

In his *Private Notebooks*, Wittgenstein, a post-Enlightenment, though not necessarily post-modernist, language philosopher, provides one of the insightful glimpses into the horrors of war on the eastern front during World War I. Contemporary with many of the ‘disillusioned’ generation of ex-patriot writers such as Ernest Hemingway, who served the allies during the war as an ambulance driver, Wittgenstein, unlike his contemporaries, served in a combat unit as a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian Empire for nearly the entire duration of the war.

During this time, he employed a Caesar cipher to encode his personal thoughts on one side of a two page notebook, the *verso*, while he began to lay out his thoughts on language, logic, and philosophy, often under continuous cannon fire or below the deck of a captured Russian patrol boat, *Golpana*, on the right side, the *recto*. Of the daily challenges in wartime, Wittgenstein, an orderly rather than an officer, bemoans and his bemoaning, a saga his caretakers suppressed for many years due to various circumstances, Perloff, the author of this new translation, details in the *Afterword*, intersect with his philosophy in ways she makes apparent for readers; and this for the first time in the 100 plus years since Wittgenstein, whose early life during WWI had remained much of a mystery, originally wrote his *Private Notebooks*.

Perloff’s translation is timely. While mainstream academia is still under the ‘authoritative’ dominion of Chomsky’s nativist theory of language acquisition with mental switches for features of grammar an individual language turns on, the bleeding edge of technology, decried by Chomsky as ‘glorified autocorrection,’ generates grammatically sound sentences without acquisition or the human mind, undermining the Cartesian dualism ‘generative’ grammar exploits to defend itself against attacks from philosophy.

Based on Large Language Models (LLMs), the world of Artificial Intelligence is limited by language more so than a response to a critique of the *Minimalist Program*.¹ In an often muted, self-contradictory world of linguistic paradox, the paradoxical Wittgenstein, who never read Descartes, his *Private Notebooks* and his discussions of language, which challenge these contradictory and, often times, warring worlds, are perfectly suited for a new, provocative discussion of speech right now.

After articulating the central axiom in Wittgenstein thought on limits, Wittgenstein writes in his *Private Notebooks*: “Is there a priori an order in the world, and if so, of what does it consist?” (pg. 82; 147) This burning question, Perloff highlights, is one of the

questions from the *Private Notebooks* that gives rise to the nascent *Tractus Logico-Philosophicus*, a book long considered to be a classic in the cannon on logic.

Stationed on battlefields sacred to Russia's extension of Muscovite influence into Poland, the eastern front near the natural barrier of the river before Krakow, the Vitsula, the cite of Napoleonic warfare from as early as the 18th century, Wittgenstein, only twenty-five years old, began his enlistment into the 2nd Garrison Artillery Regiment under the command of the Austro-Hungarian Empire on August 7th, 1914, one day after Czar Nicholas II declared war and six weeks after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo.

Wittgenstein witnessed not only the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire but the Russian revolution whose leaders Vladimir I Lenin and Leon Trotsky led to success on October 17th, 1917, events of enormous social, political, economic significance in the history of mankind that the infamous Brusilov offensive, in which Wittgenstein proved himself as a soldier, ushered into the course of human events. Described as the major challenge of his life, "[it] was this time," remarks Perloff, "Wittgenstein finally got his wish to be sent to the front and to face death directly." (pg. 156) Of his time in the Brusilov offensive Wittgenstein would say, "Perhaps proximity to death will bring me the light of life!"

Here Perloff highlights the connectivity of Wittgenstein's personal and philosophical thoughts. Described as an "erlösende Wort" on par with the Socratic legacy of ancient Greek in in the Gospel of St. John's *logos*, Perloff's decision to coordinate *verso* sections of the *Private Notebooks* with its *recto* pages culminates in the elusive pursuit of language. Perloff's discussion of the Brusilov offensive in the context of Wittgenstein's *Private Notebooks* is paramount to understanding the value of her contribution. Accordingly, Perloff synchronizes the metamorphosis and metastasis of Wittgenstein's *Private Notebooks* with Wittgenstein's transformation on or around the Brusilov offensive.

A central theme in the *Tractus*, Perloff describes how Wittgenstein's predilection with silence in the *Private Notebooks* at that time manifests the first version of *Tractus 7*: "*Was sich nicht sagen lässt, lässt sich nicht sagen.*" (pg. 13) It provides the reader with the ability to relish in the awe-inspiring moment when the profound catalyst of individual (Wittgenstein), human events (Brusilov offensive), society (The Hapsburg Dynasty's Austro-Hungarian Empire), and history (WWI) coalesce, a cataclysm. Alongside the collapse of the The Hapsburg Dynasty, the fall of Russia's Czar Nicholas II, the result is the embryo of the *Tractus*. "The war," Wittgenstein would remark in 1919 after five long years in its shadow, "saved my life. I don't know what I would have done without it."

Equally so, the world might not have known what to do with Wittgenstein, had it not been for the war.

At a time when many seek to manipulate 'narratives' relatively, Perloff's contextualization of the *Private Notebooks* with objective reality makes it an invaluable contribution to the literature and source material on Wittgenstein. Her translation with German on one side, English on another, and an introduction and afterword is the only manual on the *Private Notebooks* to combine a translation and the original language of Wittgenstein's historic thoughts. It is, therefore, more than a single book. It is many books in a single volume. In a world of marketing and advertisements, one cannot resist the temptation to emphasize the discount and bargain its purchase must registers for readers.