

"TO MAKE TRUTH GLIDE INTO THE SOUL"

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"The purpose of Berkeley's attention to style is the education of the reader in appropriate methods of discourse" ([1], 135). Peter Walmsley's in his *The Rhetoric of Berkeley's Philosophy* is very much the same: to get his readers sensitized to Berkeley's rhetorical theory of language and the suasive opportunities of the philosophical discourse.

There still remains a lot to learn about standards for a philosophical style and the part of rhetoric as the "master of persuasion", played in the encounter of the authorial and the reader's subjectivities. What with the collapse of the sham "consensus omnium", i.e. a state of perfect intersubjectivity, where all minds are at one about certain truths or beliefs, and what with our ensuing commitment to dialogical socio-political practices, philosophy, too, has found itself immediately exposed to the challenges of otherness – the otherness that ought to be responded to and, by feedback, should be invited to confirm, to amplify, and to share.

Face to face with these challenges, the former declarative strategies of philosophical discourse frequently happen to be deficient in terms of their rhetorical force.

This having been said, P. Walmsley's book-length assessment of Berkeley as a writer, an ingenious stylist, and an accomplished rhetorician has come just in time, concurrently to serve as an erudite guide to Berkeley's texts and an ethos of how to win convicts by means of using rather than abusing powers of rhetoric.

Berkeley's "vigorous engagement with the reader" is actually a dramatic effort to "put spirit in touch with spirit", aptly conveyable by Novalis's proposition, "It is certain my conviction gains infinitely, the moment another soul will believe in it". To seek sharedness, i.e. assent of others, is but human. The intersubjective validation, however, necessarily entails recourse to rhetoric. The more so, given one's writings "fall not within the measure of five senses" and explode the conventional views and beliefs.

According to Peter Walmsley, that was exactly Berkeley's case. The latter's challenging epistemology and his radically new portrait of our sense experience (with his principle "esse est percipi", Berkeley insisted that "ideas" of sense can only exist in the perceiving mind and, further, that only minds and their perceptions can be said to exist) were in need for rather a sympathetic than critical reading. Thus there surfaced the problem of a proper philosophical tone.

Berkeley's rhetorical choices' dynamism and drama are being traced by P. Walmsley through the fabric of the philosopher's four major philosophical texts, *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, *Alciphron*, and *Siris*. Peter Walmsley does prove well equipped to fully appreciate the scope and heterogeneity of affective imagery, rhetorical strategies and the range of philosophical genres – the treatise, the dialogue, and the essay – Berkeley is bringing at the service of immaterialism in his effort to "link Heaven and Earth".

So therefore, all of a sudden, we come to feel indebted to Peter Walmsley for the Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne, we have never known before: the Berkeley speaking not *ex cathedra* but appealing *ad populum* ("it is agreed on all hands"); the Berkeley making a pact

with the reader; the Berkeley establishing a specific community of author and alien world; the Berkeley shunning no informality, tentativeness, or spontaneity of the dialogue or the essay – the unexpectedly intimate and immediate Berkeley. As Peter Walmsley puts it: "...Berkeley develops the plain style's most powerful qualities...Easy and informal expression lacks the distance created by a heavily-ornamented, periodic style, which seems self-conscious and emphatically public...the impression of conversation is heightened by the ubiquitous 'I' of the *Principles*. Berkeley's *persona* constantly evaluates his own argument, appealing to his own perspicuous ideas and laying the working of his own mind before the reader. The effect of these initial revelations is to develop the reader's trust" ([1], 27).

For all these rhetorical gestures inchoate in Berkeley's account of immaterialism, the diction of *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* was still too "aggressive", direct, and imposing not to sort of intimidate the reader, or scare him/her away, or again make him/her suspicious of the breakthrough doctrine advanced. Berkeley, P. Walmsley proceeds, opted for the dialogue. Due to the latter's opportunities for accommodating more naturally diverse perspectives and perplexities, spontaneity of response and horizontality of belief as well as resiliency and openness to the unexpected, the form of the dialogue was standing better chances to capture a readership for immaterialism where the treatise had proved wanting in suasion.

In Peter Walmsley's account of Berkeley's grappling with words, the drama of human exposure to the worlds other than our own, i.e. the anguish over the ultimate unattainability of otherness, takes on the form of a tireless authorial effort to (unostentatiously) "make truth glide" into the reader's consciousness. Avid for the reciprocal interactions with the reader, for one thing, and aware of the fact one cannot climb out of his/her skin or leave her/his own world, for another thing, Berkeley had learnt a lesson from the *Principles'* lukewarm reception.

There was no denying the fact Berkeley's and his readers' perspectives had refused to blend. Incongruity, as one of the ways otherness may call on us, urged Berkeley to revise his rhetoric. Right, he could not climb out of his skin, yet it was up to him to articulate aspects of himself in order to open up the world of the other and to implant an alien world with his. The recalcitrant ought to be rendered malleable.

Now, "less than three years later", P. Walmsley narrates (few could hold a candle for him in his striking a perfect balance between concretizing details, these touches of life – how scarce, how spare, how disarming – and the remaining intellectual discourse), the unbroken champion of immaterialism left Ireland, "for the first time in his life" (!), carrying with him the manuscript of the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. Though congruent with the *Principles* in a subject matter, it was, however, radically different in form.

For once, Berkeley had opted for the style of the dialogue known as "elenchus" (a legacy from Plato): logical wrangling that was extremely popular among the Greeks, who as often as not took a playful delight in the dispute. Berkeley, P. Walmsley argues, exploits the rhetorical opportunities of the elenchus, mixing its tight repartee with unexpected lyrical excursions.

Probing in dialogical discourse led Berkeley to the apologetical *Alciphron*, where rhetoric feeds on the contrast between the views of Christian and atheistic characters, "free-thinkers". Thus, in P. Walmsley's focused rendition, the narrated dialogue *Alciphron* is the exemplification of true and false discourse, polemic against improper language, its abuse and deluding tricks. Writes Peter Walmsley: "Berkeley has taught us how to unravel the deceptive rhetoric of the coffee-house philosophers, how to decode their specious diction and recognize the flaws in their appealing analogies, *exempla* and rhapsodies. And all the while Berkeley has illuminated...a style that is both logically valid and rhetorically effective" ([1], 135).

P. Walmsley's gripping and illuminating journey into Berkeley's rhetorical land reaches the zenith of intellectual subtlety and stylistic refinement where he addresses Berkeley's essay *Siris*.

Siris: the most esseystic of essays whose heterogenous topics are only glued together by the pervasive image of the mind and the underpinning ethos of the legitimacy of any subject matter: "This probing wayward discourse generates a cautious ethos as it depicts an almost nervously receptive mind hesitant to impose its own hypothesis on the evidence it has gathered" ([1], 150).

Siris: how lofty, how earth-bound, how life-enhancing!

Siris: Berkeley's swang song, written by Bishop of Cloyne amongst his consuming pastoral duties as a radical experiment in form and style: "This random collection of notes about tar-water's virtues is the antithesis of the *Principles*' smooth, logical flow. In *Siris* Berkeley favours very short sentences and these take the barest subject-copula or subject-verb-object form. But even the longer periods exhibit little subordination or syntactic projections... Berkeley also enforces an unnatural parataxis, banishing connections between his periods. Each sentence begins the discourse anew with its own subject, emphasizing the independence of each observation" ([1], 148).

Siris: Berkeley's most perplexing work and the one most frequently ignored by modern Berkeley scholars; a history of free meditation, a "patchwork" of opinions and evidence; a lesson of open-mindedness about the possible benefits of other perspectives; a preparation for the encounter with the unforeseen and uncalculated; a hand stretched out to the reader by way of invitation to become "fellow-travellers" on the same obscure path: "Berkeley's tone in presenting *Siris* is altogether different. He seems rather dubious about the outcome of his inquiries... And he seems less than willing to take full responsibility for the book, depicting himself as almost passive in the writing process; he merely followed his thought... ([1], 144).

Siris: Berkeley's hermeneutics of the natural world and, on the other hand, a mirror of the natural process of the acquisition of knowledge; *Siris* (a chain), Berkeley's presiding metaphor: "Throughout the work he makes extensive use of the ancient conceit of the chain of being, and applies it to the work itself, which effectively climbs from the lowest to the highest being. 'Chain' implies both the order and connection that mind can bring to the world, and the world's painful restraint on the innate aspirations of the mind. The image remains, none the less, an appropriate title for *Siris*, which seeks not to resolve, but simply to narrate the tension between world and mind" ([1], 171-172).

A disjointed aforistic style of the essay ("Truth is the cry of all but the game of few"), that has no claims to embrace the whole discipline, admmissive of metaphoric and narrative "touches of life" and as it has been practised by Berkeley and brought home to us by P. Walmsley, might well be another avenue for the current philosophy to get *practical* in the most Kantian sense of the word.

Peter Walmsley's is a tome to regale on, to give a second thought to, and to learn from.

LITERATÚRA

- [1] WALMSLEY, P.: *The Rhetoric of Berkeley's Philosophy*. Cambridge Studies in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Thought 6. Cambridge University Press 1990.