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Literary Philosophy: The Anatomy of Philosophical Style

by BEREL LANG

Style is the physiognomy of the mind.
Schopenhauer

ALTHOUGH the history of western philosophy is almost entirely a history of written texts, philosophers have lived in that history—and written and thought in it—as if the role of the unusual artifacts we recognize as manuscripts and books were entirely incidental. The assumption here is that the act of writing has nothing—or at least nothing *essential*—to do with the act of philosophy; that philosophy as spoken, “oral” philosophy, would have the same character that written or “literary” philosophy does, and that the two of them would be identical to philosophy as it might be thought but not yet expressed, or even to philosophy in its hidden truth before it had been thought at all. The conventional means of writing, in other words—of syntax and of language—have no more to do with *what* is written than do the further literary possibilities exemplified by individual style with *its* marks of the author’s voice. All that counts philosophically in this view of the history of philosophy—past or future—is the “what” which is asserted there, not the “how” by means of which the “what” puts in an appearance.

It would be arbitrary simply to reject out-of-hand this conception of the relation between philosophy and the act of writing, and indeed the claim that this conception is *possible* is a premise of what will be said here. For to consider it as a possibility means at least that it is not self-evident or necessarily true; that it can be tested by evidence and argument and also—most importantly—that it bears comparison with *alternate* possibilities. I shall in fact be defending one of those alternatives, but whether that defense succeeds or not is itself separate from the claim that there *is* an issue here, that the body of philosophy—its faces and limbs—cannot simply be assumed to be an accidental encumbrance on its mind and thought, indeed that the likelier connection between those two is far from accidental. The ideas of philosophy, in other words—its mind—do not only constitute a history; they appear always *within* history, subject to the same constraints that any form of action or making is subject to and mirroring those constraints in the ideas themselves.

I shall be attempting to call attention here to one aspect—the literary

and stylistic appearance — of this location of philosophy within history. If my suggestions about the relation between the literary features of philosophical texts and the substantive work of philosophy turn out in the end to seem obvious, the fact remains that they have much more often been held to be obviously false than they have been admitted as even possibly true. Certainly the claim has not been part of any sustained view of philosophy by philosophy itself, and this is, it seems, but another example of the larger indifference of philosophers to their own history: acutely tuned to the metaphysical categories of space and time, philosophers have been notably reticent about their own locations in space and time. Thus, the argument that philosophical writing is shaped by its formal character as written discourse as well as by its other, more explicitly philosophical purposes — and beyond this, that those two determinations are themselves related — has still to be made (and probably, if the history of philosophy serves as a guide, more than once).

In considering the relation between the work and the writing of philosophy, we are obliged, it seems to me, to choose between two alternate and opposed models. On the first of these — what I call the “Neutralist” model — the form or structure of philosophical discourse is denied any intrinsic connection to its expression as philosophy; the relation is viewed as at most ornamental, at its least as accidental and irrelevant, even as a hindrance or occasion of philosophical obfuscation. This view might be willing to agree that certain philosophical writers (Bacon or Hume, for example, or Kierkegaard) had keener ears for literary mood and style and a more deliberate involvement with those literary means than other thinkers did; but such accomplishments make no more *philosophical* difference, either for the writer or for the reader, than does the fact that certain philosophers (Nietzsche and G. E. Moore, for example) had good ears for music and others were tone-deaf or at least tune-deaf, as Kant apparently was.

The premise on which this conception of philosophical discourse depends is much like the principle that underwrites the possibility of translation among languages. For even if we concede that nuances in one language may be missing from another or if we maintain, more formally, some version of the slippage that Quine finds between all (ostensibly) synonymous terms¹ — still we take for granted in much of what we say and do a common thread of meaning that enables us to distinguish better or worse translations of the same text, or at a more immediate level that enables us to make (or break) appointments across several languages with no more than a nod at the incommensurable features that may separate them. Just so, this first “Neutralist” model holds, there is also a single and common ground of philosophical discourse: propositions which tie

1. See, for example, W. V. Quine, “The Problem of Meaning in Linguistics,” in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953).

predicates to subjects and which, in doing this, ascribe or deny existence to the variety of objects, theoretical or palpable, that comprise the reference of philosophical discourse. Thus, for Plato's dialogues, Aquinas' commentaries, Montaigne's essays, Hume's inquiries: it is only a matter of extracting from each of them the common linguistic core that has been imbedded as a proto- or metalanguage among the several historically distinct languages in which those authors respectively wrote; and then after that (*soon* after that) of extracting the structure of philosophical assertion which enables the reader to place the thoughts of such various figures in a single, homogeneous field of philosophical discourse. We read the quite different texts of these and other philosophical authors, then, as addressing each other (and us) about a common set of problems in a philosophically neutral medium of discourse, and we place them on a continuous and fairly even line in the history of philosophy.

There are, of course, powerful attractions to this view. Practically, it enables critical comparison and contrast, the elaboration and (more important) rebuttal of philosophical texts, without the burden of historicism, without requiring more than passing attention to the specific contexts from which philosophers have written or to the sociological and psychological—as well as literary—conditions that would otherwise be assumed to distinguish those contexts. Philosophically, it also provides support for what has been a constant and perhaps necessary (even if illusory) starting point for philosophical reflection: the sense that the individual philosopher stands always at the point of a new beginning on which the lines coming out of the past, united because of the insufficiency of that past, converge. It underwrites, then, the hope of philosophical progress. Psychologically, too, it offers the comfort of thinking of the otherwise solitary profession of philosophy as a large (albeit diverse) corporation in which philosophers have carried on a single and lengthy conversation.

Even if we accept this prospect of a context-free or neutral medium of philosophical discourse as an ideal (as many historians of philosophy and philosophers do), it is quickly apparent that the difficulties of finding that ideal realized in philosophical writing are substantial—sufficiently so, it seems to me, to indicate the need for a quite different model on which to base the anatomy of philosophical style. The difficulties themselves suggest the form that this alternative will have. It seems obvious, for example, that a reader of the *Republic* who identifies the speeches of Thrasymachus as representing Plato's point of view—even if we grant that Plato himself in one sense did say or write those speeches—would be making a serious mistake. But the only way we come to know this, whether we explicitly identify the process or not, is by recognizing that in the genre of the dialogue, authorial point of view (for the *Republic*, Plato's) looks out of the text by means that are quite different from the

means by which authorial point of view asserts itself (for example) in a treatise or in a commentary. *There*, unless notice appears to the contrary, we feel justified in attributing the statements of the text directly to the author: whatever other problems of interpretation we encounter in understanding those statements, it is the author's own commitments that speak. There are different ways, then, in which an author can look out of a text—out of philosophical texts as well as out of novels or poems; and this makes a difference—it *should* make a difference—to the way in which a reader looks into the text, the philosophical text as well as those others.

Once we admit the relevance of this principle of interpretation to the reading of the *Republic* at the elementary point at which we distinguish Thrasyarchus' presence from Plato's, moreover, we encounter the inevitable next question about the *true* location of authorial point of view in that work. Do the speeches or words of Socrates himself represent Plato's point of view (as, for example, we later would identify Philonous with Berkeley in *his* Dialogues), or—as seems likelier here—do we have to make further distinctions even among the occasions of Socrates' words? For if Socrates speaks differently (not only in manner but in what he says) as he addresses different interlocutors, and if, in addressing different interlocutors or even sometimes the same one, he contradicts himself egregiously or makes mistakes in elementary logic (the more obvious the blunder, the rule of interpretation goes, the more likely that it is intentional), then we must follow the search for authorial point of view one step further, beyond even Socrates' statements. We find here in fact a conception of method—the Platonic method—in which the reader together with the speaker articulates the philosophical process and the conclusions to be drawn from it. The authorial point of view appears here as a ground against which the reader himself then appears as figure; the collaboration is unavoidable. We thus learn that the form of the Platonic dialogue is itself associated with a conception of learning (and behind that of knowledge) and so, finally, with a conception of philosophy itself—all of them animated by what would otherwise appear to be “only” a device of literary artifice. At the very least, as we recognize again and again the implausibility of identifying Plato's position with any single proposition or argument simply because they *appear* in the dialogue, we have then also to consider that this suspicion or bracketing of discourse is itself an intention of the dialogue form.²

To be sure, much has been written along these lines about Plato's dialogues, and it might be objected that any general conclusions based on that source are likely to represent no less an anomaly in the history of philosophy than Plato does himself. The implication I draw is stronger than this, however; namely, that if the conventional literary category of

2. For a fuller statement of this view of Plato, see Berel Lang, “Presentation and Representation in Plato's Dialogues,” in *Philosophy and the Art of Writing* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1984).

authorial point of view makes a difference (ultimately a philosophical difference) in reading Plato's dialogues, then the same literary feature also may be of consequence to understanding other philosophical genres. At least it would be arbitrary as well as imprudent simply to assume that this is not the case, and that means, of course, that we have to look and see *whether* it is the case or not.

Even the reasonable claim that the role of authorial point of view in other philosophical genres is usually less striking or crucial than in Plato's dialogues is in no way inconsistent with this first conclusion of philosophical interpretation. For we are familiar with the saying that "art conceals art"; and as point of view sometimes serves philosophy as a literary (and so artful) mechanism, the fact that it is less obviously a causal presence in certain instances of philosophical discourse than in others may mean only that there are artful reasons why that should be so. Indeed one can readily think of literary/philosophical reasons why the concealment or repression of the author might well be attempted as a tactic of philosophical discourse. If, for example, philosophical writing is conceived along the lines of scientific discourse—that is, as a reflection or mirror of the "facts" of a philosophically accessible reality—then, in the interests of consistency, the authorial point of view would approximate that of nature itself: impersonal, disinterested, universalist, hardly a point of view at all. It is not surprising then that for philosophical writers who take scientific or mathematical discourse as a model for their discourse (I think here of writers otherwise as dissimilar as Spinoza and Husserl, Leibniz and Carnap), the persona of the philosopher should appear in the text—more accurately, be repressed in the text—through the various stylistic corollaries of impersonality, detachment, replicability of evidence and argument. Thus, stylistically, the third person tends to be used rather than the first as the subject of assertions, the passive voice rather than the active. The stance of authorial point of view here is that of an observer who, in contrast to the point of view that animates Plato's dialogues, is simply reporting disinterestedly and objectively on a body of philosophical principles and arguments to a reader who is assumed to be in much the same position as the author (minus, of course, the author's knowledge). Philosophy intends here evidently only to describe the world, not to change it, much less to be changed by it—and this conception of philosophy is displayed or represented in the text itself no less clearly (sometimes much more so) than it is asserted there.

The persistent appeal of science as a model for philosophy owes a good deal to the Cartesian method, and this makes it the more ironic that as we identify different forms assumed by authorial point of view in the topography of philosophy, Descartes himself, in at least one of his works, takes up quite a different stance from either of the two just cited. The "I," of course, is a constant presence in Descartes' *Meditations*, and indeed the meditation as a genre is itself a distinctively egocentric form of discourse

which could not exist without such constancy. But there is more to the connection between the authorial "I" and the genre of the meditation than only the repetition of the former—and we see this especially vividly in Descartes' insistence that the reader of the *Meditations* must replace the Cartesian "I" in the text always with his or her own "I." The reader, Descartes tells us, is not to read "*about*" the process of meditation but, in reading the *Meditations*, actually to meditate. So the "Cogito" argument works for the reader—insofar as it works at all—only when it is the reader's "I," not Descartes' "I" and not even the reader quoting Descartes, who utters or asserts it. That "I," moreover, must carry on the process of meditation without interruption, as a single and continuous activity. Descartes' insistence that the reader should not interrupt him (or himself) with objections or questions may seem no more than the plea of an author for a sympathetic reader—but Descartes formulates a specific justification here which he also acts on in gathering the Objections at the end of the *Meditations*, namely, that meditation (the act *and* the genre) is (in J. L. Austin's term) "performative." In it, the authorial "I" appears not as an observer or even as an agent actively engaged by some other object—but as constituting itself in the discourse, in effect creating itself in the act of expression. Only so is the systematic doubt from which Descartes sets out and which threatens the reader's self as well as Descartes' to be overcome. This process, although carried on successively, step by step, requires in Descartes' view a distinctive combination of continuity and memory, an incorporation of each preceding step which interruption or counterargument would not only interfere with but destroy: once interrupted, it would have to begin over again. There is, then, a progressive construction of the reader's "I," for which the philosophical meditation is intended to provide a means—in contrast, for example (as Descartes himself points out), to the genre of the treatise which he could have written but chose not to and in which the reader's "I," like the author's, would figure as a presupposition, something that *already* existed.

What we find then in these several references is the outline of a typology in philosophical writing for the role of authorial point of view, with three points mapped onto it (I call them elsewhere the "reflexive," the "expository," and the "performative" conceptions of point of view)³—with much empty space remaining to be filled in, and with room as well for certain problematic variations: So Nietzsche, for example, argues in *The Genealogy of Morals* for a perspectival conception of knowledge from what seems itself to be the disinterested and universalist stance of the expository point of view that he is attacking. Or again, Hume, raising doubts in the *Treatise* about the status of personal identity and the external world, manifests no such doubts about his own identity as philosopher, or about the (apparently) external objects of his

3. Cf. *ibid.*, Chapter 2, "Space, Time, and Philosophical Style."

philosophical investigation. There is a question then in such cases of whether we may not learn more about the author from his written text of literary presuppositions than from the explicit one of philosophical assertions—but once again, on either count, text it is. In any event, the objection seems to gain force in these examples, as well, *against* the first, Neutralist model of philosophical style as it argues for the irrelevance and certainly for the inconstancy of philosophical style as a factor in philosophical writing and reading. The correlation between variations in the role of implied author, on the one hand, and substantive differences in philosophical method, on the other, argues for the need or at least the plausibility of an alternate anatomy of philosophical style.

I propose that we consider as such an alternative, then, an “Interaction” model which introduces a version of the “Heisenberg Effect” for philosophical discourse. That is, in contrast to the Neutralist model in which the philosophical writer draws on an independent and supposedly “styleless” body of propositional assertions that the philosopher first discovers and then arranges or reformulates, the writer on this second model, in choosing a form or structure for philosophical discourse, is, *in that act*, also shaping the substance or content which the form then—very loosely speaking now—will be “of.” The form in other words is an ingredient of philosophical content—as the impingement of light, in the Heisenberg Effect, influences the activity or location of the particles identified, with the question of what identity the particles would have *without* the process of identification placed in the limbo of indeterminacy. The “Interaction” model thus alleges an intrinsic connection for philosophy between those sometimes dichotomous terms “form” and “content”—or, put more broadly as a gloss on Buffon’s familiar line that “style makes the man,” argues that style also makes the philosopher (and then the philosophy).

This proposal may seem to move to the side of excess as the Neutralist model had suffered from scarcity, and certainly the systematic objections that can be anticipated here are formidable. A possible implication of this alternative—one which is realized in Croce’s nominalist aesthetic, for example—is the contention that with it the several genres of philosophical writing and beyond that even the individual works *within* a genre cannot be compared or criticized. If the form of each text is unique and determinant, then the hope of subsuming any one of them under a general category, of evaluating it or even of interpreting it by trans-individual criteria (such as truth or adequacy), is doomed beforehand. Since we are required to address each text in its own terms, the only alternative simply to reiterating the individual text would be to write a new and different one. More strongly than the Romantic ideal, according to which the most adequate response to one poem is the writing of another, this alternative would hold that that is the only response *possible*. Even if one qualifies the Interaction model so as to admit the existence of philosophical genres, moreover, the question persists of whether what is expressed

philosophically in one generic form could not be expressed in another—for example, whether Plato's metaphysics or the conception of philosophical method represented in the *Republic* could be expressed in a critique or treatise, or Hume's *Treatise* as a meditation, or (perhaps most pointedly) Descartes' *Meditations* as a discourse, without significant philosophical loss (or, more neutrally, difference).

What is at stake in such questions is the issue of exactly how strong the claim for interaction in the "Interaction" model is. If any conclusions emerge from the discussion so far, they are first that the latter issue would indeed be a test of the Interaction model (and perhaps of much else as well); and secondly that resolution of the issue is possible only by looking and seeing—by examining case by case and literary feature by literary feature the extent to which the means applied in the literary analysis of texts generally (as, for example, the category of point of view) are fruitful when applied to philosophical writing.

It may be useful in this light to consider the directions in which such analysis may go, and especially then the important structural element already referred to, of philosophical genre. From Aristotle on—indeed before him as well, at the basis of Plato's attack on the poets—the tradition of literary theory finds a central and pivotal feature of "literariness" in the varieties of genre and literary type and in the structural differences which those varieties entail. On the Neutralist model of philosophical discourse, the authorial voice, together with all other central features of the text, is homogenized both across individual works and across genres: all authors, notwithstanding their superficial differences, speak with a single philosophical voice, overriding the many *apparent* differences of genre and style. But even the concession that these latter exist as *apparent* is a sufficient starting point for the proposal made here—since once admit among groups of texts even apparent differences (which may be all that genres ever are, after all), and we have then to distinguish the genres, to see *what* they are, and then, most important, to determine what if anything underlies the appearances.

I have already noted for a number of philosophical genres (the dialogue, the treatise, and the meditation) that, like the standard literary forms of the novel or the lyric, they serve certain functions more aptly than others: it would, for example, be as unlikely to find a philosopher writing a refutation of another philosopher's work in the form of a meditation as it would be to find a poet writing a sonnet whose intent was comic. This does not mean that either of these would be impossible—but that they are unlikely to occur and, if they occur, unlikely to succeed. We find, moreover, built into the generic structures of philosophy, philosophical presuppositions (like the relation between the philosopher as he writes and the reality about which he writes) which make the study of genres potentially even more significant for philosophy than for other disciplines where such presuppositions may or may not bear directly on

questions of content. We recognize otherwise as well that the history of philosophical genres (for example, in the medieval attentiveness to the commentary or in the development, beginning with Montaigne and Bacon, of the genre of the essay) is linked to the social history of philosophy—to the selection of canonical or authoritative texts and to the changing role of canonization, for example, but also to external developments: to the history of printing with its impact on the expanded audience of philosophy and to the development of vernacular languages—all factors that also influence the articulation by philosophical writers of the genres within which they work. What is required here, and what also, on the basis of the comments above, becomes more likely as a possibility, is an enumeration and typology of philosophical genres, a map keyed in such a way as at once to acknowledge the apparent variety of those genres as they range from aphorism and *pensée* to critique and treatise—and yet to find in common, for each instance of that variety, the correlations between the literary means and philosophical purpose.

Beyond the category of genre appear many other instances of the standard array of literary elements, some of them more speculative than others so far as concerns their likely effect on philosophical discourse but hardly, any one of them, *prima facie* irrelevant. The use of figurative language, for example, is itself a recurrent methodological issue for philosophers and has often in fact made strange bedfellows of empiricists and rationalists; it turns out to be an issue in terms of their philosophical *practice* as well as of their theories. Both Hobbes and Locke, for example, object explicitly to the use in philosophical discourse of figurative language as it moves away (in their view) from the plain sense and direct reference of literal usage (a “perfect cheat,” Locke castigated it); but we know that this did not prevent either of these writers from making use of such figures and Hobbes, most egregiously, of a large one—a “Leviathan” of one—at that. Viewed more systematically, there are considerable differences in the use of certain literary figures by philosophical writers. Kant, for example, tends to use metaphors rather than similes, where with Plato the proportions are the other way round, and in both cases there seems to be a relation between the literary figure used and the philosophical intent—as there is also in Hegel, for whom any philosophically historical fragment will eventually disclose the whole: so his use of metonymy as a literary figure.

Differences are also evident *within* the individual literary figures with respect to the philosophical significance ascribed to them. Stephen Pepper, for example, identifies four “root-metaphors” which, in his view, exemplify or even determine the metaphysical commitments of the principal systems in the history of philosophy.⁴ We know, too, that philosophical examples—which are themselves often dependent on figures of speech

4. Stephen Pepper, *World Hypotheses* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1942).

such as metaphors or similes — play various roles in philosophical writing; these range from simple illustration to a role as paradigm to a function as evidence and even to a position much like that of a crucial experiment on which a thesis may stand or (more usually) fall. It would surely be important to know what correlations exist between the varieties of philosophical example and patterns of philosophical method and metaphysical commitment. The evidence suggests that there *are* such correlations — and if there are, this is unlikely to be accidental.

Again, at a more distant remove, if we consider the possibility of reading philosophy in terms of the standard literary tropes, we recall Hayden White's tour de force in applying that schematism to the writing of history by the great 19th-century historians — and his conclusion that beneath (or above) their ideological differences there was also a consistent literary impulse: that Marx had written history as tragedy, Burkhardt as satire, and Ranke as comedy. The historian is thus viewed as "emplotting" the data, and in doing this quite naturally, even inevitably, as making use of literary modes of narrative.⁵ The question will persist, of course, of how far one can press or extend such characterizations; but it seems to me more than only whimsy to associate the causality of Hegel's *Phenomenology* — what motivates the discourse — with a version of what we otherwise recognize as the Bildungsroman in the narration of which the novice figure of Geist (spirit) after overcoming a number of serious adversities (for which, naturally, Geist itself is responsible) then realizes its true nature and destiny. This is, after all, a standard pattern of what in literary history we recognize familiarly as the Romance. Similarly, Leibniz's *Monadology*, often taken to be an accidental object of fun, may in fact be a quite real object of fun — that is, comic. We see there a piecemeal or monadic world in which objects which superficially look quite different from each other, with specific shapes and physical bodies and taking themselves seriously in those individual appearances, are found by Leibniz to resolve themselves into a perfect harmony; they thus restore a lost equilibrium or balance to the world. This is, after all, a quite standard combination of reduction and restoration, replete with happy ending, that comedy *characteristically* has, whether inside philosophy or (more usually) out.

Again, the question of what or how much we gain by classifying philosophical writings in this way (and to what extent we can do so) is open — but that same question is far from closed even with respect to the categorization of much more conventional literary works. And if it turns out that the standard literary tropes of romance, comedy, tragedy, and satire *do* apply (even as painted with broad strokes) to the discourse of history or philosophy, then the question of what those "tropic" categories themselves signify becomes increasingly important as a philosophical

5. Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974).

question. Surely if there are standard narrative patterns that cross the disciplines—or that cross some disciplines but not others—the significance of those patterns becomes a substantive question for (and across) the disciplines themselves. Even if one questions the specific account of archetypes that Northrop Frye summons as an explanation for their recurrence, or the account of class consciousness and social displacement that Marxist writers like Lukacs offer, it would be in the direction of such explanations that the discovery of common patterns between literary and philosophical texts would move us.

Even without this larger implication, it is possible now, on the Interaction model, to begin to think of philosophical texts, like other literary structures, as composed around “actions” and characters, with the philosophical author “emplotting” the actions for a variety of purposes (inside or outside the text)—rather than simply discovering or thinking of the philosophical system as a static or unified whole. The latter image of philosophical thought as atemporal and undramatic, as itself nonrepresentational, has been very much taken for granted in the historiography of philosophy since the 19th century, and in some ways it has been part of the profession of philosophy almost since its origins. Any attempt to assert authority—a feature, after all, of all rhetoric—will also be inclined, even with the best of intentions, to disguise its own means which, so far as they are disclosed, would undermine that authority. Philosophers have persistently seen themselves and persuaded readers to see them as knowing rather than doing and thus as beyond the reach both of time and of rhetoric. To speak of philosophical texts as literary artifacts, then, whatever difficulties it encounters in the way of literary analysis, at least forces philosophy to an awareness of its historical self—which is surely a necessary part, if not the whole, by which philosophy might know itself.

These then, albeit sketchily, are some of the features that an anatomy of philosophical style will, on the Interaction model, hope to identify and which promise to show more clearly than would otherwise be seen or imagined a view of the body of philosophy—that is, of its corpus, that is, of its texts. Admittedly, the discussion here has been both preliminary and programmatic; the “Anatomy” itself which flourished as a genre in the sixteenth century (as in Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*)⁶ also raises self-referentially the questions of philosophical style referred to above more generally. Nor have I meant to suggest that the analysis of philosophical style will be decisive for every or any particular instance of reading or interpretation. What I have been arguing is that the evidence on which the reading and interpretation of philosophical texts depends will also, unavoidably, take a position with respect to the literary or stylistic character of those works—and that this is the case because of

6. Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (first edition, 1652) (London: J. M. Dent, 1932), 3 volumes.

their own status as writing, a condition that makes philosophy possible.

For philosophers and readers who find nothing startling or exceptional in this conclusion, the task now is to go on to develop the critical instruments — a finer anatomy — for which the literary study of philosophical discourse still waits. Only the philosopher who takes as his goal the ideal of a disembodied text, the literary equivalent of jumping out of one's skin, will be reluctant to acknowledge that whatever else we recognize about the origins of philosophy or its habitat, its methods or its purposes, philosophy characteristically lives inside the text. This seems, moreover, not to be an accident: there is no philosophy as we have come to recognize it in nonliterate societies, and there seems little promise that philosophy would survive the transition to a post-literate society. We need then a theory and practice of literary philosophy for the same reason that we need philosophy itself.