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A surplus of meaning : the intent of irregularity in Vedic poetry

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Citation

Knobl, W. F. (2009, September 30). *A surplus of meaning : the intent of irregularity in Vedic poetry*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/14036>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Foreword-and-Introduction

*Denken ist interessanter als Wissen,
aber nicht als Anschauen.*¹

IF I HAD LIVED in the Vedic age and had been so fortunate as to be born into a traditional *brahmán*-family, to become one of those poets and philosophers specialized in speculation on — and *formulation* of — what was called *bráhman*-, I should have liked to compose a cosmogonic hymn of my own. And I might have started that hymn in the following slightly disenchanted way, by reciting a distich in the *trīṣṭubh* metre and anticipating the opportune ambiguity that the word *śabda*-was to acquire with the passage of time:

*śábdō vā ágre áarthavān yá áśīd
anartháḥ sá śábdā evā babhūva*

That meaningful *word*, which *was there* in the beginning,
has come to be (*á babhūva*) a mere *sound* without meaning.²

¹ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*. Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1976, 198 § 1150.

If we apply this pithy apophthegm — which epitomizes, with maximal terseness, a great poet's and natural scientist's experience of a full lifetime — to linguistic and philological research, the following adaptation can be made: It is *most* interesting for us scholars attentively to *look at* individual word-forms and text-passages, and let ourselves be inspired by them to thoughts that will go well beyond what we think we already know. Now, *interesting* also means 'amusing' and 'entertaining'. And there is no reason for us to believe that science must be practised in the spirit of dead earnestness, or else it isn't science.

² Our would-be — or rather, would-have-been — ancient poet-philosopher may have sprung from a *bráhmaná*-family belonging to the Vājasaneyin branch of Vedic knowledge, since the equivocal word *śabda*- is prominently attested in texts of the White Yajurveda. To be sure, the adjective *śabdín*- 'noisy, geräuschvoll', which occurs at ŚS 19.36.3b ≈ PS 2.27.3b, presupposes the noun's existence for the time of the Atharvaveda, at least. The noun *śabda*- itself, however, does not only occur at VSM 30.19 = VSK 34.4.1, but also in 17 places of the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa.

I am sadly certain that my complaint would have been justified even in a past so far away from the present as to suggest an almost extratemporal quality of *yonder age*. But neither is there a past, however distant, that could possibly take us outside this mundane framework of Time, nor can any poet or philosopher be found in any age, however remote, whose words and thoughts would *eternally* remain a complete mystery to us.

The common human nature — a nature that we share with even the most arcane poet, with even the most abstruse philosopher — guarantees the *possibility*, at the very least, of an infinitely approximative understanding,³ provided we free ourselves from those obstructive distinctions — which have come to be accepted as natural, wellnigh god-given differences — between poet and scholar, intellect and emotion, reason and imagination, fact and fancy, objective and subjective truths.⁴

After this — not altogether fictitious — preamble, it is now about time for me to introduce the contents of the present work:

My seminal paper “Mind-Reading the Poet”, part of which was read at the Second International Vedic Workshop, 31 October – 2 November, 1999, Kyoto University, has proven to be the moderately reproductive starting-point of a series of partly unpublished articles. Only the following four have already seen the public light:

1. “The Nonce Formation: A more-than-momentary look at the *Augenblicksbildung*”. The Vedas: Texts, Language & Ritual. Proceedings of the Third International Vedic Workshop, Leiden 2002. Edited by Arlo Griffiths & Jan E. M. Houben. (Groningen Oriental Studies, Volume XX). Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2004, 261–283.

All of these ŚB occurrences are found in the Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka-Upaniṣad section of that Brāhmaṇa, and two passages from among them may have been of particular interest to the poet: ŚBM 14.4.3.10 = BĀUM 1.3.10 (≈ BĀUK 1.5.3) *yāḥ kās ca śabda / vāg evā śā* ‘Whatever sound [there is], that [sound] is but speech’ and ŚBM 14.7.2.23 = BĀUM 4.2.23 (≈ BĀUK 4.4.21) *nānu dhyāyād bahūn chābdān vācō viglāpanaḥ hī tād* ‘[The pensive (*dhīra*-) *brāhmaṇā*-] should not [‘ponderously’] ponder on many words, for that would [only] weary speech’.

It also seems clear that our speculative poet felt free critically to *reverse*, for the sake of his *cosmological* argument, the textually attested meaning-development of the ‘word-sound’ *śabda*-from ‘sound’ to ‘word’. And this early piece of presumptive evidence may perhaps pass muster as yet another example of what we call *poetic licence*.

³ To be sure, even the demigod Achilles will never catch up with the turtle, and the *tortoise taught us* that there is no ultimate truth we mortals could hope to attain. *Devant nos yeux, il n’y a qu’une vérité tortue*. And *she* may grant us longevity if we keep staying behind.

⁴ If those differences really *were given* by a god — who may have tried, but hopefully in vain, to imbue us, by means of the poison of his gift, with distinctions of a venomous kind — we would have to implore the goddess of speech, whose voice is heard on both sides, to intervene between man and the divine donor of the dose, so that forthwith the donum *be taken back*.

2. “Mind-Reading the Poet. Cases of Intended Metrical Irregularity in Vedic Poetry”. *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 24, 2007, 105–139.

3. “Conspicuous Absence. A New Case of Intended Metrical Irregularity: The Catalectic Line ṚV 10.129.7b”. *Indologica: T. Ya. Elizarenkova Memorial Volume. Book 1. Compiled and edited by L. Kulikov and M. Rusanov. (Orientalia et Classica. Papers of the Institute of Oriental and Classical Studies: Issue XX). Moskow: Russian State University for the Humanities, 2008, 183–195.*

4. “Portmanteau Words in the Ṛgveda”. *East and West. Papers in Indo-European Studies* edited by Kazuhiko Yoshida and Brent Vine. Bremen: Hempen Verlag, 2009, 89–110.⁵

For reasons of limited space, the editors of this latest publication asked me to curtail the final draft of my paper by almost half of its size, when I submitted it to them in 2008. With a heavy heart, I agreed to excise *all the four* excursuses that formed, in spite of their digressiveness, an integral part of the whole.⁶

Below, I have tried to restore the text to its original integrity; not, however, by reinserting the four excursuses into their proper place, but by annexing them to the already curtailed version — now that the harm has been done — as just so many appendices, under the new title:

5. “Stars. Four-in-One”, *1–*21.⁷

Also, a completely unpublished article — which is based on a paper that I read at the 12th World Sanskrit Conference, Helsinki, 14–19 July, 2003, and which has, in the mean time, far outgrown the size acceptable for publication in the proceedings of the Veda section at that conference — is included here:

6. “The Mid-Word Cæsura in the Ṛgveda: Degrees of Metrical Irregularity”, *1–*62.⁸

Future projects are occasionally mentioned, or hinted at, in the present collection. Some of them concern subjects that fall under the same general heading as this dissertation: A Surplus of Meaning. Among these topics, there are the following: Rhythmical Irregularities in Vedic Trimeter Verses (MR 113 n. 23), The

⁵ This is the proceedings volume of an international conference on Indo-European that was held at Kyoto University, 11–12 September, 2007, and at which 17 papers were read.

⁶ If to *curtail* meant ‘to cut off the *tail* of a *cur*’ — which, of course, it doesn’t — then shortening my poor dog of a paper by nearly one half of its *quadruped* identity would have amounted to a rather drastic operation. And it is quite likely that in this unlikely case, I would have felt, with sympathy and compassion for the cruelly truncated animal, a kind of phantom pain in my own *extremities*.

⁷ Eventually, this fourfold digression may prove to be separately publishable as one (or several) paper(s).

⁸ Whenever I refer to one of these six articles, I shall use the following abbreviations: NF for 1. Nonce Formation, MR for 2. Mind-Reading, CA for 3. Conspicuous Absence, PW for 4. Portmanteau Words, FO for 5. Four-in-One, MWC for 6. Mid-Word Cæsura.

Metrical “Rest” Expressive of an ‘Extra-Linguistic Element’ (MR 125, MWC 55 with n. 170), Word Haplology as a Means to Add Meaning in Compensation of the Syllable Loss (MR 128, MWC 13 with n. 37), or The Principle of ‘Under-Understanding’ (MWC 45 with n. 143, and 61–62 with n. 186).

On its surface, my research is obviously concerned with well-known linguistic or literary units: prosodic and grammatical forms. We have to be sufficiently informed about their respective regularity if we wish to estimate the exact degree of an encountered *irregularity*. Some irregularities are so frequent or so typical — such as, for instance, the typically catalectic and hypermetrical trimeter verses — that they need not even be mentioned, let alone treated in any detail. Others, however, are so few and far between, or deviate from the norm to such *an oticeable* extent as to call for much more than a mere mention; they seem to claim nothing less than a special and very preferential treatment of their irritatingly irregular character.

There are scholars for whom an irregularity — no matter how irritating it is — does not seem to be worth their scholarly while, and who will dismiss it, without more ado, as an aberration, or abnormality, or even monstrosity. Representative scholars of this no-nonsense kind are repeatedly cited in my articles; not without a fair measure of irony, and an invisible smile expressive of mild amusement, which they have earnestly earned with their offhand dismissal. However competent and authoritative they may be thought of as, say, grammarians, their hasty, more or less derogatory qualifications of irregularity are apt to give them away in another respect: they have proven insensitive to the *artistic* side of language.

As if in humorous rebellion against a social and psychological order that seems to be firmly established in accordance with the maxim *tel maître, tel valet*, the late English-American novelist Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse cultivated a jocular partiality for the *inimitable* Jeeves at the expense of the butler’s gentlemanly employer Bertie Wooster. In a somewhat similar way, I seem to have developed a *parti pris* for irregularity, and almost an idiosyncratic prejudice against any all-too-regular form of language. Future researchers may feel called upon to decide whether such a bias has to be explained *psycho-* or *socio-*linguistically.

But before this prospective decision is actually made, I would like to be granted the chance to explain myself first. Just as the moral nature of a human being reveals itself most clearly in an extremely vicious or excessively virtuous act, so it is with language: Its character comes to light with greatest clarity where we find forms that defy an easy and immediate understanding. The very eccentricity of these forms suggests a meaning that is well below the skin-deep epidermis and

most superficial surface of speech, well beyond language as a convenient means of commonplace, middle-of-the-road communication.

My investigations are based upon the — to my mind, reasonable — assumption that every work of literary art is literally saturated with *meaning*. And meaning means *intent*. Whenever we find regularity of form, a purpose can readily be presupposed.⁹ Any kind of irregularity, on the other hand, seems almost to exclude intent, or at least, can make it extremely difficult for us to detect a purpose behind and underneath.

A strong and dominant tendency among Vedic scholars would make us consider anything irregular a lapse of the pen — or rather, of the tongue — or even a *lapsus mentis*. And if the mistake cannot be imputed to the poet himself, then it must have been tradition that slipped. For we are prone to think that the later redactors, who are responsible for the so-called *orthoepic diaskeuasis* (Oldenberg), may be guilty of many a clerical error.

The handing down of the text of the Ṛgveda by word of mouth has proven so reliable, however, that we may want to follow suit and be as *true to the letter* — or rather, *to the sound* — as the Indian *oral* tradition warrants us to be.

The topic of all the investigations presented here is this very difficulty, the difficulty of unveiling the underlying intent of irregularity. And in my various attempts at solving this difficulty whenever I am confronted with it, I have consistently started from the fundamental presumption — which by now has acquired in my mind the character of a self-evident axiom — that where we come across conspicuous irregularity in poetry of a high or the highest standing, *it must be intended*.

In my writings, I have always tried to distinguish as accurately as possible between lower and higher degrees of irregularity. The challenging problem irregularity poses — at least to a scholar who cares to *feel* the challenge and is ready to take it up — increases in direct proportion to those degrees: the higher they are, the more provocative irregularity becomes. But also, *pari passu* with the increase in provocation, the likelihood of irregularity being *intended* increases, too.

Imaginative Intellection — which, to our conventionally trained ears, may sound like a contradiction in terms — is the activity we have to practise when trying to interpret irregularity, if we wish to get any closer to the poem than the study of its regularities allows us to get.

⁹ Minimally, the purpose of a regular form, although such a purpose may be unconscious to the author, would be this: unquestioningly to follow the rules. At least a *certain* — but certainly not the highest — degree of awareness may be assumed in the loyal, law-abiding person whose intent it is to *teach* regularity.

Do we scholars make it a habit to close the stable-door after the poet has stolen the horse? Often this would seem to be our practice, because we are left in the dark *within* the stable, and *without* the horse. We are bound to remain mountless in obscurity, unless we realize that it is *us* whom the poet has taken outside, out into the daylight and open air, together with the horse; *nay*, riding the horse; *neigh*, being the horse.

My profound interest in poetry dates from the early sixties, when I was about twenty years of age. As time went by, I became more and more attracted to literary works that abound in word-play. Not only did the amazing artistry of classical Sanskrit poetry fascinate me, but also the paronomastic sophistication of the great ‘word-play-wright’ Shakespeare, the amusingly digressive playfulness of Laurence Sterne, or the respective charms of Lewis Carroll and Gerard Manley Hopkins. French intellectual artists such as Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Valéry, or Guillaume Apollinaire and many of the surrealists, held me as tightly spellbound as German poets like Rainer Maria Rilke and Gottfried Benn. Nor should I forget to mention James Joyce and Arno Schmidt, the study of whose word inventions and deformations kept me preoccupied for quite some time. Particularly important became the new school of Concrete Poetry, which had started in the fifties, spreading from Brazil to many countries around the globe.

It is because I had grown familiar with the puns and tricks of quite a number of poets that I was able to draw the attention of Paul Thieme — when he mentioned in his classes, toward the end of the sixties, that he intended to write an article on what he fancied to call “Sprachmalerei” — to several interesting examples of, *sit venia verbo*, ‘glotto-iconic’ character I had come across in the works of Ennius, Catullus, and a few other ancient as well as modern poets. In the published article of 1972, Thieme generously gave me credit for referring him to the two Latin authors.¹⁰

¹⁰ See Paul Thieme, “Sprachmalerei”. *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 86, 1972, [64–81] 66 n. 4 = *Kleine Schriften II*, 1995, [994–1011] 996 n. 4: “Ich verdanke den wichtigen Hinweis hierauf meinem Hörer W. Knobl ...”. I do not mind being called Thieme’s *Hörer* because I think I did listen to him and his teaching as attentively as a young man’s hearing flushed with the rush of youth would allow me to listen.

But I was also his (irregularly) *regular* student and (undisciplined) disciple, although my erstwhile teacher may have thought that I wasn’t (any more), since at that time I pretended not to be interested in an academic career, and affected an independence that made me refuse his proposal to write a dissertation with him (for which headstrong refusal, see further below). And I hope that he too does not mind — standing corrected *posthumously*.

I have made mention of Thieme’s important and influential 1972 publication on *Sprachmalerei* in several places of the present collection: at, for instance, MR 106, 125; NF 261 n. 3, 265 f., 266 n. 10; MWC 28, 34–36.

At the Second International Vedic Workshop, Kyoto 1999, Jared S. Klein, with his characteristic kindness, graciously pointed out to me that my mind-reading efforts “could open”, as he chose to put it, “an entirely *new branch* of Vedic research”. Encouraged by Jared, and by other dear friends and colleagues, I have been out on that limb ever since — for the better part of a decade — even though it may have lost some of its pristine freshness in the process of my being out on it.¹¹

Three years later, at the Third International Vedic Workshop, Leiden 2002, when I had finished reading my paper on the Nonce Formation, Stanley Insler asked me about my method.¹²

In maybe too sanguine a vein, I improvised an answer that must have sounded funny at the moment, because it earned me some good-humoured laughter from the audience. Should I now be allowed to elaborate on that impromptu reply of mine, I could make it look reasonably ‘serious’ as well.

On the spot, I pretended, with a touch of light-hearted irresponsibility, that I had recently thought about method — the temporal adverb “recently” being intended to cover a few uncounted years between the millennia — and that I had come up with an idea.

Scholars are known to like *-eme*-formations. They freely speak of *emes* such as *grapheme*, *meneme*, *moneme*, *morpheme*, *mytheme*, *noeme*,¹³ *phoneme*, or *sememe*. The term ‘grapheme’, for instance, refers to a graphic unit, ‘sememe’ to a semantic or semasiological one.

Now, in case we wanted to measure units of poetical significance, in order to become more systematic and imitably methodical,¹⁴ could we not think of a new

¹¹ The only thing that could discourage me now from keeping up ‘the good work’ is the fairly remote chance of *my* new branch showing signs not only of age, but also of getting crowded. If, against all odds, that contingency should eventually happen to occur, I would have to gather all my strength in resisting the powerful urge to glide down from the tree with monkey-like speed.

¹² As if assiduously attending our common teacher’s classes, and intently studying his writings, might not have proven sufficient to guarantee that at least some of *his* method had effectively rubbed off on us! Or did my *satīrthyāḥ* and *co-disciple* perhaps wish to suggest that our *maître bien-aimé* and *priyātamo gurūḥ* had not much of a method himself? If so, then how is it possible that this hypothetical deficiency coexisted so peacefully in one and the same person with the greatest *mātrise* and *gauravām* the last century had the privilege to witness in a single indologist of truly secular fame?

¹³ This too is *an eme* — even though it spells *noeme* — as scholars of the Erlangen School will tell you.

¹⁴ All-too-often, this seems to be the point of scientific method, that it is *imitable*. But should we not aim a little higher, and try to attain a goal that lies beyond *imitability*? If ‘aping and being aped’ — or ‘parrotting and being parrotted’ — were to remain one (or two) of the most eagerly striven-after final causes of our science, then some not-so-remote day we may become dispensable, for there will be other, and far better, *imitators* waiting for their chance, for the chance to supplant us.

-*eme*-formation — one that would run approximately parallel to those that exist already, as if to compete with them, possibly like something of a black horse — and introduce it as a technical term?

If the answer is in the affirmative, as it is likely to be, then I may perhaps venture a novel expression, which I hope will not be taken as just another nonce formation and “forerunner without a following” (NF 262). The newly-coined *eme* that I would like to propose is — *poeme*.

When I discussed, MR 130–139, two extreme cases of hypermetricality: **1.** the *fourteen*-syllable *triṣṭubh* line R̥V 10.10.12a *ná vā u te tan_uvā tan_uvām sám papṛcyām* (130–135) and **2.** the *thirteen*-syllable *triṣṭubh* line R̥V 10.121.7c *táto devānām sám avartatāsur ékaḥ* (135–139), I should have liked to be aware of the following somewhat disheartening aphorism:

*Un poète consultait Chamfort sur un distique: «Excellent, répondit-il, sauf les longueurs.»*¹⁵

Had I then been acquainted with this witticism, I would certainly have availed myself of it; not without adding, however, some quibbling remark — meant to keep in ironical line with Chamfort’s response to the poet, and intended, at the same time, as a critical comment on it — which could have read like this:

The excessive (‘excelling’) *lengths* of R̥V 10.10.12a and 10.121.7c, far from reducing the excellence of these two hypermetrical *triṣṭubh* lines, are apt to render them, *bien au contraire*, even more *excellent* and *prééminent* — positively ‘outstanding’ by just as many syllables: by the three of *tan_uvām* in the first case, by the two of *ékaḥ* in the second.

And I could have been tempted — on that opportune and irresistibly seductive occasion — to apply our newly-acquired technical term *poeme*, and measure the Surplus of Meaning by simply counting either three or two additional units of poetical significance, in exact parallel with the number of syllables in *tan_uvām* and *ékaḥ* respectively.

But then I would also have found the strength, I am fairly confident, to resist that temptation, in spite of its pretended irresistibility. Yielding to it should be

¹⁵ Nicolas Chamfort, “Caractères et Anecdotes”. Œuvres complètes de Chamfort, recueillies et publiées, avec une notice historique sur la vie et les écrits de l’auteur, par P. R. Auguis. [I-V]. Tome second. Paris, 1824-1825 (= Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1968), 157.

I wonder whether the enlightened Frenchman (1741–1794) *du grand siècle des lumières* would have formulated the same skeptical reply, possibly in Japanese, if the differently enlightened 17th century haiku poet [Matsuo] Bashō (1644–1694) — lightness (*karumi*) was his ideal — could have asked, from a distance of one hundred years (or should that have been too far away?), for advice on a poem of no more than seventeen *light* syllables. I imagine that *les longueurs de Chamfort* may have got lost in translation.

reserved for the time when I have grown weak and decrepit with old age, when all that I am still capable of doing is counting and measuring.

Here may be the place, in this tortuous path of a foreword-and-introduction, where to drop a few *obiter dicta* on method:

1. Often enough, a method or ‘methodology’ only creates the unorganic disorder it was meant to *organize*. And there is ample occasion for us to recall — in case we had heard it before — a ‘sarcaustic’ criticism the Viennese wit Karl Kraus leveled against psychoanalysis, to the effect that *Ψ is the disease whose cure it alleges to be*.

2. Method is only acceptable if it helps to understand. Some methods, however, are greater dangers than any lack of method. They are to be apprehended as just so many *obstacles* to understanding. Whenever one of those obstructive methods gets in our way, we shall have to invoke Indra the *vṛtra-hān-*, or else, act as *obstacle-destroyers* ourselves.

3. Goethe, the poet and *natural scientist*, observed in one of his posthumous aphorisms: “Zur Methode wird nur der getrieben, dem die Empirie lästig wird”.¹⁶

As long as empirical research is not a burdensome bother (or bothersome burden) to us, and I hope it will never turn into that (or that), we shall always try — without letting ourselves be driven to apply a method for a method’s sake — attentively to look into individual cases, and patiently to examine all the examples that seem to testify to a suspected phenomenon, down to the least and most modest witness, with a critical and even sceptical mind, but also with all the passion and enthusiasm that every aspect of a poetical language deserves.

4. Of the greatest value will be a method — whether we call it ‘scientific’ or not, does not matter at all — that sharpens our senses, that helps us develop sagacity and penetration, that brings out the best in our human, emotional as well as intellectual, faculties. And our — yes, infinitely free — faculties should not be reduced to the compulsive instincts of an *accountant* or a *collectionist*. However strong and justified these instincts may be, and however important for the self-assertion of the scholar as a competent craftsman, they have to be kept in check by more creative impulses.

5. In my discussion (MWC 21–25) of an intriguing third-degree mid-word cæsure that occurs in the anticlimactic verse RV 2.1.8d *t_uvám sahásrāṇi śatá dáśa práti* ([O Agni,] You are equal to *thousands, hundreds, ten*’), the undeniably disturbing metrical irregularity created by the poet with this wayward sequence of numerals gave me occasion to maintain (MWC 23–24 with n. 73): “But let us be

¹⁶ J. W. Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, 207 § 1214.

disturbed, and see what happens. The disturbance may lead to a sudden insight. And all depends on that”.

Having referred to Thieme’s “Es kommt darauf an, einen Einfall zu haben, und der Einfall läßt sich nicht auf vorgeschriebenem Wege herbeilocken”,¹⁷ I went on to embroider and elaborate: “As a matter of fact, that ‘unprogrammed’ *Way* is the untrodden *Path* — and also the *Method* (ἡ μέθοδος) — of Speech herself, a more-than-human latent *Trail* which evokes or elicits a patent response from us mortals.

Often, we are able to find the manifest answer only after a long and laborious delay. And sometimes, not even then. Without the hope, however, that one day — perhaps already next week, but maybe not before another thirty or forty years have elapsed — the obvious reply will be found, we could not even take the first step in the right direction”.¹⁸

The very special relationship between Poet and Scholar undoubtedly deserves a few further remarks:

When interpreting poetry, two fundamental options are open to us. We may consider the poet either a skilled artisan trained to rearrange the *disjecta membra* of a pre-existing poetical production into a motley patchwork of borrowed pieces, disparate *Versatzstücke*, which some scholars like to call ‘patterns’. Or else, we may regard the poet as a relatively autonomous author who, while not completely averse to using a few fragments of tradition here and there, produces something new and original.

To be sure, the tendency is strong among us scholars to look down upon the poet from a supposedly superior standpoint or coign of vantage, coldly to test, examine, and schoolmaster him in the name, and under the cover, of scientific objectivity. But this assumed superiority can easily lead to missing the point of his poetry altogether. That point may be fine, sometimes extremely fine, nay, virtually invisible. Yet, the *finesse* of our own research might entirely depend on whether we are able to find it or not. And before we can hope to succeed in spotting *ce point infiniment fin*, we have to get very close indeed.

In our attempt at getting close to the poem — and through *it* to the poet, and through *him* to Speech the Poetess, and through *her* to Speech Itself — we may, on occasion, lose our critical distance. The risk has to be run. And I refuse to believe that there is danger in that loss of distance. Only the *results* of our mind-reading will justify, or disavow, the effort.

¹⁷ Paul Thieme, *Untersuchungen zur Wortkunde und Auslegung des Rigveda*. (Hallische Monographien, Nr. 7). Halle / Saale: Max Niemeyer, 1949, 8.

¹⁸ For more on method and technique, see, in particular, NF 264 f. or MR 106 ff.

The clash and conflict that is bound to be struck up when Poet and Scholar meet has the tendency to develop into a one-sided dialogue. One-sided, because, after the poet has had his say, it is now the scholar all by himself who is speaking. But if, in this scholarly monologue, the learned speaker is able to listen, to listen attentively, he may be capable of hearing an inner voice that suggests — *sotto voce*, as it were — *anch' io sono poeta ...*

If his ears are fine-tuned to the evocative murmurs and whispers of Speech, and the droning loudspeaker of his scholarly discourse does not drown out the subdued undertone of that Voice within, which unobtrusively tries to make itself heard, he will be enabled sometimes to discern a subtle meaning that his uninspired mind could not have descried on its own.

The meaning in quest of which the scholar has started out on his investigative journey may objectively *be there*, but how could he possibly know about it if he compulsively restrains his own nature — for the sake, I am told, of scientific objectivity — if he refrains from giving voice to his natural subjective self?

Mind-reading the poet does not only mean — as I have explained in one or two places of the present collection (e.g., MR 107) — reading the poet's mind *with* a scholar's mind. It also means, and this is more important than anything else: reading the poet's mind *within* the scholar's mind.

For it is *there*, in the mirror of his *own* mind, that the scholar may catch intermittent glimpses of the poet's *reflexion*, that he has *reason* to expect repeated delightful lightning flashes of insight. But the mirror is also his source, it is the original fountain-head from which may spring the waters of his inspiration.

As long as Mirror and Source are kept clean, they will keep reflecting faithfully, keep streaming resourcefully.

By way of a brief autobiographical note, which is meant to be less fictitious than the preamble above, I may perhaps hark back to my student days at Tübingen University. I had scarcely started, on the shady side of the sixties, to study Sanskrit seriously — more seriously, in fact, than I have ever studied a foreign language — with my revered teacher Paul Thieme (1905–2001), when he offered me the unexpected opportunity to write a dissertation on several Sanskrit words, for which I had suggested new etymologies in his classes.¹⁹

¹⁹ I do not mind making the delicate confession that more than forty years ago, I fell in love at first blush with Sanskrit, that I have never fallen out of my *vernal* fancy for it, and that the blush has only grown a deeper shade of purple every fall. If this *autumnal* change of colour continues to befall me — year after year after four-seasoned year — until a full lifetime of one *śatāśāradam* may be completed, I hope to have reached by that time in the future, some one hundred seasons from now, untold depths of bashfulness.

In the critical spirit of those years — of years that were given over, as you may remember, to a sweeping dismissal of convention — I short-sightedly declined Thieme’s well-meant offer. I am not proud of this refusal. Nor am I overly ashamed of it. And Thieme himself, with admirable understanding for negative attitudes, not only respected my foolish decision, which appeared to be inspired by *l’esprit de révolte*, but also kind-heartedly mentioned, as if to make me feel less awkward, that certain of his Berlin and Göttingen teachers had not written a doctoral dissertation either. Famous Friedrich Carl Andreas (1846–1930) for one.

After a *Kunstpauze* and creative intermission of almost ten years, I thought I should come to my senses and finally accept Thieme’s generous proposal. I therefore sat down, during the three summer months of 1980, to writing — or rather, feverishly hacking out of an antediluvian “Adler” typewriter, which made me feel like an ‘eagle’ myself — the one hundred odd pages of my doctoral “Untersuchungen zur altindischen Wortkunde”. The result of these ‘investigations’ was, I may as well tell you, praisingly approved by Thieme, but never defended by me, because I had defected to Japan before the defence could be organized.²⁰

The failure to defend my Tübingen dissertation almost thirty years ago can now be seen — in far-sighted retrospect — not as a frustrating obstacle, but as the favourable condition without which I could not have received admission for the present Leiden Dissertation.

Destiny may have had a hand in it. And as her faithful envoys and fateful agents, Arlo Griffiths and Alexander Lubotsky, who had mysteriously got wind of the fact that I was lacking *the title*, were destined to deal a fatal blow to the natural nobility of my name.

For it must have been Providence in her inscrutable wisdom who provided for this to happen, after I had so successfully shielded off — by means of a mental blazon and coat of arms that was indelibly marked with the heraldic motto *Knoblesse oblige* — all the attacks that threatened to inflict a defiling title upon my family name’s innate purity.

²⁰ And once I had become busy with teaching so many classes of Sanskrit to so many students in this country, I never cared to look back. Only when Thieme came to Japan in person, for two one-month-long visits in 1983 and 1988 — and I had the privilege to enjoy his company and conversation twice, each time for four entire weeks — did I have occasion to regret my absence from Tübingen.

During the same decade, the greater part of my undefended 1980 dissertation was prematurely published in the shape of two (or three) separate articles:

1. “Zwei Studien zu Wörtern des Sanskrit”. *Journal of the Naritasan Institute of Buddhist Studies* 6, 1981, 1–78: *a.* “*saudāmanī-* f. ‘Blitz’”, 12–24, *b.* “*kaṭa-* m. ‘Matte’/‘Hüfte’ und die Bildungen auf (-)kaṭa-”, 24–78.

2. “*śāla-* und *viśāla-*”. *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 99, 1986, 223–240.

Nor is it without Fate's Irony that I should be offered a second chance, again on the shady side of sixty, though this time in a merely personal sense. And — *hélas, trois fois hélas!* — this time I cannot escape my fate, desert the dissertation, and defect to Japan — because I am already *here*.

Also, the age-long relationship I have unlawfully enjoyed with Science held as a Mistress — or is *she* perhaps the one who has held *me* as her master? — is now about to be terminated by a legitimatizing ritual act.²¹

Thus, the bravely sustained effort of trying to avoid the inevitable has eventually been foiled.²² And my final defeat makes me feel like the Chinese smuggler who, in order to evade the payment of customs duties for his goods, travelled all through the night toilsomely transporting the contraband over an extensive mountain stretching along and across the border, only to arrive, when a new day dawned upon him, at the very toll-gate that he had so painstakingly endeavoured to circumvent.

My 2002 Leiden paper “The Nonce Formation” was dedicated, in the 2004 Groningen publication of it (NF 261), to the memory of Paul Thieme, who had passed away in 2001. On the present (festive) occasion, I wish to renew, and remind myself of, the love and reverence that I had expressed there for my unforgettable — and ultimately, *inimitable* — Tübingen Teacher of Sanskrit.

Two Japanese scholars and senior colleagues of mine, both staunch admirers of Thieme, deserve a very special mention: Kiyoshi Yoroi, professor emeritus of Kanazawa University, who wrote his indological dissertation at Utrecht and was Jan Gonda's *wetenschappelijke medewerker* some forty years ago,²³ and Nobuhiko Kobayashi, retired from Kyoto University, with whom I co-edited, in 1995, Thieme's *Größere Schriften*.²⁴

I could not have stayed in Japan for any length of time, nor would I ever have had the rewarding opportunity of teaching *World Sanskrit*²⁵ — and,

²¹ I have made sure with my beloved (duly-wedded) wife that she will not suffer any jolts of jealousy. Nor do I have to fear, I hope, that this second marriage ceremony will make me a bigamist.

²² It seems that I had placed all my trust in the truth of the adage *on ne perd rien pour attendre* and had acted upon the maxim *quam serissime*.

²³ Who would have thought that through Kiyoshi Yoroi my scholarly connection with The Netherlands reaches *so far* back in time?!

²⁴ Paul Thieme, Opera Maiora. Band I. Herausgegeben von Werner Knobl und Nobuhiko Kobayashi. Kyōto: Hōzōkan, 1995. For further information, see my German “Vorwort” to that volume, pp. i–vii.

²⁵ Is this, peradventure, the *global* — or even *universal* — *language* that is celebrated every three years at those perennially well-attended *World Sanskrit Conferences* which have been

occasionally, also some other, *minor* languages — to many very gifted and diligent students, foreign as well as Japanese, at several universities in this country, if I had not had the privilege of knowing these two scholars, Yoroï and Kobayashi, and had not enjoyed their selfless support and protection. Without them, I would simply *not exist*.

As the Prussian poet Heinrich von Kleist described the creative process of *ideation* in his famous essay and letter to a friend “Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden”,²⁶ *les idées se forment en parlant*. And that is why I owe so much — and much more than I can think without talking — to my dear pupils. I have been teaching for almost thirty years, and *this* has always been a profoundly gratifying experience: When the students happen to create, with their intelligent interest and concentrated attention, the favourable atmosphere that is necessary for the *formulation* of ideas, the teacher’s speech has a chance to become productive.²⁷

I feel deeply grateful to Arlo Griffiths, the bright young man I first met in 1999 at the Kyoto Vedic Workshop, with whom I maintained a long and intensive scholarly correspondence during the first years of this millennium. The dissertation I have finally produced is entirely the fruit, my dear friend, of your beneficent intervention, of the “fault”, as you yourself once put it, “to have planted the subversive doctoral seed” into my heart, where it was lying idle for quite some time — but not through any (other) fault of yours — unwatered and unsprouting.

Alexander Lubotsky is the one who patiently watered the seed, so that it could sprout and grow into something that *resembles* the other plants: not in size, but in nature. Without your kindness and liberality, *lieber Doktorvater*, the seed would still be lying there (*śayīta*), if not ‘in the Lap of Lady Dissolution’ (*nīrṛter upāsthe*), at least in the dry seed-bed of my heart. I thank you — from the bottom of it — for all you have done on my behalf!

Marianne Oort and Chizuko Suzuki have honoured me with their love and friendship and the kind willingness to act as my *paranymphs* at the *promotie*. I hope that I will not disappoint you, dearest Apsarases, and that the fulfilment of this hope may be acceptable to you as a not inadequate expression of my gratitude!

organized most recently — as 12th, 13th, and 14th WSC — in Helsinki (2003), Edinburgh (2006), and Kyoto (2009), respectively?

²⁶ Shall I dare and replace the seemingly reduplicated abstract noun [*ferfertigung*] — in order to express *concretely*, with playful ‘glotto-iconic’ intent, the *Allmählichkeit* of the *gradual* fabrication of ideas, which at times takes the form of a verbal stuttering that reflects a mental stammering — with its ‘reduplicated’ wraith-like *double* and *doppelgänger* *ferferferfertigung*?

²⁷ Unfortunately, the corresponding negative experience can also be made: There is nothing as effective in casting a damp over a teacher’s mind, or striking it into his heart, than those poker-faces and wet blankets that he seems to be doomed occasionally to encounter, even in so-called Centers of Excellence.

Catherine Ludvik has constantly accompanied my research in the field of irregularity and its intent with her careful and sensitive critical advice for over ten years. I welcome this opportunity to say ‘Thank you so much!’ once again.

My former pupil Masato Kobayashi has spent much of his precious time and energy on formatting several of my articles with great expertise. Having to depend on him and his skills has made me feel ashamed of my own technical incompetence. May this bashful feeling pass for the faint afterglow of his radiant readiness to come to my rescue whenever I was in need of expert assistance, and as a modest sign of my appreciation!

I am very much indebted to my dear friend and colleague Diwakar Acharya of Kyoto University, with whom I have had so many inspiring conversations in recent years. His genial, intelligent, and discreetly supportive presence has unaccountably enriched my scholarly life.

And had he not so graciously extended his generous help when it came to formatting the final version of my Leiden dissertation, the *promotie* — as if in loyal imitation of the Tübingen defence — would have been indefinitely delayed.

My latest publication, “Portmanteau Words in the Ṛgveda”, was already dedicated to my beloved wife Chizuko. With the same devotion and gratitude I offer her — *uxori carissimæ* — this whole work as a token of my lasting love.²⁸

But without my Love for Sanskrit — for that almost ideal language, that paragon of perfection, that model of linguistic excellence, that language so rich in words and ideas, so clear and transparent in grammatical structure, so naturally poetic in character — not a single of the several articles that are united here would have been written.

Werner Franz Knobl,
Kyoto, 2009, April 1st

²⁸ I have half a mind to adopt — and adapt to my own human-all-too-human condition of a husband and (grand)father — the goof-hearted dedication P. G. Wodehouse wrote for *The Heart of a Goof*, which reads: “To my daughter Leonora, without whose never-failing sympathy and encouragement this book would have been finished in half the time”.