

The Ontopoetics of Judith Wright: Illumination for a Dark Time?

Veronica Brady

I. It can be said that we live in dark times. The environmental disasters facing us, climate change and our abuse of the natural world, the wars and violence, poverty, hunger and disease, growing fear and suspicion and a general retreat into the fortress of the self and its certainties and prejudices, all suggest that this is so. Yet, as Hannah Arendt writes in the preface to her collection of essays, *Men in Dark Times*:

Even in the darkest of times we have the right to expect some illumination, and ... such illumination may well come less from theories and concepts than from the uncertain, flickering and often weak light that some men and women, in their lives and works, will kindle in almost all circumstances and shed over the time span that was given them on earth.¹

The people she writes about in these essays, however, are mostly dissenters from the common sense of their time, people who refuse to be taken in by what she calls “the invisible government” of the language of the status quo, a language which does not disclose what is really the case but “sweeps it under the carpet ... under the pretext of upholding old truths, [and thus degrading] all truth to meaningless triviality”;² this is a situation not unfamiliar in this country as far as issues to do with the environment are concerned. So the illumination such people provide can be provocative, to the extent that they refuse to be taken in by fashion or surface appearances, seeking instead, to quote Judith Wright, to “slant a sudden laser through common day.”³

Thinkers who refuse to be taken in by fashion or by superficial appearances are, I would argue, searching instead for wisdom. As its etymology suggests, wisdom is not so much a matter of intellectual understanding as an existential position, a sense of what may ultimately be the case and acceptance of it. “Wisdom,” the English word, is a combination of *wis* or *wys*, the Old English word for wise – which was also, according to some accounts, the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of the Greek *arête*, the perfection of a being or quality – and *-dom*, a suffix which implies an abiding state. So the “wise” person is not someone who knows everything, but is one who has learned how not to “know,” not perceiving or understanding as fact or truth, apprehending with clearness and certainty, but rather being open to what may still be revealed and probably cannot be put into words.

In effect this kind of openness to uncertainty implies an awareness that the self is not apart from the world, that it cannot stand back from the world and know the world as a finished totality, but is rather always embedded in the world, always implicated in the flux of the world. Such a self is therefore sensitive to relationship, to the relationship between self and other-than-self; it is always aware that, as Levinas puts it, “we never exist in the singular”;⁴ or, as John Donne famously said, that no one is an island “entire unto itself” but that we are all part of one great continent of life. Evidently this is very different from the competitive and possessive individualism of Western culture today, since it is essentially

¹ H. Arendt (1970), *Men in Dark Times*, Cape, London, p. ix.

² *Ibid.*, p. x.

³ J. Wright (1994), “Grace,” in *Collected Poems: 1942–1985*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p. 331.

⁴ E. Levinas (1985), *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, Duquesne University Press, Pitsburg, p. 58

sympathetic and receptive. But in the “dark times” facing us this kind of awareness may be crucially important. It demands a different kind of language; however, as Wittgenstein remarked, when we say “this is how it is,” in fact, we are merely “tracing round the frame” through which we look at the world.⁵

The literal and instrumental language of our present culture is intent on *building*, on dominating and exploiting the natural world for our own ends, rather than learning to *dwell* in it – to draw on Heidegger’s distinction.⁶ But this means, as Wittgenstein goes on to point out, that such language keeps on “inexorably” repeating to us this limited and limiting picture of reality.⁷ So, for example, in Australia many of us are either unaware or unable to come to terms with the illumination which might be revealed to us by the wisdom in the cultures of the Aboriginal peoples who have lived for so many thousands of years in and with this ancient and difficult land and adapted to all its changing ways.

But there is another kind of language, poetic language, which involves what Novalis called the “representation of the spirit, of the inner world in its totality.”⁸ Freya Mathews suggests that it may offer a solution to the problem of literalism and with it the much larger problem of our dealings with the natural world by providing “a ground of poetic/storied invocation, which is able to ‘sing up’ the world in which ... [we] dwell and [make] that world an active participant in communal life.”⁹ Nor do we need to look elsewhere for this kind of invocation. It is to be found in our own poetic tradition, especially in the work of Romantic poets. Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” for example, celebrates

...a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round earth and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought
And rolls through all things¹⁰

True, today many would dismiss this as mere “poetic fantasy.” But contemporary science seems to be moving in this direction, turning its attention with increasing interest and respect to realities of this kind, suspecting that, as William Birmingham puts it, “matter derives from space (which is invisible until populated), and that 90 percent of the universe ... is invisible.”¹¹ Similarly space is no longer seen as empty but as an energy/medium, so that the cosmos may be more open, subtle and supple than has hitherto been realised¹² – though, significantly, this has been realized by so-called “primitive” peoples and cultures and many poets have also been concerned to respond to this understanding.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the concluding poem of his *Duino Elegies*, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote that

⁵ L. Wittgenstein (1974), *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, Oxford, 113–114, p. 48e.

⁶ M. Heidegger (1975), “Building Dwelling Thinking,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper Colophon, New York, p. 143–62.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, L. Wittgenstein, 115, p. 48e.

⁸ In Alex Preminger (ed.) (1975), *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Macmillan, London, p. 643.

⁹ F. Mathews (2007), “An Invitation to Ontopoetics: The poetic structure of being,” *Australian Humanities Review*, 43, p. 8.

¹⁰ W. Wordsworth, “Lines Composed above Tintern Abbey on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour July 13 1798,” in M.H. Abrams *et al.* (eds) (1965), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Norton, New York, vol. 2, p. 79.

¹¹ W. Birmingham (1998), “The Matter of Matter,” *Cross Currents*, 48 (1), p. 2.

¹² L. Harris, “Divine Action: An interview with John Polkinghorne,” *Cross Currents*, 48 (1), p. 3–14.

... all the world around us, so fleeting, seems to need us,
to strangely concern us, us, the most fleeting
and that therefore we are being asked to name the world, to “sing it up,” as Mathews says:
... to *say* [it], you understand,
O to *say* with an intensity the things themselves never
hoped to achieve.¹³

Scientists might not put it this way. But a growing number are beginning to think that, in James Studer’s words, “the self-reflective creature [may be] the explanation of the universe [and therefore that] growth in consciousness increases the reality of both,” if, as they suspect, “the physical universe ... both produces us and, ultimately, participates *in us* to become real.”¹⁴

This kind of understanding, of course, is characteristic of most traditional cultures in general and of Aboriginal cultures in this country in particular. But it also may help us newcomers achieve the task which Mircea Eliade, for example, sees as the essential one for any people newly arrived in a country hitherto unknown to them, the “transformation of chaos into cosmos,”¹⁵ or, to invoke Heidegger once more, to learn to *dwell* in and with the land instead of merely *building* on it, and thus to live wisely in it, to develop an “ontopoetic” sense of reality instead of a merely utilitarian one. This is by no means easy: by definition emigration involves separation from one’s former home and the associations and memories which go with it. In our case, the distance involved and strangeness of the new environment increased this disruption. The new land appeared empty, *terra nullius*, at best, as Paul Carter put it, a bare stage on which “Nature’s painted curtains [were] drawn aside to reveal heroic man at his epic labour.”¹⁶ Self was set over against nature and its task was to subdue nature and impose our intentions on it. There was little sense of ourselves as part of the life of creation as a whole. Nevertheless, many of our artists and writers have been preoccupied with this absence. One of the most important is Judith Wright, poet and activist, whom the distinguished public servant, environmentalist and champion of Aboriginal Australians, “Nugget” Coombes, called “the wisest of poets.” So it is worth reflecting on her contribution to the discussion.

II. Judith Wright was born into a family which had lived on the land ever since the 1820s, and even when she was a child the land was central to her self-understanding. She explained this in an interview towards the end of her life.

As a poet you have to imitate somebody, but since I had a beautiful landscape outside that I loved so much and was in so much ... it was my main subject from the start ... Most children ... are brought up in the “I” tradition these days – the ego, it’s me and what I think. But when you live in very close contact with a large and splendid landscape as I did you feel yourself as a good deal smaller than just I.¹⁷

¹³ R.M. Rilke, “Ninth Elegy,” from *The Duino Elegies*, in M. Mack *et al.* (eds) (1965), *World Masterpieces*, Norton, New York, vol. 2, p. 1302.

¹⁴ J. Studer, “Consciousness and Reality: Our entry into creation,” *Cross Currents*, 48 (1), p. 22.

¹⁵ M. Eliade (1974), *The Myth of the Eternal Return or Cosmos and History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 10.

¹⁶ P. Carter (1987), *The Road to Botany Bay: An essay in spatial history*, Faber & Faber, London, p. xv.

¹⁷ V. Brady (1998), *South of My Days: A biography of Judith Wright*, Angus & Robinson, Sydney, p. 464.

Throughout her life, the New England tableland in which she had grown up remained a living presence, “part of my blood’s country,” its “bony slopes wincing under the winter.”¹⁸ Yet she was also aware that “the language and culture I was brought up in ... was wholly imported, a second skin that never fitted no matter how we pulled and dragged it over the landscape we lived in. Nor did we ourselves fit. That fact grew more obvious as the land changed under our hands.”¹⁹ But it was poetry which enabled her to understand this “inner argument between the transplanted European and his country.”²⁰

Beginning with the first settlers’ feelings of exile in a hostile land, overawed by its size and silence, her *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* takes up D. H. Lawrence’s insight that “something had gone out of the European consciousness [here] ... and that as yet nothing had taken its place.”²¹ She then looks at the way in which successive generations of Australian poets set about making this land “our spiritual home.”²² This, she argued, involved listening to and coming to terms with “a landscape that had survived on its own terms until the world’s last day.”²³

But she also realised that what was at issue here was a question of power or, more exactly, how it is defined and where its centre lies or should lie. The settlers saw themselves as the centre of power conquering the land and imposing their will on it. As she saw it, however, what we call “the world” is an experiential construction, the product of perception, not necessarily something absolutely given. The latter attitude, she believed, derived from “a one-sided masculinity and a narrowness of thought” which in her view was “leading nowhere but to a world scarcely worth living in and, clearly, on a slide to its own destruction.”²⁴

This is a key point in our understanding of onto-poetics and its cultural significance. What it implies is illuminated by the work of Hélène Cixous,²⁵ since it expands our understanding of the difference between the language of commonsense, which is literal, and the language of “wisdom,” which is poetic and therefore polyphonic. For Cixous, “masculine” and “feminine” are symbolic designations of two different ways of being in the world. The masculine mode, the “Economy of the Proper,” is preoccupied with property, propriety and appropriation, so that colonial attitudes to the land can be seen as “masculine.” But the kind of identification with the land that Wright advocates belongs to Cixous’ feminine, her “Economy of the Gift,” which is open to giving to the other and receiving from it, and lives intuitively from within, where she “has never ceased to hear the resonance of fore-language ... the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure or death.”²⁶

So even in her early poems, Wright was aware of an Aboriginal presence in the land:

...an unsaid word
that fastens in the blood the ancient curse,
the fear as old as Cain. (“Bora Ring,” *CP*, p. 8)

But this was because the “feminine” self, in Cixous’ sense, moves with the ongoing life of creation as a whole, not as a centre of power but as a “coming alive,” as Freya Mathews puts

¹⁸ J. Wright (1994), *Collected Poems: 1942–1985*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p. 20. Hereafter page references to poems from this volume (*CP*) will be given in the text.

¹⁹ J. Wright (1966), *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p. xiv.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. xix.

²² *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

²³ *Op. cit.*, V. Brady (1998), p. 121.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

²⁵ In Toril Moi (1991), *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, Routledge, London, p. 110–113.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

it, “in a flow of configurations of circumstances along axes of meaning.”²⁷ This is apparent, of course, in Wright’s poems about pregnancy and birth, in “Woman to Child,” for instance:

Then all a world I made me;
all the world you hear and see
hung upon my dreaming blood.

There moved the multitudinous stars,
and coloured birds and fishes moved.
There swam the sliding continents.
All time lay rolled in me, and sense,
And love that knew not its beloved. (*CP*, p. 28)

But this identification runs through her work as a whole, not just as a matter of biological experience, but as a fundamental change in perception. Our picture of the world is altering, she wrote, “The current of events which forms the life-stream of the individual escapes – and we can now see, has in its essential form always escaped – description. The word tree, for instance, is only a label – the tree seen, the momentous living event, slips through it as through a sieve; it is part of the flow of our relative individual experience, and our perception of it is no more lasting than a dream-perception.”²⁸

As she wrote to Elizabeth Harrower, in this kind of world “what really matters is relationship, obvious and oblique, body to earth and heart to mind and the integrity of things created.”²⁹ The onto-poetic can thus be seen as “feminine,” in Cixous’ symbolic sense, in contradistinction to a “masculine” culture preoccupied with property, power and appropriation.

If, as Levinas argues, the ego “is the very crisis of the being of a being,” onto-poetic understanding has an important contribution to make at a time when this “masculine” culture threatens the life of the planet since, as Levinas goes on to say, “it is in the laying down by the ego of its sovereignty (in its ‘hateful’ modality), that we find ethics and also probably the very spirituality of the soul, but most certainly the meaning of being.”³⁰

To return to Judith Wright, the way in which Wright was responding to the
first call of Being which
gathers our thinking into the
play of the world³¹

also showed a way for this country to become “our spiritual home.” This would bring us closer to the land’s First People who knew, (as she writes in “At Cooloola”) that “no land is lost or won by wars” since “earth is spirit” and “we are justified only by love” (*CP*, p. 140–141).

Most of Wright’s poems about the natural world are concerned with a loving exchange of this kind. “The Flame Tree” (*CP*, p. 95), for example:

How to live, I said, as the flame-tree lives?
– to know what the flame tree knows; to be
prodigal of my life as that wild tree
and wear my passion so?

“Nameless Flower” (*CP*, p. 130) suggests, in the awed contemplation of its opening lines, an answer: participation in the community of life and celebration of this life as sacred.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, F. Mathews (2007), p. 2.

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, V. Brady (1998), p. 171.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

³⁰ In S. Hand (ed.) (1993), *The Levinas Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, p. 85.

³¹ M. Heidegger (1975), “The Thinker as Poet,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper Colophon, New York, p.

Three white petals float
above the green.
You cannot think they spring from it
till the fine stem's seen.

So separated from each,
and each so pure.

The poem also suggests that we accept responsibility for this life by naming it and thus prolonging its fragile existence:

Flakes that drop at the flight of a bird
and have no name,
I'll set a word upon a word
to be your home.

Yet perhaps this is to claim too much, to exalt the self, lock the flower's beauty "in a white song." Mere human words can be "white as a stone is white / carved for a grave."

Ultimately its beauty is beyond words:

...blooms in immortal light,
Being now; being love.

There are echoes here of Dante's visions of Paradise as one vast cosmic rose in bloom, the final flowering of the process of realization in which the universe is engaged, and which culminates in the vision of "the love which moves the sun and the other stars." So the human task of creating and carrying "fields of order through an enigmatic cosmos" culminates in joining in its cosmic dance.³²

But it is important also to understand that Wright was aware that this was no mere flight of fancy and that many contemporary scientists were also moving in a similar direction. As she wrote to the literary critic Shirley Walker,

I don't think that even scientists any longer regard the physical and psychic as separate, and all the work being done seems to confirm this – what is the observer, what the observed? Can you tell the dancer from the dance? With the "material" becoming more and more difficult to define, and so many workers even in the sciences now more interested in studying relations than in studying the object itself, ecology rather than taxonomy, the distinctions that used to be made get more and more blurred [so that it appears] ... that we are part of a unity with "nature" and that human thought is a development of that relationship.³³

While this understanding in itself is merely theoretical, it also impelled her to political action. Wright was involved in the battle in the 1970s to protect the Great Barrier Reef and the rainforests from developers, and when the Whitlam government was elected, she was appointed to the committee it set up to document and preserve the National Estate – places and monuments of national and historical significance. In turn these involvements led her, together with a group of well-known and respected Australians led by the public servant "Nugget" Coombes, to campaign for a treaty with the Aboriginal peoples of this country.

Her feeling for the land also inspired the anger apparent in many of the poems she was writing, and her main concern was with the instrumental reasoning which had given us unprecedented power over but little feeling for the natural world. This is the target of "Lament For Passenger Pigeons" (*CP*, p. 319). Its epigraph, Wittgenstein's proposition – "Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use" – is a reminder of his belief that our language shapes our perception of the world and also highlights the language of "use" which leads to its exploitation. The poem opens on this note, pointing to the ways in which "use" has damaged the world:

³² S. Perkowitz (1996), *Empire of Light: A history of discovery in science and art*, Henry Holt, New York, p. 91.

³³ *Op. cit.*, V. Brady (1998), p. 287

The voice of water as it flows and falls
the noise air makes against earth-surfaces
have changed; are changing to the tunes we choose.

Tunes which drown out the music of the universe and imprison us in ourselves:

Trapped in the fouling nests of time and space,
we turn the music on, but it is man,
and it is man who leans a deafening ear.

And it is man we eat and man we drink
and man who thickens round us like a stain.

This misuse of our existence, however, is brought on by language:

A word, a class, a formula, a use
that is the rhythm, the cycle we impose—

which has cut us off from the poetic ability

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour³⁴

It has, in other words, cut us off from the poetic ability to see that everything is precious. So to lose even one species, in this instance the passenger pigeon, is to diminish “the sheen of life on flashing long migrations,” and to exile us further from the world in which “pigeons and angels sang us to the sky,” leaving us instead in one “turned to metal and a dirty need.”

But for Wright this loss was not inevitable. Poetic language could reveal a “further principle in consciousness” and enable us to understand that our role as human beings entails an obligation for the “existence of the earth and its doings and beings.”³⁵ This obligation, as we have seen, is the subject of “Nameless Flower.”

Another poem, “Interplay” (*CP*, p. 190), approaches it more theoretically, in its opening especially:

What is within becomes what is around,
This angel morning on the world-wide sea
is seared with light that’s mine and comes from me,
and I am mirror to its blaze and sound,
as lovers double in their interchange.

To revert to the distinction made earlier, this assumes an “economy of the gift,” a giving to and receiving from the cosmos which summons us to celebrate and participate in its dance:

Look how the stars’ bright chaos eddies in
to form our constellations. Flame by flame
answers the ordering image in the name.

Ego has laid down its sovereignty, becoming part of the original cry, “let there be light,” by which “all creation stirred.” So “world is signed with words” but words not of command but of love. The self here is, as Heidegger put it, a “shepherd of Being,” caring for a universe that is seeking “to story itself” through us.³⁶

But it must be a mutual interplay. Where disasters like drought, floods and fires have traditionally been seen as the work of nature, this is to suggest that they are rather a punishment for our offences against it. In an early poem, “Dust,” written in the midst of drought, the dust “sighing at the blistered door, darkening the evening star,” telling us that our dream of domination “was the wrong dream / our strength was the wrong strength” and that

³⁴ W. Blake, in G. Keynes (ed.) (1961), *Blake: Complete poetry and prose*, Nonesuch Library, London, p. 118.

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, V. Brady (1998), p. 298

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, F. Mathews (2007), p. 10.

Weary as we are, we must make a new choice ...
... We must prepare the land for a difficult sowing,
a long and hazardous growth of a strange bread.

This belief strengthened throughout her career. “Jet Flight over Derby” (*CP*, p. 279) extends the attack to technology as, looking down from the “sky’s nothing” (where technology has put her), she realizes that this is “no place for me,” since it has reduced her to a mere “travelling eye.” Body’s place, however, is to “to stand on land” since “I am what land has made / And land’s myself, I said.” From above, however, the cruelty of our present culture is clear: “Opened by whips of greed / these plains lie torn and scarred.” But so too are its effects. Seeing it, “Then I erode; my blood / reddens the stream in flood,” and as all the joy of the interplay between self and world disappears, “Only a rage, a fear, / Smokes up to darken air.”

So the project of onto poetic understanding may have a tragic/prophetic aspect. If the universe is an arrangement of matter/energy it may be transitory if we misread or fail to respect those energies. As Lyotard points out, it is therefore dangerous to focus only on “nature’s smile” and imagine ourselves “in the cosy lap of complicity between man and nature.”³⁷ Since we are inescapably involved in the life of the universe, it is wise to renounce the fantasies of power propagated by our present culture, recognize nature’s awesome power and accept rather than attempt to defy it.

In fact the concluding poems in the first and second editions of Wright’s *Collected Poems* express this kind of realism. The last poem in the 1971 edition, “Shadow” (*CP*, p. 292), is about the coming of night as an observer sees the sun slipping over the world’s edge and the shadow below

rose upward silently;
announced that it was I:
entered to master me.

But the self stands firm, not in defiance but in acknowledgement, preserving its integrity by naming what is happening:

World’s image grows, and chaos
is mastered and lies still
in the resolving sentence
that’s spoken once for all

This is something like Pascal’s response to the “infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant,” as he calls on reason to “humble itself” and accept what cannot be denied. But it is also an act of dignity, of “wanting not to want, wanting not to produce a meaning in place of what *must* be signified” – to quote Lyotard again.³⁸ So as the poem concludes, the shadow is named and accepted but remains unknown: “I must enclose a darkness / since I contain the sun.”

In a similar vein, “Patterns” (*CP*, p. 426), the final poem in the 1994 edition, contemplates the possibility of cosmic disaster, opening with a reference to the explosion of the first atomic bomb: “Brighter than a Thousand suns’—that blinding glare / circled the world and settled in our bones.” Wright goes on to reflect on its aftermath as “round earth’s circumference and atmosphere / bombs and warheads crouch waiting their time.” Once again, however, no resolution is reached, only an acceptance of what cannot be denied, “the play of opposites, their interpenetration / there’s the reality, the fission and the fusion,” and that it is “impossible to choose between absolutes, ultimates, / pure light, pure lightlessness cannot be

³⁷ J.-F. Lyotard (1991), *The Inhuman*, Polity Press, London, p. 10–11.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

perceived.” What is possible, however, is to trust in existence itself and that, for good or ill, “We are all of us born of fire, possessed by darkness.”

This may be a troubling conclusion. But the refusal to cater to dangerous complacencies is a challenge to rethink our values and contest the direction our culture seems to be taking, as Wright’s last poems do so energetically. “Rockpool” (*CP*, p. 419) contemplates the savage power of the ocean:

...this, the devouring and mating,
ridges of coloured tracery, occupants, all the living,

the stretching of toothed claws to food, the breeding
on the ocean’s edge.

True, other poems, like “Connections” (*CP*, p. 421–422), for example, are gentler, set in springtime watching the “cream-coloured moths” drawn “from how far away” to “the tiny clusters of whitebeard heath” in flower as an awed observer of the cosmic life of which she, too, is part: “When I look up at the stars I don’t try counting, / but I know that the lights I can see pass right through me.” Accepting that it is not possible “to be a mere onlooker ... Every cell of me has been pierced through by plunging intergalactic messages.” But also these are messages we may not be able to understand, while “the cream-coloured moths vibrate their woollen wings / wholly at home in the cluster of whitebeard heath.”

To conclude, Judith Wright is, or ought to be, a key figure in our understanding of ourselves and of the world, suggesting as she does that poetry can be a form of ontology and one which throws light on the way forward in dark times. What the final significance of this illumination may be is probably impossible to say. But I would argue that it is the way of wisdom, of knowing and accepting our place in the cosmic scheme of things. So let Hannah Arendt have the last word: “Eyes so used to darkness as ours will hardly be able to tell whether their light was the light of a candle or of a blazing sun. But such objective evaluation seems to me a matter of secondary importance which can safely be left to posterity.”³⁹

³⁹ *Op. cit.*, H. Arendt (1970), p. ix–x.