* are here worth noting, in which “All shall be well” when among other things, “the fire and the rose are one.” These lines on their own demonstrate the spirit/letter, pattern/execution, form/content, and commentary/text relationship in a particular figure Eliot intends to be complicit in his (mis)claiming of Julian of Norwich’s “all shall be well” (Julian’s own self-commentary on her autommentarial vision). See pp. 208-209.

²⁴ See Rainier Maria Rilke, “Sonnets to Orpheus,” Part 2, XIII, in *Ahead of All Parting: Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell (NY: Modern Library, 1995), 487 (Ger. text 486):

Be ahead of all parting, as though it already were
behind you, like the winter that has just gone by.
for among these winters there is one so endlessly winter
that only by wintering through it will your heart survive.

direction towards whatever (absolutely anything) as well as toward the nothing itself that the auto-commentary remains with nothing yet to double back on. The feeling of reading Brady's book is of a constant veer towards the limit of auto-commentary, no matter how much she may theoretically have the 'text' of the verse-essay as supposedly separate from its movement of self-commentary to comment begin with. Although Brady's book deals with a very material history it would seem both that the relation of what consists of a 'material' for writing appears more in this movement around the surface of a we-know-not-what than an assumption of a classical understanding of *ousia* simply as empirically discoverable and shapable 'substance.' A commitment to this sort of commentary—to orbit what may after all be only other orbits disturbing orbits—appears as a best hope in the search for alternatives to that divine fire which flames up in contempt of the world and indeed the material whose materiality that same burning ironically attempts to secure via the "transcendence still lurking in poetics which attribute to specific poems (or to themselves) the power to illuminate or obscure"—a transcendence which is, as noted above, such a deeply troubling phenomenon to Brady and indeed a purported occasion for the book (72).

To the extent the book veers towards pure autocommentary—miraculously non-combusting flames surrounding miraculously non-combusting flame, a read feels very much in the swirl of this problem of genesis. This is a ~~moment~~ where commentary stands in as a paradigm of the problem of genesis in all writing, when it could be 'about' anything or everything, but remains forever nothing—cannot in fact begin. Again, commentary is conventionally about something,

Be forever dead in Eurydice—more gladly arise
 into the seamless life proclaimed in your song.
 here, in the realm of decline, among momentary days,
 be the crystal cup that shattered even as it rang.

Be—and yet know the great void where all things begin,
 the infinite source of your own more intense vibration,
 so that, this once, you may give it your perfect assent.

To all that is used-up, and to all the muffled and dumb
 creatures in the world's full reserve, the unsayable sums,
 joyfully as *yourself*, and cancel the count.

conventionally comments on a text and maintains a kind of expanding specificity. To return to Masciandaro:

Infinite commentary on an infinitesimal text is commentary's ideal, not actually, but only as an unimaginable concept reasserting its deep desire, namely, to spatially achieve the ontological breaking-point of the text, the situation where there is *neither anything outside the text nor nothing outside the text*.²⁵

So for the limit phenomenon of pure autocommentary, a text that begins by referring to itself, to begin, is in Derridean parlance, always already a *renvoi* (re-sending), marked by an *a priori* divisibility that is for all that not a lack or negativity: "Everything begins by referring back [*par le renvoi*], that is to say does not begin."²⁶ In this respect, what one might detect as a persistent obsession with embodiment and its relation to fire (fats, ashes, etc.) in *Wildfire* is fortuitous. Such poesis

²⁵ Masciandaro, "Becoming Spice," 54.

²⁶ See "Envoi," trans. Peter and Mary Ann Caws, in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other* Vol. 1: "Everything begins by referring back [*par le renvoi*], that is to say does not begin. Given that this effraction or this partition divides every *renvoi* from the start, there is not a single *renvoi* but from then on, always, a multiplicity of *renvois*, so many different traces referring back to other traces and to traces of others. This divisibility of the envoi has nothing negative about it, it is not a lack, it is altogether different from subject, signifier, or the letter that Lacan says does not tolerate participation and always arrives as destination. This divisibility of difference is the condition for there being any envoi, possibly and envoi of Being, a dispensation or a gift of being and time, of the present and of representation . . . As soon as there are *renvois*, and they are always already there, something like representation no longer waits and one must perhaps make do with that so as to tell oneself this story otherwise, from *renvois* to *renvois* of *renvois*, in a destiny that is never guaranteed to gather itself up, identify itself, or determine itself. I do not know if this can be said with or without Heidegger, and it does not matter. This is the only chance—but it is only a chance for there to be history, meaning, presence, truth, language, theme, thesis, and colloquium." Thus Derrida hope for something related to "the unrepresentable, not only as that which is foreign to the very structure of representation, as what one *cannot* represent, but rather and also what one *must not* represent, whether or not it had the structure of the representable . . . the immense problem of the *prohibition* that beat on representation . . ." (126-128). With respect to the problem of thinking the genesis of autocommentary, I refer to all the same structures.

could not *begin* but would have to emerge as a *body* which is a movement of a boundary (the marginal sphere of commentary) around a nothing in such a way that this nothing remained open to the outside. Alternately, as a body, autocommentary would appear, whole, fleshly, by referring to its own auto-replicating genetic code (as certain kind of asexual reproductive model). It must at once take up space and be flat, be plural *and* monadic without being merely plural. Autocommentary would be the bringing into the world of something new in which text must be encountered as body, recalling Gérard Granel's assertion (which echoes Derrida's comments on the *renvoi* above) that "The body is the site of diversification of the a priori of the visible. It is the pure ontological site"²⁷—thus the problem of being able to talk about anything but having to begin seemingly as nothing.

Reading a line of *Wildfire* as a layer of skin on such a body would be to mark Brady's poem, at a moment when much of the so-called avant-garde is content to pay attention to mere quirkiness in the hope of raising an interesting issue accidentally or along the way as a side-effect (a kind of poetics as pharmaceutical R&D investment whose profit depends on stumbling upon off-label uses), with a refreshing ambition which gives relish without coping (without pretending to resolve the world by returning itself to itself, but returning itself to itself in such a way that a ripple of disturbance skids across the curved surface of cosmological happening). Such ambition to write an 'important' poem curves flat space into the planetary or global space which Nicola Masciandaro points to as the very spherical movement of commentary—surrounding even in its moment of deixis:

Accordingly, commentary works to hold forever open *and* totally fill writing's space, as if to absolutely disclose the place of writing, which means to realize it as *curved space*, the immanent space-becoming-place through which everything leads back to itself. This spatial curving that commentary realizes is visible materially as the becoming-round of the text/commentary border and conceptually as the turning motion commentarial reading and writing take:

²⁷ Gérard Granel, "Far From Substance: Whither and to What Point?" translated and reprinted as an appendix in Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith (see note 17) (NY: Fordham, 2008), 173.

away from the text, turning back towards it, repeat . . . Commentary rotationally transforms the *space* of writing into an earthly *place*. Simple textual space-filling discloses the space of writing as writing's potentiality, the page, by enclosing and surrounding it *from the inside*. Commentary, whose meaning is founded upon proximate separation from its text, continues the enclosure *from within the outside* and thus holds open the space of writing by bounding it, pushes writing to the limit where the space of writing *intersects* with what it already is, the real space of the world.²⁸

Autocommentary is a texturing of nothing into a body which can move through the world and disturb whatever moves through its curved lens-like space-time. Thus while Masciandaro is right that commentary forms the sphere where everything leads back to itself, it leads in such a way that exerts a gravitational pull which disrupts and disturbs each and every vector of force which holds the globe (or infinitesimal globule) together (including even those lines of force returning to themselves). Such commentary as the principle of the globe's self-disruption is not unlike the cartographic gloss: mapmaking as the dis-ordering elaboration of the globe's surface which renders it variously as Worlds.

The implicit claims to what is at stake in *Wildfire* as its politics—even beyond the obvious concerns of militarized burn of the globe—is the way a commentarial texturing/elaboration of nothing can paradoxically come to form the becoming of a poem: that in which what comes to be does indeed come to appearance, an *ousia* that is nothing at all (yet without being a lack or a negativity).²⁹ The claim is

²⁸ Masciandaro, "Becoming Spice," 54.

²⁹ With Derrida, I suspect that try as we may, it may be impossible to escape the critique of the determination of Being as Presence. But if the sense of *ousia* as the texturing or elaboration (as self-stirring, as *kinesis*) of nothing at all can be even *implied* (much less ever *found*, *relied on*, or *proved*), then I do think one can uncover a very different sort of *ousia* than that in the most metaphysical of cosmologies: one characterized by authentic movement which would ripple the fabric of World, an *ousia* (recalling the phrase in Granel's title cited above in note 17) "far from substance." At very least it would revise what one would mean to think about in reading Heidegger's more explicit statements on the term, even in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, where one must

that a poem is a body that is bound, but only by its unboundedness to the world rushing in on it, unable to stem that flow of leaves, shirts, guns, organs, nymphs, and even margins filling up its margins:

This point is not being finished with writing, but writing's becoming an unending beginning, the sphericization of the space of writing or our finding of the page as *unbounded finitude*, a surface for limitless writing whose every mark is first and last. Commentary's filling of the margins is an exercise in intentional, exuberant futility directed toward an ultimate forgetting of the outside, toward continual

unabashedly confront both metaphysics and their complicity in reprehensible politics. At the moment Heidegger explicitly defines Being as presence, *presence*—though still subject to Derrida's critique—appears differently than one might expect: “But from an observer's point of view, what stands-there-in-itself becomes what puts itself forth, what offers itself in how it looks. The Greeks call the look of a thing its *eidōs* or *idea* . . . What grounds and holds together all the determinations of Being we have listed is what the Greeks experienced without question as the meaning of Being, which they called *ousia*, or more fully, *parousia*. The usual thoughtlessness translates *ousia* as ‘substance’ and thereby misses its sense entirely. In German, we have an appropriate expression for *parousia* in our word *An-wesen* <coming-to-presence>. We use *Anwesen* as a name for a self-contained farm or homestead. In Aristotle's times, too, *ousia* was still used in this sense *as well as* in its meaning as a basic philosophical word. Something comes to presence. It stands in itself and thus puts itself forth. It is. For the Greeks, ‘Being,’ fundamentally means presence” (66-67). *Ousia* will emerge in terms of movement, leaving its meaning as what comes to presence very different than if substantiality is understood in terms of physical ‘matter’ (as defined by empirical science). When *phusis* as *sway* thus comes to stand in/as Being (a horizontal movement), the holding against and with which this emerges (*ousia*) is constancy in a way very different than one might think despite being a “constantly”—for it is by no means a stillness. And this is already in Heidegger, for whom the constancy of Being is said in *phusis* as “arising and standing forth” and in *ousia* in a way that is “constantly,” that is, enduringly, abiding” in which what is *constantly* coming to be does so in which what can only be called constant struggle (*polemos*) (cf. 65). Given its relation to *polemos*, that which is “that within which it becomes” (69) is actually less like the “sway, rest and movement” which are “closed and opened up from an originary unity” (which sounds just so *still* for the sense of a *phusis* constantly self-arising “and within which *that which* comes to presence essentially unfolds as beings” (64)) than it is to an originary *kinesis*. What we call substance might be the movement of nothing.

writing of the omnipresent impossibility of separateness, the always-never asymptotic union of text and world.³⁰

Such poetics could only appear as such thanks to a hidden and exiled ontology, since it would have to look something like what, with reference to Granel, Jean-Luc Nancy has called “the simultaneity of the open and the ringed, the bordered, the cerned or the dis-cerned, and the simultaneity of the void and the divided out.”³¹ When even the avant-garde disavows ambition of any kind, even for their work, and turns itself to worry about anything other than cosmology (and especially about its academic status), this reviewer would not bother to make pretense to judge the effectiveness of this attempt to produce a spark under erasure, but merely recommend that readers stay, in the spirit of commentary, along the paths of its weird contours. Poems as ambitious embodiment are so refreshing at the moment that adjudicating their success is neither here nor there, as long as a poet would once again care to interfere in philosophy, and not give up on that discourse—so it is a young poet and not just Jean-Luc Nancy (for whom I have nonetheless nothing but respect and admiration) who will ask “How do we touch, or let ourselves be touched by, the opening of the world / to the world?”³² Brady’s book may help along these lines if we try to learn from its attempt to change terms from heat and light to mass and gravity; from what we know and can circulate, to what falls, and even for a moment, stays.

³⁰ Masciandaro, “Becoming Spice,” 55.

³¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, “A Faith that is Nothing at All,” trans. Bettina Bergo, in *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (New York: Fordham, 2008), 73.

³² *Ibid.*, 73.

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