An Editorial Introduction

Jonathan Locke Hart

This second issue of *Veritas Review* builds on the strength and variety of the first and inaugural issue. As with the previous issue, this one highlights the work of students and others at Harvard and in Cambridge and beyond. Encouraging student work and creativity in verbal and visual arts is at the heart of what this journal does as well as what the Abigail Adams Institute, which houses this publication, also does. We seek artistic and critical interpretations of the world in which we find ourselves. We strive for harmony, sometimes *discordia concors* or concord from discord or the harmony of discord, to echo Pythagorean music theory and the Empedoclean idea, the *harmonia mundi*.

The body of the issue begins with a poet, an undergraduate at Harvard, Gabrielle Landry, who records her conversations with six paintings at the Harvard Art Museums, focusing on Degas' *The Rehearsal*, the first of six encounters, learning patience and enriching her life and poetry with a slow seeing. A Harvard undergraduate decades before who also worked at *The Harvard Gazette* and The Museum of Comparative Zoology, Alfred Alcorn, a long-established and distinguished novelist, has written a series of mysteries about murders in the museum, and here represents a poetry reading. So, Harvard museums and poetry are keys to these first two contributions. My own contribution is poetry from a manuscript I lost on the Celts, who were pushed back in Europe by invaders, and I remember, revive, and represent them by beginning most of the poems in Gaelic.

Henry Stratakis-Allen, an undergraduate at the College of William and Mary, responds to Demosthenes' *Third Philippic*, which begins with the great orator addressing Greece's inactivity in the face of Philip's wrongs. Stratakis-Allen explores the implications of Demosthenes' thought in areas such as war, politics, religion, and other matters, including "the Roland ideal." Iosif M. Gershteyn writes an appreciation of Ivan Bunin, a brilliant Russian writer who deserves to be better known in this generation of English-speaking readers, and describes what it means to translate him, including two major challenges. Gershteyn provides an elegant translation of a short story, the title of which he translates as "Barely a Breath."

In this issue, as in the previous one, we have interpretations of a figure or work, the first issue on Plato, and here on the epic in Old English about Beowulf and his world, on the borders of Denmark and Sweden. David Franks, who leads The Great Conversation at the Abigail Adams Institute, explores pressing matters of life and death in *Beowulf*, discusses Tolkien, who was a scholar and translator of the poem, and examines the typology of monsters then and now, in poetry and life. Anne Knechtges moves away from some earlier views by discussing Beowulf as both a Christian and pagan hero, of honour and grace, who honours his pagan ancestors and looks forward to salvation.

Throughout the issue, Catherine Ezell presents her portraits, her drawings, which, as in the first issu,e enhance *Veritas Review*, literally giving the journal character and a lively interaction between the verbal and visual, putting a face on the words of the writers. More images and words interact in the work of two other contributors. Yunfeng Ruan writes about her photographs of Cambridge, which also appear here, and explains that rather than photograph the academic part of this town, she, although a researcher, is free to reshape her life and the town, photographing the plants, river, sky, graffiti and the like. James Capuzzi also photographs Cambridge, the Harvard Colleges along the Charles River, and the Abigail Adams Institute and its programs for students and others, as well as recording what he photographs in words, ending this issue of *Veritas Review*, which is of the Institute and reaches out to Harvard, Cambridge, and beyond. The issue ends with a gallery of Ezell's portraits, moving from John and Abigail Adams to larger versions of the other portraits that appear earlier in the issue.

This second issue embodies a diversity and richness in image and word, of past and present, here and there. The contributors seek, imagine and even find beauty and truth in the whirligig of the world, poetic or artistic moments in various tones. Whether these moments are a poet's conversation with a painting, a poetry reading in a mystery, a meditation on a people, a consideration of an ancient orator and more, a remaking and reviving of a writer, two interpretations in conversation of an epic poem in terms of the spirit then and now, portraits of human faces, different points of view on photographing Cambridge, the shared theme is the human in the world. Matters of life and death are part of the thoughts, experiences, feelings, and ideas—matters of body, mind, and soul—found in this issue.

What I Learned from Looking Closely

Gabrielle Landry '23

On a Friday morning in September, I sit in front of Degas' *The Rehearsal*, taking in the pinks and blues of the ballerinas' shoes and ribbons, observing the brushstrokes that pull light from the windows into the studio, and imagining a backstory for the violinist playing in front of the dancers. The quiet of the Harvard Art Museums calms me. After a week of immersion in the "Harvard grind," an hour spent looking closely at this painting revives me. Time slows. The painting unravels itself bit by bit. Within a few minutes, a conversation between me and the painting begins.

When I leave the museum, campus looks and feels a little different. I notice how, across the street, the gate leading into Harvard Yard frames the back of Sever Hall. I notice the way the morning light lands on the still-green leaves. The air feels a little fresher and brighter, my pace a bit slower and calmer. No change is dramatic, but each makes me feel more relaxed and observant as I go about my day.

My time with *The Rehearsal* was the first of six encounters with paintings in the Harvard Art Museums throughout the Fall 2021 semester. My project, which I called *Looking Closely*, was simple: sit with six paintings for an hour each and write poetry in response. I considered *Looking Closely* not only a creative project, but a "journey in poetry" through the paintings.

Over time, as they asked questions, stirred memories, and evoked emotions, the paintings became like friends. At my introductory ballet classes, I couldn't help but picture the grace and simplicity of *The Rehearsal*. When taking the T into Boston, I recalled Monet's *Arrival of a Train*; cold, grey days of Fall (and the snowstorms this semester) reminded me of his *Road Toward the Farm*. Sargent's *Lake O'Hara*, Maris' *Landscape*, and Whistler's *Nocturne in Grey and Gold* spoke to me in other ways. *Lake O'Hara* reminded me to take time to pause and to appreciate the natural environment. *Landscape* and *Nocturne in Grey and Gold* evoked mystery and intrigue, like vivid dreams that fade quickly upon waking.

I was motivated to create *Looking Closely* because I have always loved the Harvard Art Museums, but I felt like I wasn't getting as much as I could out of my visits. I would wander through the galleries, pausing occasionally to look closer at one item for a minute or two, but I never stopped to really linger with a single piece in a single visit. I also was interested in exploring the ways in which different creative forms inspire each other. As a poet, I find that paintings inspire new imagery and ideas for my poems.

At first, I wasn't sure that I would be able to fill a whole hour just looking at each painting. I had never spent so long looking at a single piece of art in one sitting. During every visit, however, I realized how quickly time flew. Minute by minute, more details and connections revealed themselves. With each painting, I developed a process for examining the art and jotting down notes to hone my observations.

The process of creating *Looking Closely* taught me a lot about patience. There were many times when I became distracted or drowsy, but I found that letting my mind wander while staying guided by the painting—that is, remaining semi-focused on the painting but not being too hard on myself for getting a little distracted—helped me remain present and patient. I also learned to keep in mind that these artists spent way longer than just one hour to create their pieces, so I wouldn't hear everything the painting had to communicate in just a few minutes.

I also realized that I really enjoy this kind of artistic engagement. Before, visiting art museums felt like shaking a hundred hands at a networking event; now, spending time with just one work for an hour feels like having a good conversation with a new friend. When I return to art museums or encounter public art (murals, sculptures, etc.) around Boston and Cambridge, I see the works differently. To me, they are mysteries to unravel, layer by layer. I feel more comfortable taking my time with one or two pieces in an art gallery, rather than speeding through the space.

Finally, *Looking Closely* taught me that inspiration for creative expression can come from anywhere. One of my favorite ways to develop my poems was to imagine the characters in the painting as real people with hopes, dreams, and struggles. This kind of imagination sparked self-reflection as I considered my own thoughts and memories around beauty, new beginnings, adventure, home, friendship, and love.

I look forward to returning to the paintings in this project and to discover new works of art as I continue to look closely at art within Harvard's campus and beyond.

A Poetry Reading

Alfred Alcorn '64

A considerable turnout milled around in the spacious library of the Center for Criminal Justice. It was an incongruous mix. Among the word-stricken, bleared-eyed, unkempt types who frequent poetry readings, were a good sprinkling of cops, some still in uniform, as well as lawyers and other worthies from Seaboard's criminal justice establishment. I also noticed a lot of women. Perhaps they were confusing Morgliesh with a character in the crime novels of a well-known British mystery writer.

A crew from Channel Five busied themselves setting up lighting, testing mikes, and arranging two cameras, one stationary and one on a dolly. They were there at the behest of the BBC, though there would no doubt be a snippet about the event on tomorrow's news.

As we stood around before taking our seats, I found myself gratified by the apparent esteem with which many of those in attendance held me. One burly state trooper—Sam Brown belt, jodhpurs, the whole rig—sought me out to shake hands. "We're behind you a hundred percent," he said. Marvin Grimsby, the center's director, also came over—I had given the Bernard Lecture here a couple of years back—and introduced me around.

I already knew Lieutenant Tracy, of course. He was there with his wife Katrina, a petite, dark-haired, pretty woman. We were chatting when Detective Lupien of the state police came over. We shook hands warmly. He asked me how I had been faring. I told him there were longer and longer stretches when I forgot all about being shot at or nearly run over.

"But stay alert," he told me, the warmth of his voice belying his dark stony eyes.

While settling in on a chair at the end of one of the several rows arranged before the lectern, I took his advice and glanced around at the stacks that led off on either side. I began absently thinking that these benign refuges from the clamorous world would soon be gone, along with the books and peace and quiet they harbor. What couldn't you find online? The age of Gutenberg, including these temples of reading, were disappearing right before our eyes. What next? A fine wire implanted in the appropriate part of the brain for the direct transmission of organized thought, which is what reading and writing is, after all.

At which point I gave a visible lurch. Watching me intently from the stacks to my right down near the lectern was the tall, dark-haired thirty-something man who had been watching me at the theater and in the parking lot. He also bore a resemblance to the driver of the Humvee that nearly ran me over. He held my gaze for several seconds before turning and pretending interest in a book he had in hand.

A moment later there was movement around the lectern. Marvin Grimsby, in company with Wendell Brothers of the Wainscott English Department and Commander Adam Morgliesh of Scotland Yard, emerged from a side door. The latter two sat on chairs provided and Grimsby began his words of welcome. I glanced again at the stacks to find my stalker had disappeared. But surely, I thought, touching the Glock in its belt holster, he wouldn't try anything with all these cops around. If I wasn't safe here, where would I be safe? But his presence began to gnaw at me.

Brothers, a pale, shaggy man who, like so many literary academics, appeared bereft of words, introduced the poet in halting phrases before hitting his stride. Brothers spoke of the new territory Adam Morgliesh had opened up for the searching light of poetry. "If his verse to date has been unflinching in its collision with life, the commander's new collection, *Rigor Mortis*, is unsparing in its confrontation with final things. These poems, with their sparseness of language, with their subtle, honed wit, and

with their fateful cadences, compel the reader to shake hands with his own mortality. But not alone. As the 'Bard of the Yard' —as the commander is known in some quarters—so plangently depicts, we are all standing in our own tumbrel as it creaks its way to our own particular and personal gallows."

The Scotland Yarder acknowledged the scattering of applause with a downcast nod as he arranged his material on the lectern.

There was more of the Oxford don about Commander Morgliesh than of an intrepid public detective. His large, saturnine face with its strong nose and pouched eyes wore an expression of tolerant, subdued humor. It was of a piece with a tall, sturdy frame, abundant, graying hair, a neat blue button-down shirt, club tie, and an old but by no means shabby corduroy jacket.

I had not taken time to retrieve any of his poetry from the library or even to peruse samples online. So, except for Brothers' introduction, I was quite ignorant of the man's work.

He took a moment to thank the Center and those who had organized the reading. Clearing his throat and speaking in a rich, Oxbridge accent, he said, "I won't spend a lot of time explaining my poems as I trust they speak for themselves." In an aside, he added, "If a poem cannot speak for itself, then what can?" He smiled and went on. "I will be reading from this new volume the title of which, *Rigor Mortis*, alludes to the rigor of both death and poetry and to their simple and absolute strictures. By that I mean there is no poetry without words and there is no death without finality. At least for now."

I tried to listen. But seeing X, as I called him on the wanted poster in my mind, I had walked back into the nightmare of terror. That is to say, I was in the grip of a fear that feeds and festers in the imagination while in no way being imaginary.

The commander was saying, "I have been asked why, as a law enforcement officer, I write poetry. I think the question is a polite way of insinuating that something as squalid as crime and as pedestrian as police work is antithetical to poetry and to those Olympian realms to which it aspires. Or once did, at any rate. I have no coherent answer to the assumptions in that question. I can only tell you that we must look within ourselves to find that larger world into which to escape the quotidian banalities of existence. And, as we all know, police work too often involves that ultimate banality of which Hannah Arendt wrote so eloquently."

As he went on, I glanced around again. My stalker was nowhere to be seen. Or was that he, behind me and to my left, sitting in one of the lounge chairs that surrounded a low table strewn with periodicals? I thought of discreetly taking the Glock from its belt holster and making it handier in my side pocket.

Or was I just being melodramatic? Perhaps the fellow was one of those shy but devoted fans who fixate on someone for God knows what reason. Or was he a kind of spotter, keeping an eye on me and communicating my movements to a trigger man whose silenced pistol already rested on the bindings of some law book as he took careful aim?

Behind the lectern, the commander peered down at his text and intoned the title, "Troping the Light Fantastic" and began, reciting from memory:

> Time is the fire
> We burn in,
> D. Schwartz told us.
> He's right.
> A few of us
> Blaze brightly
> In our hours
> And leave an afterglow.
> More of us
> Smolder dimly
> Waiting for a spark
> Before we burn out.
> Most of us
> Are grateful
> Simply
> For the light.

"Speaking of light," the commander said, turning to the technician in charge of the filming, "could you angle that light just a bit. It's right in my face."

He waited. He cleared his throat. He read "*Circ de la Vie.*"

We all balance
Above the abyss.
There is no safety net
To ease the drama
Not of who falls
Or of who hangs on
But of when.

I eased from my chair and stepped into the nearest opening in the stacks. The commander was saying something about the influence of Philip Larkin on his work. I shifted the Glock from its holster to my side pocket where I encircled its butt with my right hand. The commander began reading "After Larkin."

Between death
And decrepitude
We usually choose
The latter.
It's not just
Fear of that
Undiscovered country.
It's that we think
We'll get better,
The way we have
Gotten better
All our lives,
As though there's
A cure for time,
As though life itself
Were not fatal.

He said, "Working out a poem has been likened to solving a crime. But too much should not be made of the comparison. Words are both more available than the bad guys, but also just as intractable if not more so. It might be better to say that they are both, justice and poetry, compelling in that they each satisfy a craving for order."

In the twilit world of the stacks, I found myself in a section devoted to the philosophy of law to judge from the titles about *Leviticus*, the *Code of Hammurabi*, and the like. I paused as the poet recited "Again."

The murdered body
Of the young woman
Lay dumped
Like so much rubbish
In a roadside ditch
Beyond the verge.
Futile anger gives way
To pity
And to a yearning
For the pale Galilean
To come again
To teach us again
About doing unto others.

The phrase "murdered body" resonated as I moved toward the light at the end of the row I was in. I did not want to be a murdered body, I told myself. Anything but a murdered body. I came to a line of carrels, those modest chair-and-desk cubicles where apprentice scholars practice their trade. These were spaced against the wall and facing off to my right. They were empty.

I paused to listen as the commander read a poem about what he called the bogus art of murder.

Murder for some
May be a form of art
With its own rules,
Its masterpieces and duds,
And a tradition going back
And back and back and back
To our ape ancestors.
Murder may be just.
Murder may be necessary.
Murder may be clever.
But murder is never art

Because murder has no claim
To beauty.

Still trying to listen, I was attracted to a carrel where the chair was pushed back as though recently vacated. A book lay open on the desk. I paused, hearing the commander's voice but not his words. Overcoming scruples about invading the privacy of another, I glanced down at the book. Then I turned it enough to glimpse the title and author: *The History of Murder* by Colin Wilson.

Paranoia came over me in waves of muddled fear and self-doubt. Had someone known I was coming to the reading and deliberately left a book open, one that I would see as a portent? Of course not. I was being silly. Or was I? Cat and mouse games are all very well as long as you are not the mouse. Touching my Glock again, I moved along the carrels on high alert.

I paused then because I wanted to listen to the poetry. I reached a spot along the row of cubicles from where I could hear the recital quite clearly. The commander intoned the title "Knowing," and began.

The price
Of knowing
Is knowing
That you
Will know
And know
Until the day
You know
No more.

I was contemplating knowing no more when the back of a head belonging to a tall, dark-haired man came into view in the last carrel. Had he been dozing, bent forward, head in arms. Was it he? And if so, what was I to do? Creep up to him and poke the barrel of my gun into his upper vertebrae for a hotly whispered interrogation? Just who are you? Why are you stalking me? The object of my gaze, perhaps sensing it, turned and gave me a puzzled look. It was not he.

It was then, with a heady sense of empowerment, that I knew I was not to be the victim of terror this time. I would systematically track this guy down and confront him, with the Glock if necessary, and make him tell me who he was and why he was stalking me.

The poet sipped water from a glass and indulged in a manly clearing of his throat before talking about how he had selected and arranged the verse in his new volume. "I came up with three general categories: crime, death, and miscellany. I like to think that time is the theme linking all of them. But, of course, there may have been a bit of shoe-horning here and there. 'Oh, To Be in England' expresses what might be called perverse nostalgia." He read:

When in some grand place
Listed on the National Trust
Or in some idyll green,
I yearn for the banality
Of the real Britain,
Of pebble-dashed blocks
And treeless car parks
And motorways that lead

From nowhere to nowhere.

I kept moving. I went past the carrels toward the back of the hall along the stacks, checking into each as I went. No one. I came out where the lounge chairs were set around the table. Not there, either. I returned to where the stacks opened into the rows of chairs and kept just back where I could both see and listen.

The commander was peering around at his audience. The mobile camera dollied to his left. After another sip of water, he said, "Poetry is a funny business. The fact is, if you read the ingredients on a tin of curried lamb with just the right cadence and tone of sententiousness, you can make it sound like poetry. Bad poetry, perhaps, but poetry nevertheless."

He turned a page. He said, "Ghosts."

You don't have to die
To be a ghost.
A lot of us already
Haunt this sphere
As much with
Our presence
As we ever will
With our absence.

Like a ghost, a determined ghost, I melted into the stacks that walled off the back of the hall. The titles here ran more to popular fare. I might have browsed *Criminality and Creativity* or *Criminals I Have Known* or *Who's Who in Organized Crime* or *The Gravity of Law* or *The Midnight Court* had I not been otherwise occupied. I moved with uncommon stealth behind the first column of books and peered out at the ranks of attentive listeners. X was sitting in the back row of chairs over to the right. But he had changed from a windbreaker and chino trousers to a brown turtleneck and jacket of dark green tweed. As I pondered, quite seriously, how and where he had changed his clothes, it occurred to me that I had entered a shadowy area of my own mind. Because suddenly my stalker was everywhere. All of the tall, dark-haired men of a certain age could have been he.

This may have resulted from a mild psychopathological condition unique to myself. I remember once, during a visit to Innsbruck in Austria when, while waiting in the train station, everyone I looked at resembled Mozart to a remarkable degree—or at least his likeness as rendered in the della Croce oil. At first I found it amusing and somewhat incredible. I considered asking them if I could take their pictures. Then, as the episode persisted and deepened, it grew alarming. The spell didn't break until I came upon a short, heavy woman sitting with her back to me. When, trying not to seem nosy, I positioned myself for a glance at her round, scowling face, she turned out to be the very likeness of Beethoven.

I paused to calm myself. I closed my eyes, took several deep breaths, and slowly counted to ten. I have found that the unassailable logic of numbers is an effective antidote to impending mental chaos. It worked. When I opened my eyes, the taller men with dark hair of a certain age had all returned to being themselves. Which did not mean, of course, that someone was no longer stalking me. I reminded myself that someone had paid Dennis "Blackie" Burker to kill me. That wasn't imaginary unless all of life is imaginary, a kind of dream we consent to.

The poet paused without apparent annoyance as several latecomers entered and found seats. I took the opportunity to cross over to the stacks lining the other side of the hall. The carrels here, all empty as far as I could tell, followed a line of windows that gave out onto the parking lot between the Center and the Museum.

I again positioned myself where I could see the commander, however narrowly, and hear his recital. He was saying, "I write poems about crime as a category and about crimes as something that happens to people. I think it a bit of moral kitsch to assert, as someone has, that all poetry after the Holocaust is obscene. One could say, though, that anything convincingly *noir* after the mass murders of the twentieth century is at best problematic and at times inadvertently laughable. I would argue that poetry is not only possible, but necessary in that poetry has as much to do with truth as it does with beauty. Or, better, what might be called the beauty of truth." He bent his head and read "Time."

They say
You can
Save time,
Find time,
Lose time,
Make time,

Keep time,
Waste time,
Do time,
Buy time,
Sell time,
Borrow time,
Kill time.
I say
Time is
A bomb
Ticking away.

Without thinking, I looked at my watch. And sure enough, there was time ticking away. I checked the stacks and the carrels. No one. I sat down and listened as the commander read several poems without pausing, starting with "Don't Worry."

Getting older
You tend to think
More about death.
You wonder when and how.
Will you go to bed
And not wake up?
Will you see it coming?
How will you react?
Then the ceremonies.
Who will show up?
What will they say?
Most poignantly,
You don't want
To be forgotten.
Though eventually you will
Unless you've done
The unforgettable,
Such as write
A great symphony,
Or the unforgivable,
Such as murder
A lot of people.
Until you realize that,
Being dead,
It won't make
Any difference,
Certainly not to
The no longer you.

"Green Gold"

Nothing gold can stay
Says the New England bard.
I would say
Gold would not be gold
If it could but stay.

"Sex"

If sex is nature's way
To get us to do
Our Darwinian duty,

Then what is love
But a kind of luck,
Not just finding it,
But knowing
You've found it.

"Keeping"

A murderer can
Take your life.
But he cannot
Keep it,
Anymore than
He can
Keep his own.

"The Moral"

Crime doesn't pay
Unless you have
A business plan.

It was right then that serendipity befell me. I turned on the hard chair that went with the carrel and happened to glance out the window. There he was, jacket, chinos, and all, striding across the Center's parking lot and then into the museum's, disappearing into the dark amidst the fringe of trees on the other side. It was he, I was sure. I considered easing my way out of the library and going after him. But I satisfied myself with a cautious sense of triumph. I had flushed the S.O.B.

I felt like I had vanquished danger, if not death, at least for the time being. Perhaps it was this small exultation that made me susceptible to the series of poems the commander had launched into. I caught the end of a poem about the relief of death.

. . .
The end of everything,
It's true.
But it should be a relief
To let others
Worry about others
And about the world,
Which will continue
To go to hell
The way it
Always has.

"Soul Addressed"

Don't be too proud
Of your fine brain
Or of your wonderful body.
They're only rentals.
You're not even
A tenant at will.
If it's any consolation,
They'll be torn down
Shortly after you vacate.

The commander paused as though mulling over what he was to say next. He said finally, "Death might well be called life's dirty little secret. We don't really want to think about it, much less wax poetic on its behalf. And yet our mortality remains at the core of our existence and is the driving force of our individual and collective creativity. How else to explain religion and how it has inspired everything from the literature of the Hebrews to the Gothic cathedrals to the music of J.S. Bach? The question is: would each life be the miracle it is if it never ended?"

"Been There, Done That"

Death is only
The non-existence
That existed
For an eternity
Before you existed
And will return
For another eternity
When you renew
Your non-existence

"To Cease"

Think of it as
An act of charity
In which you
Cede your place
At the feast of life,
Where, more than likely,
You've had more than
Your fair share

As I listened to these poems and others in that vein, my enthusiasm waxed into something more profound than enthusiasm. I experienced the kind of assent that happens when one hears one's convictions trenchantly articulated. He made me feel justified in my resistance to the project to prolong human life.

"Proud Death"

Death be not proud?
Nonsense, John Donne.
Without proud death
To sort things out,
We would still be
Archaea
Oozing gas
In the ooze.

"Presumption"

Life is
The presumption
Of the living
So that when
Someone dies
We say
He passed
Or he passed away
Or he went to heaven
Or he went to hell.
Would it not be
More honest
To simply say
He ended?
Or would that, too,
Be presumption?

"I'll finish with a poem that's my favorite in the collection, though I'm not sure why. It's titled "You Would Think."

You would think
That the rich
Suffer more
When they die
Than do the poor,
The rich having
So much more
To lose.
Or is it the poor
When they die,
Who suffer more,
Life being most
Of what they have?

The commander arranged his papers and said "Thank you very much."

I was surprised at the applause, which was loud and sustained. There was a scattering of questions. When did he know he was a poet? Who was his favorite poet? At the question, "Commander, where do you find your poems?" he smiled and thought for a moment. He said, "Some poems come to you. Some you have to track down. Others, ghost poems, I call them, flit around in the shadows just out of reach."

I stood aside as the commander patiently signed books. Presently, there was only Grimsby, myself, the commander, Detective Lupien, and Lieutenant Tracy and his wife. I turned to Morgliesh and introduced myself. "I enjoyed your reading very much," I said with the pleasure and enthusiasm of honesty.

"And I have taken much pleasure in your work," he replied. We shook hands cordially.

Lieutenant Tracy said, "Norman, Commander Morgliesh has asked to be assigned to your case, on an unofficial basis, of course."

"I see."

"But I thought, out of courtesy, we should ask you first, the commander explained.

"I would be more than honored," I said. "That is, we can use all the help we can get."

Lieutenant Tracy politely excused himself. "Another meeting with the federals," he said, glancing at his watch. "Otherwise I would love to join you for a drink."

Detective Lupien nodded ruefully, but didn't put the matter quite so politely. "The Feebs love meetings. They don't really accomplish anything, but they do provide the illusion of doing something."

When the others had left, the commander turned to me. "I feel like a good whiskey, a beer, and some bar food. Fish and chips. How about you?"

"Sounds good," I said. "There's the Pink Shamrock, not far from here. It's a gay pub, but with a mixed clientele, if that matters. More to the point, it has decent food."

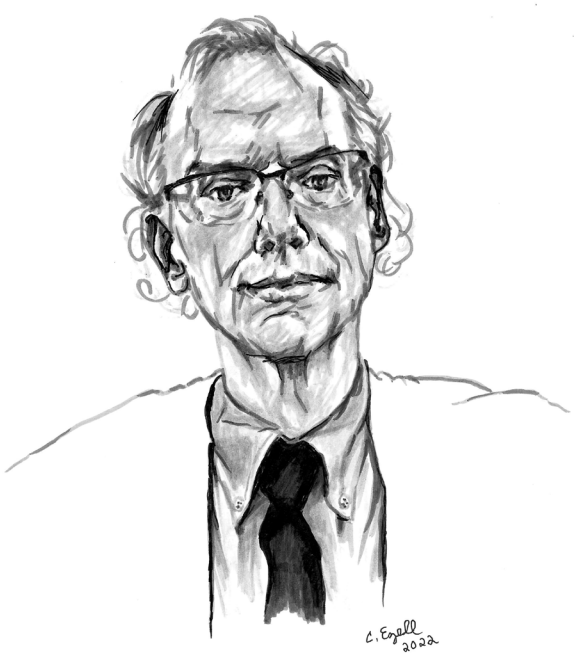
He laughed. "We might get taken for a couple of old poufs. No, altogether the best. Lead on. Food is food."

Note

The above is a chapter from Alcorn's latest novel, *The Art of Murder in the Museum of Man*. It is available on *Amazon*.

The Pushing of the Celts

Jonathan Locke Hart



a fragment of a lost manuscript, written Spring 2009,
Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris, excavated years later

1. I have been

I have been
We have been all pushed
To the west rim

They have drummed and stolen
Our tongue. These poems are for those
Who drove us

The bards lost to a time with no poetry
These words
Are an excavation

A late tongue time has given us
In mutation with the spaces
Where peoples moved like the wind.

2. Chomh haosta leis an gceo

Chomh haosta leis an gceo
As old as the mist
We are, hanging on western

Mountains, pushed into the sea
Almost, gasping, our tongue
As we are driven, starved,

Left to die. The tribes from south,
And east came

Our tongues
Died slowly, in shambles,
Tatters, buried in the peat, bog after bog.

We are the mist rising in the morning
Burnt off in the sun
Unseen at night.

3. Chomh ata le frog sa bhfómhar

Chomh ata le frog sa bhfómhar
I am as swollen as a frog in autumn
My words are as bloated after

A long summer, and winter is almost
Come, like a lover who has spilt too much
On a ground grown fallow. The air

Is full of bombast: I have sucked
In my share, boasted like a warrior
Before battle.

The danger when the leaves
Turn is when the day grows
Still, I will puff up and explode.

4. Chomh balbh le trumpa gan teanga

Chomh balbh le trumpa gan teanga
Like a trumpet without a tongue
I will call so the walls do not

Come tumbling down. No one
Will hear me, my mute call,
Along the watch-tower,

Might fall music
To the night, escape the corners
Of my mouth, wet the dry blood

Encrusted there. Some proclaim
In a dark rain
This is the language of silence.

5. Chomh cantalach le mála easóg

Chomh cantalach le mála easóg
As bad-tempered as a sack of weasels
I am when you seize my land

Do not be astonished that I snap
And bite your hand, you starve me,
My children wizened as corn-stalk

Drying in the droughting sun.
Conquerors come and go
But do damage in the meantime

Yes, it is a mean time. You take up
Our names and erase them
With our myths.

And the winter rain would fall
And the summer sun would burn
The mist undone, in this no Celtic twilight.

6. Chomh cinnte le sioc

Chomh cinnte le sioc
As certain as frost
Death will come

It will take all of us
The sun will
Fade, and memory

Will go like spring behind.
They took our books,
They forbade our tongue

The fields grew vacant
As they pushed us into the sea
Into green-tongued famine.

The harvest is done
And we are done. The frost
At midnight comes

A frozen touch
To our graves
In the burden of sleep.

[The rest was lost]

Response to the Third Philippic

Henry Stratakis-Allen

Formerly, men's minds were animated with that which they now feel no longer, which conquered all the opulence of Persia, maintained the freedom of Greece, and triumphed over the powers of sea and land: but now that it is lost, universal ruin and confusion overspread the face of Greece. What is this?

Demosthenes' attitude towards the rapid changes in contemporary warfare struck me as interesting. He imagines, first, that the Athenians' uncomfortable political situation was exclusively the result of their own inactivity and was thus entirely within their power to solve—this implies a belief in a kind of social or political decline in Athens itself. Second, the answer he provides to the question of why "the Greeks were once so jealous of their liberty, and are now ready to submit to slavery" is that corruption, specifically bribery, had spread to places in Athens where it didn't exist before. Then, finally, his attitudes towards warfare in general are clarified when he asserts that "now, on the contrary, we see most defeats owing to treachery; no formal engagements, nothing left to the decision of arms."

Pre-modern Italian poet Ludovico Ariosto once wrote, in reference to the invention of gunpowder, that "through you the soldier's glory is destroyed, through you the business of arms is without honor, through you valor and courage are brought low, for often the bad man seems better than the good; through you valor no more, daring no more can come to a test in the field." Now, Demosthenes' translator Thomas Leland, an Enlightenment-era Irish historian of the late Classical period, writes of the Greeks that "to recur to bribery in order to defeat their antagonists was to be guilty of corrupting the morals of what, in an extensive sense, may be called their country."

Very similar sentiments were echoed by westerners during the French Wars of Religion, for example by Montaigne, which predated Leland by around two centuries. Interestingly, Leland, like Ariosto, also wrote some historical fiction based in the medieval period. His *Longsword, Earl of Salisbury* begins thus: "when Henry III reigned in England, Sir Randolph, a valiant knight of Cornwall … retired to the peaceful enjoyment of those honors and fortunes which he had *purchased by a series of hardy services* in the field." He goes on: "the eve of his life was engaged in … teaching [his sons] the sacred duties which they owed to heaven and to their country, inspiring them with a gallant love of arms [and] undaunted courage duly tempered with benevolence and humanity." Here we see the recurring association of strength in the field with strength in morals, or at least nostalgia for a time when such a relationship existed or was generally idealized, when the moral purchasing power of cash was low and of "hardy services" was high. That ideal will be investigated here.

* * *

On 13 July, 982, at the height of the summer campaign season, the emperor of Germany was afloat in the Mediterranean. Having been destroyed in battle by Arab invaders in Calabria—at the southern extremity of the European continent—he was forced to swim out to sea towards a ship in the distance, trying to avoid the rout that resulted in the deaths of Margrave Gunther of Merseburg, Count Udo II of Rheinfranken, Bishop Henry of Augsburg, and "innumerable others whose names are known only to God." The defeat suffered by the emperor Otto II at Capo Colonna was so devastating that it provoked a massive, decades-long revolt of pagan Slavs in eastern Germany known as the *slawenaufstand*. The Slavs were provoked to revolt primarily by the deaths of so many powerful men: Gunther, Udo, and Henry were only three among the "innumerable" number of German aristocrats and clerics who were cut down in Italy. This devastating blow to the Ottonian administration is what provoked the revolt, rather than the mere loss of life.

The presence of so many aristocrats at such a battle was not unusual. These centuries—the ninth through the eleventh—were the formative years of western chivalry and feudalism that produced such art as the *Song of Roland* and which culminated in the disastrous Hundred Years' War; aristocrats were at the vanguard of that movement. The conclusion of the *Song* tells us something very interesting about this gestational period of western civilization: it does not conclude with Charlemagne driving the Arabs out of Spain, the tale's main action. Rather, it concludes in Paris with a trial by combat: a relative of the man responsible for the betrayal of the titular hero at Roncesvalles Pass is pitted against a just accuser to determine the guilty party. The two men, both servants of the king Charlemagne, match each other in every imaginable skill, both in strength and honor. At the moment when it seems that the traitor's relative has won the upper hand, however, God prevents the hero from being struck down, and the relative is killed. It had not been honor, or strength, or even the French courts (since they had been unable to reveal who had betrayed Roland), which had discovered the traitor Ganelon: it was God, who intervened on behalf of the

just accuser and allowed him to be recognized and dealt with justly. In Roland's world, then, it is the just who prevail over the betrayers; they defeat them in arms and battle, and prove to be the strongest, only with God's help.

A similar feat of arms took place in the real world early in the Hundred Years' War; it was arranged to decide control of Brittany between French and English-backed claimants. The French prevailed after a tough battle in which, as the historian Froissart wrote, all the combatants "held themselves as valiantly on both sides as if they had been all Rolands"; the battle is known as the "Combat of the Thirty." From then on, the political landscape of France changed considerably, especially towards the War's dramatic conclusion. The French won in the end, but not before the disastrous defeat at Agincourt in 1415, where the mounted nobles of France were butchered by the peasant archers of England (as the stereotype goes). As among the Germans at Capo Colonna, great loss of life was incurred among the greatest of the French at Agincourt: the dukes of Orléans and Bourbon were captured; the duke of Alençon and the Constable of France were killed. The mad king of France did not attend the battle.

The noble French equivalents of Froissart's knights had been slaughtered at Agincourt by unnamed, untitled peasants. The tumult of the fifteenth century would produce an uncanny mirror of those circumstances sixty years later: at the battle of Nancy in 1477, the mounted noblemen of Burgundy, led by Duke Charles *le Temeraire* himself, were crushed by a mass of unnamed, unennobled Swiss mercenaries. And yet the circumstances of the Combat of the Thirty and the battle of Agincourt may have been more similar than those of Agincourt and Nancy: while the French had been able to regroup, collect themselves, and, notwithstanding great exertion and several heroic feats, win the war against the English after Agincourt, there would be no recuperation for the Burgundians after Nancy. *Le Temeraire* was killed, and with his life went the court of Dijon, "consigned to the dustbin of history": the Burgundian territories were inherited and partitioned between the Valois and the Hapsburgs.

In this sense, Froissart's Burgundian Thirty had lost at Nancy worse than the German counts at Capo Colonna, and worse than the French dukes at Agincourt. The victors on the field that day had been the Swiss mercenaries, who capitalized on the victory by descending on and ravaging northern Italy. The pike-bearing *landsknechts*, archetypes of Ariosto's modern beguilers, wreaked havoc on the country.

Machiavelli thought that he had a solution to the Swiss problem created by the collapse of Burgundy, or at least a long list of remedies. It is somewhat ironic, given the content of his book, that Machiavelli concluded his "exhortation to rid Italy of the barbarians" with a quote of Petrarch's that begins: *Virtue against fury shall advance the fight*.

It echoes the *geist* of Roland, that God will descend from the heavens to save good men from the unjust, which is antithetical to *The Prince*. Leo Strauss says that Machiavelli "replaces the imitation of the God-Man Christ by the imitation of the Beast-Man Chiron," which summarizes his theory nicely.

Machiavelli's "secular principles of politics" won the combat of ideas against Froissart's ideal Combat of the Thirty and the idea of Charlemagne's trial of Ganelon. The sum of Machiavelli's anti-Switzer theory had been, as Strauss says, anything but a return to the medieval values that Ariosto eulogized; it had been to eradicate them from political thought more thoroughly than ever before: Machiavelli imagined no more Rolands on the field or Charlemagnes at court.

Like Thucydides' Athenian diplomats, Machiavelli's Prince does what the strong can while the weak suffer what they must. Indeed, Strauss says that Machiavelli went so far as to merely proclaim the doctrine of the Athenian diplomats openly, while Thucydides had hidden his own ideas behind them.

Now, Machiavelli's ideas have conquered the west, at least to the extent that the Roland ideal (that the strong are just, due to the intervention of God) has been eradicated from all political thought, and to the extent that religion has been scrubbed from the political landscape. One twentieth-century political philosopher, Cary Nederman, wrote of a medieval writer, glowingly and incorrectly, that he "divided his treatise into separate treatments of temporal politics and ecclesiology," so that the ecclesiology could be discarded and the political philosophy pillaged and despoiled (on Marsiglio of Padua). So far have moral ideals been cleaved from politics that it has become an element of western culture to immediately distinguish between the two.

If the Roland ideal becomes a microcosm of the relationship that used to exist in the west between religion and politics, then we might say that attempts have even been made by these philosophers at scrubbing the Roland ideal from history itself, while the landscape of western political theory is in many ways more like its state two millennia ago than its state one millennium ago.

(Nederman is not alone in his failure to confront the religious realities of the past, and he is not alone in his failure likewise to properly understand the classical and medieval worlds. In *Federalist No. 18*, James Madison criticizes the ancient Greeks for not giving the Amphictyonic Council more political power—if only they had been "as wise as they were courageous!" The Council,

however, was primarily a religious institution, not a political one; Madison dismissed the Council's religious duties as nothing more than "the superstition of the age." An inability or failure to grasp this reality produced an analysis that is unhelpful and uninteresting. The role that religion played in Greek politics and public policy was not well-understood, which helps explain why modern historians have struggled with assessing Greek identity even today. Consider the following passage:

"But now even my power of speech fails me … For in a land long alienated from letters and completely barbarized, who dares sing out the Muses' melodies? … if [Hippocrates refused to lend his services to the Persians], how then can I devote the very best thing and the most beautiful invention of the Hellenes—history—to the recounting of barbarian deeds against Hellenes?"

This passage was written not by a classical Greek, but by a late Byzantine author describing the fall of Constantinople in 1204 to the westerners. The classical western view on the author's people held by Gibbon and Voltaire are united in Hegel:

"At Byzantium Christianity had fallen into the hands of the dregs of the population—the lawless mob. Popular license on the one side and courtly baseness on the other side, take refuge under the sanction of religion, and degrade the latter to a disgusting object."

To some degree, a lack of knowledge created the misunderstanding, but in other cases it was quite voluntary. Consider, now, this passage:

"In expectation of God's love for mankind, we ought to sing out with David, 'Remember us, O Lord, with the favor thou hast to thy people …' knowing full well that in the end the ungodly shall be overlooked and flogged, and that for those who hope in the Lord their chastisement shall be accompanied by the call to repentance and consolation."

Not only was this passage also written by a late, "courtly" Byzantine, it was written by the same author as the above quote, in the same place, lamenting the fall of Constantinople to the westerners. Without a good Roland or Charlemagne to beseech, his appeal lands directly at the feet of the Lord.

As the Enlightenment philosophers chose to be repulsed by the Byzantines, so the Enlightenment and modern philosophers have chosen to molest their own history by scrubbing it of religion at their leisure and scouring among the violated remains for morsels in vogue).

* * *

As for the enemy of the Roland ideal, Machiavelli had complained that the wiliness of the Switzer mercenaries had allowed the French to enter Italy *col gesso*—"with chalk" in hand, meaning that they entered the country drawing up plans for their billets rather than planning for battle, since there would be no contest on the field. Perhaps ironically, Machiavelli's recommendations created a political landscape that could not be imagined without such maneuvers: his preference for shrewd calculations combined with the advance of military technology nurtured a civilization terrified of violence and combat. Of course, the twentieth century was replete with awesome armed conflicts the likes of which Ariosto could never have imaged. But the world has been graced with many of the other kind as well: it seems nowadays that Afghanistan is full of armies running around *col gesso* and nothing else; such is the state of war today, with the modern Melians constantly at the brink of annihilation by our new Athenian diplomats, armed now with the ideals of Machiavelli and Voltaire. These two extremes represent the poles of Ariosto's reviled modern warfare: either honor was annihilated by violence (e.g. the Great War), or combat was avoided altogether for the sake of strategy (e.g. the Cold War).

Far from being a potential source of truth and justice, as it was for Froissart and the unknown author of the *Song of Roland*, now all combat is reviled, and very few armies are willing to put down their chalks; the few that are turn their tactics on purely political principles, as has become the norm. In general, though, the taste for such combat has gone sour since the Second World War. Maybe someday it will sweeten again. But regardless of whether it does, it seems that, for the distant foreseeable future, our politicians will continue to put themselves in the shoes of the Athenian diplomats. They will browse Machiavelli for answers on whether to destroy Afghanistan, Palestine, and all the other modern Melians, while our copies of Marsiglio and Froissart gather dust.

* * *

Machiavelli's theory may rightly be called a seminal doctrine in the arrangement of the modern political landscape. Montesquieu, for example, yielded to Machiavelli. In *The Spirit of the Laws*, he uses the word 'virtue' to describe nothing more than the love of one's country. The word is stripped of its old meaning and power: it does not mean to seek the good. So, when he says, for example, that virtue is necessary for the survival of a democracy, he only means that it is necessary for the people to love their country. And when he says that "it was only ever after [Chaeronea] as easy to triumph over the forces of Athens

as it had been difficult to subdue her virtue," he only means that the perpetual subjugation of Athens was achieved merely by repressing or softening love of the country.

Montesquieu, in this Machiavellian sense, did nothing more than affirm the abolition of the Roland ideal. He says as much:

I would only make my readers comprehend that all political [vices] are not all moral vices; and that all moral [vices] are not political vices.

* * *

The truth of history, of course, is that the Roland ideal has never been realized. Otto's defeat at Capo Colonna made that quite obvious to the medieval writers who formulated the ideal in the first place, especially if they assumed that their leaders were good men. In fact, medieval history is replete with such examples. William of Tyre, a crusader cleric, wrote of a combat at Mount Cadmus in Turkey:

"The battle was long fought and of doubtful outcome. Finally, however, in punishment for our sins, the infidels conquered. Many Christians were killed and large numbers made prisoners; our army was reduced to a very few. Many noble and illustrious men perished that day, men notable for their military deeds and well worthy of pious remembrance … Their names we do not remember, but we believe that they are written in heaven and their memory will be held in benediction forever."

Like many of the German nobles who died at Capo Colonna fighting against the Arab invaders, many of the crusaders killed at Mount Cadmus fighting against the Turks are remembered only by God, very much unlike Roland, and also unlike the knights at Froissart's Combat, all of whose names are recorded. Leaving behind the stories, then, the historians give us an insight into the real world: good men die in battle every day. Their names are not remembered; prayers cannot be said for them or their families. And they are conquered by bad men who do not deserve the rewards of victory. Such, then, is life as it always was.

* * *

It does not appear that the Roland ideal was ever realized on a grand scale; it would be a mistake to idealize the Middle Ages as such. This is the somewhat obvious answer to the dilemma raised by Leland's fiction. If we would like to strive for a greater result, then we must ask ourselves whether, without a concrete historical precedent, the pursuit of the Roland ideal is productive, or whether it is attainable at all.

This problem might also be called "the question of western civilization"—is pursuit of the ideal a vain thing? Is the ideal achievable? The question of the Roland ideal is one iteration of this form; two other iterations of the same type have shaped the western canon: of progress and virtue. And there are many other iterations; for example, the striving for ideal mathematical systems.

Is the pursuit of societal progress sufficient to produce a perfect civilization? Should we assume that such a thing is attainable? While this question is most obviously relevant to Hegelian and Marxist theory, it has shaped the canon of western literature in a deeper, more subtle way: it has impelled all forms of theoretical reformation. Thus, to his list of "Eutopian" writers, starting with More and Bacon, the historian Jacques Barzun adds Rabelais, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Fielding, Tolstoy, Eliot, Joyce, and Fitzgerald. In these writers' works,"'the messy real world is shown without disguise or softening, but the ideal one runs alongside in the author's comments … the Eutopian features sketched or implied in the depiction of what is." A mini utopia is carved out of each authors' ideals and values. This is especially true of Rabelais and Montaigne, who both attached (brief) depictions of utopias to their works. Such is the provenance of this pursuit that it has stretched from at least as early as Plato (and probably much earlier) to at least as late as the present. The question of Progress, then, is too great to be surveyed properly here. Suffice it to say that most moderns, especially young people, are newly enchanted by the vision of a perfect future; the fantasy and mystery of the utopia through progress is an antidote to the present, or else a sedative.

Perhaps more justice can be done to the other question: is the pursuit of personal virtue sufficient to attain true personal happiness? Should we assume that either of those things are attainable?

In the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero argued that virtue "has everything that can befall mankind in subjection to her"—that fortune is subject to virtue. It is a very happy conclusion: to feel that everything is ultimately under your own control. Saint Augustine ridiculed and insulted this view several centuries after Cicero wrote, attacking "the stupid pride of [the Stoics] who suppose that the supreme good is to be found in this life," charging them with attempting "to manufacture for themselves in this life an utterly counterfeit happiness by drawing on a virtue whose fraudulence matches its arrogance." Of course, Augustine argued that real happiness can only be attained in the next life and that worldly virtue is always at the mercy of fortune. One of his intellectual descendants, G.K. Chesterton, took this reaction much further, writing that "complete self-confidence

is not merely a sin; complete self-confidence is a weakness. Believing utterly in one's self is a hysterical and superstitious belief like believing in Joanna Southcote," although, in fairness, he was responding to an ideology far less complex than Cicero's.

Through most of the Middle Ages, only Cicero's philosophy was known to the reading intellects of the west. It was only at the dawn of the Renaissance that his political writings were discovered along with knowledge of his lengthy and controversial political career. This discovery shocked many westerners, perhaps none more so than Petrarch, who wrote a "letter to Cicero" in response: *Alas … like a wayfarer at night carrying a lantern before him, you revealed to your followers the path where you yourself stumbled most wretchedly.*

Cicero did not follow his own advice; he died as a politician, not a philosopher.

The main character of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, Usbek, is in one way an image of Cicero. An easterner, he adopts many of the intellectual trappings of the Enlightenment during a trip to Paris, but is also "constitutionally incapable of inquiring into the practical implications of these thoughts for his own Persian life." While criticizing marriage institutions and slavery in the west, he writes back to his estate in the east ordering his eunuchs to initiate a bloody reign of terror against his unfaithful wives and their accomplices. His intellectual life and his personal life remain "hermetically sealed" from one another; rather like Cicero, he is utterly incapable of applying his thoughts to his actions (although, unlike Cicero, Usbek is oblivious to the contradiction and makes no effort to reform himself).

Of course, Cicero was a great philosopher. But the course of his life, along with the dilemma proposed by Montesquieu, offers a sharp counterpoint to the assumption of the Stoics that philosophy is the path to virtue, that it offers the only opportunity for true happiness in this life. It apparently seems very possible that great and lay philosophers alike, such as Cicero and Usbek, can deeply penetrate the study of virtue without the theory ever leaving their minds.

We should not assume, however, that dying as a politician necessary represents an abandonment of the quest for virtue. We should recall an old maxim of Aristotle's: man is political, or social, by nature. It is a duty, therefore, to participate in and contribute to civic life: "it is evident that a city is a natural production, and that man is naturally a political animal." Dante thought so as well, and he thought it somehow a sin to withdraw from civic life like the medieval ascetics. Modern American conservative philosophers have juxtaposed the northern withdrawer, Thoreau, to the southern participator, John Randolph; the fictitious ideal of Cicero's great abscondence to the Tuscan countryside may not necessarily be considered an ideal at all. Of course, the realities of social organization make it impossible to describe a clear division between withdrawing from and participating in civic life, and when Aristotle refers to cities, such as in "every city must be allowed to be the work of nature," he is not referring to urban complexes in the modern sense, but rather to the whole *polis*.

It is thus another question to ask whether alleged withdrawers such as Thoreau really did abdicate the Aristotelian obligation, and yet another to ask whether Cicero could have fulfilled it without involving himself as he did: surely mere participation in civic life must not be equated to dying for one's own political ambitions.

In any case, it is probably fair to say that the medieval ascetics—the classic withdrawers—have exercised as great an influence over the intellectual landscape of western civilization as have any such cadre of philosophers. Certainly, the weight of their contributions should not be underestimated due to their real or imagined social positions.

The questions of progress and virtue—*is pursuit of the ideal sufficient to attain the ideal?*—recall a formulation of the proof of the existence of God offered by one of those would-be medieval withdrawers that took a similar form. Anselm of Bec, a monk of Normandy, argued that mere cognizance of the possibility of the existence of God is logically sufficient to prove that God exists. Duns Scotus—another medieval—offered a proof along a similar line that was eventually adopted by Descartes; Anselm's formulation was briefly accepted by Bertrand Russell. This proof essentially argues that the answer to the question "is conception of the perfect form sufficient to prove the existence of the perfect form, God?" is the affirmative. We are then left to wonder whether the answer to this question provides sufficient ground to answer the questions of progress, virtue, and the Roland ideal, in the affirmative or otherwise. These are the questions dealt with by the western canon.

Translating Bunin's Conjuring

Iosif M. Gershteyn

Ivan Bunin (1870-1953) is a celebrated and respected contributor to the Russian literary canon, yet, either due to an accident of history, difficulty of translation, or nuances of his sentiment, his genius is not widely known in the contemporary English-speaking world. Despite such accolades as a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1933, and two Pushkin Prizes, in 1903 and 1909, Bunin's brilliance is presently lost to the west and awaits reclamation by discerning readers.

The story "Лёгкое дыхание," which appears in these pages in a new translation, is a testament to his extraordinary poetic sensitivity, astute choice of detail, and mellifluous quality of prose. I read this story in the original Russian as a teenager and it, along with the rest of his oeuvre, has stayed with me as a touchpoint of the great tradition. The tragic tale, woven through the admixture of conflicted tenses, perspectives, and memory—naturally overseen and guided by the narrator—took over two years to translate, despite its brevity.

Two key challenges cropped up in the work that required much deliberation and careful restatement. The first challenge was dealing with the shifting usage and connotations of words. It is said that in every generation Talmudic scholars must recover, and therefore renew, the wisdom passed down through the ages in a process that combines creativity and tradition in order to endow the next generation with access. In this translation I endeavored to reanimate the style to be closer to the author's original intent, and to be interpretable and aesthetically appreciable by modern readers. The resulting synthesis led me so far as to retitle the story as "Barely a Breath," as opposed to the direct translation of the title, "Light Breathing," in order to preserve the gestalt connection betwixt the Russian title and the story's content. "Light Breathing" carried none of the poetic wholeness contained in the Russian that "Barely a Breath" does, albeit mildly transfigured. The new title resonates with the budding womanhood of our subject, with her first foray into adult life and relations, and her tragic abrogated existence at the embodied hand of unbridled jealousy.

The second major challenge was capturing the sentiment of the story's fatalistic atmospherics. Bunin's love and tragedy was so comprehensive and utterly discernable that Russians of his time coined the now colloquial phrase "Бунинская любовь," a form of love named after the author. In that complex lies the friction between fantasy and reality, the impossible perfection of memory reconstructed, and the cold separation of time and irrecoverable loss.

The protagonists found in one of Bunin's major collections of short stories, *Dark Alleys* (1937-1944), often interact with recollections; for instance, the main character of the eponymous "Тёмные аллеи" (1938) encounters the aged love of his youth in a village along his route and does not recognize her until she hints at her identity during their conversation as she arranges his lodging. She remained unwed in the intervening thirty-five years or so, and, during the course of the conversation, she leaves no doubt that it was due to her love for him, onto which she so achingly held, for life. Forgiveness, beyond the pale. This simple story's cascading realizations, raw feelings, and matter-of-factness in setup, brings to the fore the strands of Bunin's world, a world of misunderstanding, irreparable harm, and unbridgeable chasms. Yet for all the pain and loss that appear on the surface of things, Bunin is a prophet of love, and where there is love there is hope. His stories don't resolve in bitterness but in acceptance, not in acrimony but in grace, not in discord but in poetic, even aesthetic, appreciation of one's complicated fate. Genuine sentimentality pours from his pen and reminds us blessed readers to heed the callings of our hearts, and exercise the necessary caution with the hearts of others.

Barely a Breath

Ivan Bunin

Translated by Iosif M. Gershteyn

A freshly cut cross stands in the country graveyard. It is of sturdy oak, heavy, yet smooth.

Cold wind rings far through the unobstructed distance of gray April days' bare trees—ringing as a porcelain wreath in the breeze —carried to the foot of the memorial cross.

Inlaid in that very cross is a porcelain plate with a portrait of a schoolgirl, a girl with joyful and piercingly vivacious eyes.

This is Olya Mesherskaya.

Among a sea of uniform brown schoolgirl dresses she was unremarkable, one among the number of fortunate, joyous schoolgirls; yet with a touch of daring and insouciance toward the admonishments of her schoolmistress. At fourteen she bloomed, developing daily; slender legs extending from her tight narrow waist, breasts filling out—forming the contours of the entrancing feminine shape that human language has never captured. By fifteen she blossomed as a fully formed beauty. Her friends dedicated themselves valiantly to attaining grace in movement, perfection in comportment, proper coiffing of their hair—yet she, herself, knew no fear! Not ink stains on her blouses, not a rose blush on her cheeks, her hair in disarray—not even knees scraped bare from tripping whilst running gave her bother. Without any effort or worry, she was given that which made her stand out so ardently in those last two years of grade school, stand out from the rest of the school—her vibrance, style, grace, the clear shine of her eyes…. No one danced at the balls like Olya Mesherskaya, no one could skate like her, and no one was more assiduously courted at these same balls. And for some reason, no one loved her more than the pupils of the lower grades. Imperceptibly, she became a young lady, and her schoolhouse fame was now a given. Rumors started circulating that she was airy, and couldn't live without the attention of suitors; that one boy, Shenshin, was desperately in love with her, and she might love him too, but her fickle attitude towards the lad drove him to attempt suicide.

They said in the gymnasium that, during her final winter, Olya Mesherskaya went completely mad with gaiety. It was a snow-filled winter with early sunsets beyond the heights of the fir-groves visible from the gymnasium's quad: unending serenity and luciferous rays, promising a tomorrow filled with frost and sun, walks along Soborniy street, ice-skating in the city park, rose-colored evenings, music, and the crowd of people slipping away in every direction atop the ice, among whom Olya Mesherskaya appeared to be the most carefree, most joyous. On mid-day break, while being chased by blissfully squealing first graders, her whirlwind run through the great hall was disturbed by an unexpected call to visit the headmistress. She interrupted her sprint, allowed herself one deep sigh, and with a quick, practiced, womanly movement, fixed her hair and jerked the edges of her apron towards her shoulders. With beaming eyes she ran up the stairs. The headmistress, though graying, had retained remnants of her youth. Calmly, she sat with her knitting in her hands behind a writing-desk, a portrait of the Tsar above her.

"Bonjour, Mademoiselle Mesherskaya," she said in French, not raising her eyes from her knitting. "Unfortunately, this is not the first time I must summon you in regard to your behavior."

"I'm listening, Madam," replied Mesherskaya, walking toward the writing-desk. Watching the headmistress with expressionless, yet clear and seeing, eyes, she sat down in a manner so light and gracious only she alone knew how to do.

"You shall listen poorly, I am, alas, convinced of that," said the headmistress whilst pulling on a thread and sending the ball of yarn on the lacquered floor spinning, which Mesherskaya contemplated with curiosity before lifting her gaze. "I shall not repeat myself. I shall not go on unnecessarily."

Mesherskaya liked this unusually clean and large office-room, so airy on frosty days with the warmth of the brilliant tile stove and

the freshness/scent of the lilies-of-the-valley upon the writing-desk. She looked up at the young Tsar, painted in his full height in some shimmering hall, and then focused on the careful part down the center of the headmistress's milky hair. She waited silently.

"You are no longer a girl," said the headmistress meaningfully, secretly beginning to get annoyed.

"Yes, Madam," answered Mesherskaya forthrightly, almost happily.

"But you are not yet a woman," the headmistress intoned even more meaningfully, and her unperturbed face started to blush. "First off, what is this with your hair-do? It is a full-grown woman's style!"

"It's not my fault, madam, that I have good hair," answered Mesherskaya, and lightly touched her beautiful, neat hair with the tips of her fingers.

"Ah, so it's not your fault!" said the headmistress. "The hair-do isn't your fault, the expensive combs aren't your fault, it's not your fault that you are bankrupting your parents with your shoes worth twenty rubles! I will repeat myself, you completely lose sight of the fact that you are still a schoolgirl…"

At this Mesherskaya, without losing her forthrightness and composure, politely interrupted the headmistress:

"Excuse me, Madam, you are mistaken: I am a woman, and do you know who is at fault? The friend and neighbor of my father, your brother, Alexei Mikhailovich Malyutin. It happened last summer in the country…"

A month after this conversation took place, a Cossak officer, ugly and of a plebeian visage, having nothing to do with the circles in which Olya Meshercheva moved, shot her on the platform of the railway station, among a great crowd of people arriving in the train-cars. Olya Mesherskaya's unlikely confession, which transfixed the headmistress, was then proven true: the officer stated to the court prosecutor that Mesherskaya seduced him and they became intimate; that she swore to become his wife, and on that day at the railway station, the day of the murder, when she was seeing him off to Novocherkassk, she unexpectedly told him that she didn't think she would ever love him, and that all talk of marriage was but a cruel trick she played on him. Then she let him read the page of her diary where she wrote of Malyutin.

"I read those words and instantly shot her, on the platform where she was walking and waiting for me to finish reading," said the officer "The diary, here it is, take a look at what is written on July 10th of last year,"

In the diary the following was written: "Now it is the second hour after midnight. I fell asleep soundly, yet awoke instantly… I have just become a woman! Papa, Mama, and Tolya have all left to go to the city, and I stayed behind alone. I was so happy that I was alone! In the morning I walked in the garden, the field, went to the forest, and I felt as if I was alone in the whole wide world, and I thought; 'how grand!', how in my life, it has never ever been so. Later, I had lunch alone, and after I played piano for an entire hour, under the spell of the music I felt as if I would go on living forever, and be so happy, as no one has been before. Then I fell asleep in papa's office, and at four o'clock I was awakened by Katya, who told me that Alexey Mikhailovich had arrived. I was so happy to see him, it was so nice to take him in and entertain him. He arrived with a pair of his horses, very beautiful ones, and they spent the entire time at the doorstep. He stayed, since it had started raining, and he wanted to wait for it to dry up a bit—toward evening. He regretted that he had missed seeing papa, yet was very lively and acted like a young courtier, joking that he had long been in love with me. When we walked in the garden before tea the weather was lovely. Sun shone throughout the whole wet garden though it was very chilly. He led me by the arm and told me that he was Faust and I was Margarita. He is fifty six years old, yet he is still very handsome and always well-dressed. I didn't like that he arrived wearing only a Krylatka[1] smelling of English perfume. His eyes are youthful, black, and his beard is gracefully parted into two long sections, both completely silver. During tea we sat in the glass veranda. I felt unwell and lay down on the ottoman, he smoked his pipe and then sat next to me, and again started speaking pleasantries, and then looked closely at me and kissed my hand. I covered my face with a silk scarf, and he kissed me upon the lips several times through the scarf… I don't remember how it happened, I lost my mind, I never thought that I was like this! Now I have but one escape. I feel such great disgust for him that I cannot survive it!"

During these April days, the town had been washed clean and the dry stones whitened, and it was easy and comfortable to walk upon them. Every Sunday, along Sborniy Street which leads to the exit from the town, after lunch a small woman dresses herself in mourning, black calfskin gloves, and an umbrella made of black wood. She crosses the highway and the dirty square, where there are many smoke-blackened forges, and the fresh air blows in from the fields; and further away, between the monastery and the wooden fence, the luminous white clouds tilt meeting the gray spring field. After crossing through the puddles under the monastery walls, she turns left to find a somewhat large low garden, encircled by a white fence. Above the entrance gate is a painting of the Assumption of the Holy Mother. The small woman crosses herself with small movements and walks down the main alley with a familiarity born of regularity. Upon arriving at the bench facing the oak cross, she sits in the wind and spring-time cold for an hour or two, until her feet are completely chilled through her light boots and hands in kid-skin gloves.

Listening to the happy birds, sweetly singing even in the cold, listening to the ringing of the wind in the porcelain wreath, she thinks sometimes that she would give up half her life if only that deathly porcelain wreath in front of her eyes didn't exist: the wreath, the mound of earth, the oak cross! How is it possible, that under all that, the girl painted on the bulging porcelain medallion upon the cross with her eyes shining and immortal, that that pure vision is now inexorably linked to the horrible tale and

the name Olya Meshercheva. Yet, in the depths of her soul, the little woman is happy, as are all people who are dedicated to a passionate dream inside.

This woman is the head governess of Olya Meshercheva's class. She is not young, and has long been living in a dream that takes the place of her real life. At first this dream was about her brother, a poor and undistinguished ensign—to whom, and whose future, she consigned her entire soul, and who, for some reason, she imagined to be brilliant. When he was killed at Mukden, she convinced herself that she should dedicate herself to another ideal. The death of Olya Meshercheva now captured her new focus of attention. Olya Meshercheva is now the subject of her constant ideation and emotions. She goes to her grave every holiday and stares for hours at the oak cross, recalling the pale face of Olga Meshercheva in her grave among the flowers and what she once overheard Olya say. Once, during the general recess, strolling through the gymnasium garden, Olya Meshercheva spoke quickly with her closest friend Subbotina, rapidly telling her, stately, tall, and confidant:

"I read in one of papa's books—he has many strange and entertaining books—I read what kind of beauty a woman should have…. There was so much you see, that it's impossible to memorize; well, of course, black eyes boiling with tree-sap, by God yes, that was how it was written: boiling sap! Eyelashes black as night, gently playing against rosy cheeks, a tight waist, and arms longer than expected—you see, longer than normal! A small foot, tastefully large breasts, properly rounded calves, knees the color of seashells, rounded shoulders—I memorized most of it, it's so true! Yet you know what is the most important? Gentle breathing!

And you know, that's what I have! Listen to how I breathe—isn't it true, barely a breath?"

Now that gentle breath has dissipated into the world again, into the cloudy sky, into the cold autumn wind.

Note

1. Mcfarlane, a type of coat.

Original: 1916, Ivan Bunin

Translation: 2022, Iosif M. Gershteyn

A Little Circle of Light

David Franks

Death takes everything. It is left us to win and maintain an enclave against a chaos that presses in. That theme pervades *Beowulf*, as Tolkien[1] shows in his excellent essay, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics." Hrothgar, king of the Danes, constructs the fantastic mead-hall Heorot, a besieged "circle of light." There a bard or *scop* sings of Creation, "how the Almighty had made the earth / a gleaming plain girdled with waters." Our whole world is no more than an island in a sea of darkness, and this song of created order triggers Grendel's rampage.

Beowulf starts off the semester of The Great Conversation devoted to the Middle Ages. Our guiding question is always, "How should we live?" For this poem, that could be specified as another question, "How should we face the monsters who threaten order?"

These monsters are within and without. The international system is currently at mortal risk with Putin's invasion of Ukraine. European peace is a rare thing. Any extended peace is a little circle of light indeed against the sweep of history. Precarious, and not without serious exceptions (such as the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s), a European equilibrium has obtained the last seventy years. But now chaos makes its push.

It is the disorder of one soul, that of Putin, that has thus disturbed the world. But we all must grapple with internal monsters: insouciant voracity, ogres of fear, vampiric narcissism, gigantic pride, and resentment.

These monsters are hard to see, inhabiting as they do unilluminated psychic corners and the blindspots of history. Even this wonderful poet, who sees so much, starts *Beowulf* by celebrating Scyld Scefing, Hrothgar's great-grandfather. This isn't an obvious place to start, as the hero of the tale, Beowulf, is a Geat from southern Sweden, who crosses the Sound to Zealand (the largest island of modern-day Denmark, and site of Copenhagen) to help Hrothgar. Though the poem ends with the death of the king of the Geats, Beowulf, it starts with Scyld: "that was a good king," the poet states emphatically. Scyld makes his people, the Danes, secure, by lording it over their neighbors: he was "scourge of many tribes / a wrecker of mead-benches, / rampaging among foes." That is, many mead-halls burned so that Heorot could rise.

The old heroic code is celebrated throughout *Beowulf*, and that system of open-handed gift-giving of a warlord to his retainers itself requires destroying the little circles of light of one's neighbors: a gratuity fed by plunder. The monstrosity of grace dependent on cruelty, of a heaven built upon hell, seems to lie somewhat beyond the poet's ken. But otherwise, this poet shows himself profound in plumbing the precarity of existence.

Tolkien points out that the structure of the poem is one of balance: "a contrasted description of two moments in a great life [that of Beowulf], rising and setting, … first achievement and final death." The poem's ending has the Geats in a most perilous position. Their bulwark Beowulf has died; he has no heir. The Swedes press in. The Geat circle of light will be extinguished.

In Beowulf's prime, he kills Grendel and Grendel's mother, preserving the Danish nobility's circle of light. The king he has helped, Hrothgar, counsels the young man, for whom he sees kingship coming in turn: "So learn from this / and understand true values. I who tell you / have wintered into wisdom." This is Heaney's translation—and that last phrase is particularly magnificent. What is Hrothgar's wisdom? Do not let power corrupt your soul; it breeds the delusion that one is invincible, uncapsizable by the waves of relentless change. Do not become prideful, as Hrothgar admits he had become: "I came to believe / my enemies had faded from the face of the earth." But then Grendel came, and he was humbled.

Simone Weil notes in her brilliant "The *Iliad*, or The Poem of Force" that exercising force against others dehumanizes the one intoxicated by such power. Hrothgar has seen this:

"Sometimes [God] allows the mind of a man/of distinguished birth to follow its bent, / grants him fulfillment and felicity on earth / and forts to command in his own country. / He permits him to lord it in many lands / until the man in his unthinkingness / forgets that it will ever end for him. … The whole world / conforms to his will, he is kept from the worst / until an element of overweening / enters him and takes hold / while the soul's guard, its sentry, drowses, / grown too distracted."

This is an internal Grendel: "The devious promptings of the demon start. / His old possessions seem paltry to him now. / He covets and resents; dishonors custom / and bestows no gold; and because of good things / the Heavenly Powers gave him in the past / he ignores the shape of things to come."

The *Beowulf* bard finds wisdom in the ancient, pre-Christian ways and stories, showing us that the mythical age of heroes, like mythology in general, is not something dead and gone, something to be dismissed. This Christian *scop* does not act in the censorious and supercilious manner of many other medieval Christians confronting the pagan past. Mythology hovers over the abyss, most pointedly in the Norse tales. And there is light and wisdom in that hovering. (One might compare what the *Beowulf* poet has done to the stupendous achievement of C.S. Lewis in *Till We Have Faces*, which likewise treats paganism as iconic of reality's depths.) If even Saint Augustine could only see in the ancient mythological religions the operations of demons, so much the worse for Christian civilization. If God is God, that is, identical with reality in its depths, He could not have suddenly appeared having never appeared before.

This is one of the keynotes of the political philosopher Eric Voegelin. Democratizing his insights somewhat, one might ask: is not God always there, in each significant happening in our lives? Indeed, does His presence not constitute significance as such? This constitution of meaning and order out of the divine presence could not have bypassed tens of thousands of years and billions of human lives. If we find across the New Testament reference to the Lamb slain from, or before, the foundation of the world, one thing being claimed is that history, personal and universal, is constituted by God's, very often obscure, communication with us.

And so, though all things in time are doomed, though tragedy is the truth of time, could there not be a remedy *within* the tragedy? "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). If agonized humanity has never ceased to be devoured by its own beasts in a cosmic colosseum, we might remember that love embraces ordeal and night. And perhaps our small and always perishing lights belong to a constellation that is rising.

Note

1. Portrait of J.R.R. Tolkien on pp. 28 and 41.

Beowulf Reflections

Anne Knechtges

Beowulf remains a haunting echo from out of a past both pagan and Christian. Many critics have attempted to separate the Christian from the pagan within *Beowulf*. None have succeeded. What they desire necessitates a butchery of the poem itself. This poem is neither fundamentally pagan, nor fundamentally Christian; it is fundamentally both. Beowulf is neither a Christian hero, as Sir Gawain or Roland are, nor is he a pagan hero, as Sigemund is. Beowulf does not compartmentalize his culture and his religion. In him they exist side-by-side, even at times interweaving in inextricable ways that render impossible the dissections contrived by critics. Moreover, these elements do not strive against one another, as might be expected. In many ways they harmonize and work towards the same end. This end towards which they propel humanity is immortality. In Christian tradition it is sought by means of following God in all things; in pagan tradition it is sought by means of honour and renown. As Beowulf has shown, a person may follow God with honour, attaining immortality through salvation, but also being granted immortality within the cultural memory. Through honour he becomes a beacon to future generations. His actions echo down through the ages, speaking not only of how to live a noble life, but also of how to live a life informed by divine grace. Such a man is a hero. Such a man transcends the narrow lines drawn around those ideals which are pagan and those which are Christian, achieving something which, being common to both, rises higher than either—this is human excellence. Not singly an excellence which is spiritual, nor merely an excellence which is temporal; rather one which, like man himself, stands tall with a foot placed firmly within each world. Such a man looks back to honour his ancestor's traditions with as much sincerity as he looks forward to prepare his soul's salvation. Such a man is Beowulf.

Photographing Cambridge

Yunfeng Ruan

Photographing Cambridge is my way of making myself hate this place less.

Unlike what people may expect, I found Cambridge a cold and stressful place soon after I moved here. This is a wonderful academic place full of world-famous universities and research institutes, but maybe it is too full: strangers at the next table in the restaurant talk about their research projects. Even in the *kendo* (a Japanese martial art) club, most people work at a university, and if they don't, they work at an R&D department. All my conversations turn out to be somehow job-related.

Research is great, but a place only focusing on research is suffocating to me. Life should be much more than carefully controlled experiments, funding applications, seminars and conferences. Human intelligence should be more than a tool for inventing a new algorithm or writing a high-impact paper.

Our job defines many aspects of our life, but outside my job as a researcher, I have the freedom to redefine my life and even redefine the town I live in. Photographing the plants, the river, and graffiti is my way of stripping off the halo of academic clout from this town. I want to find a small place where people only care about their garden, the weather, or rebellious art. I want to see if this town is still charming without all the vanity that haunts the tourism booklets. I want a moment or two when all my attention is dedicated to the subtle details that are meaningless for a successful research career but purely pleasant to stare at.

That is why I hate taking photos of the iconic tourism spots, and instead gravitate towards "plain and ordinary" street corners. Who says Cambridge has to only be known for its universities? Who says our life has to only be defined by our job?

TOW ZONE
EMERGENCY
NO PARKING
HARVARD
69

Photos by James Capuzzi

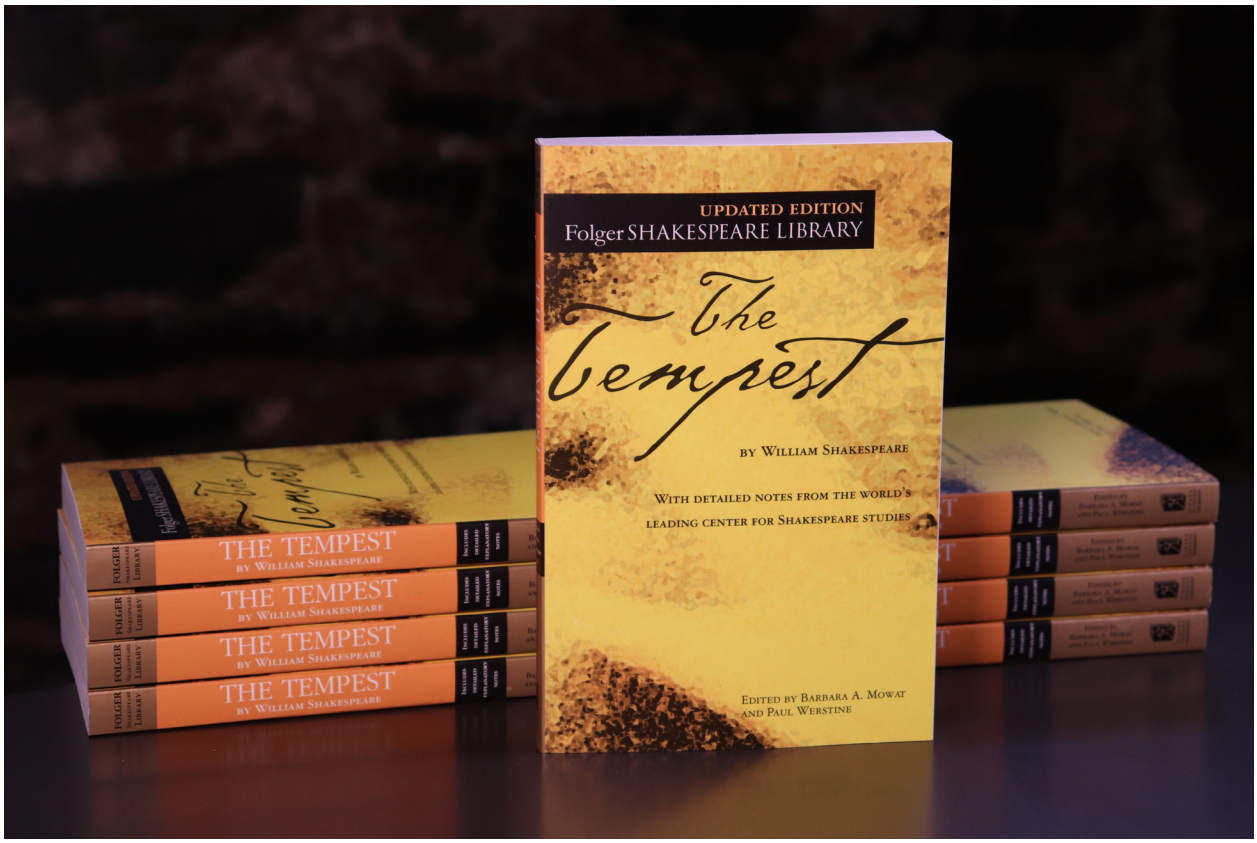
1. The Abigail Adams Institute promotes the humanities through stickers, classical and romantic artwork, and quotations from our namesake and other prominent thinkers.

2. The Institute's summer seminars allow for small class sizes and warm engagement between professors and students, such as Erika Bachiochi leading a session of the Wollstonecraft Project's *Man and Woman, Body and Soul* seminar.

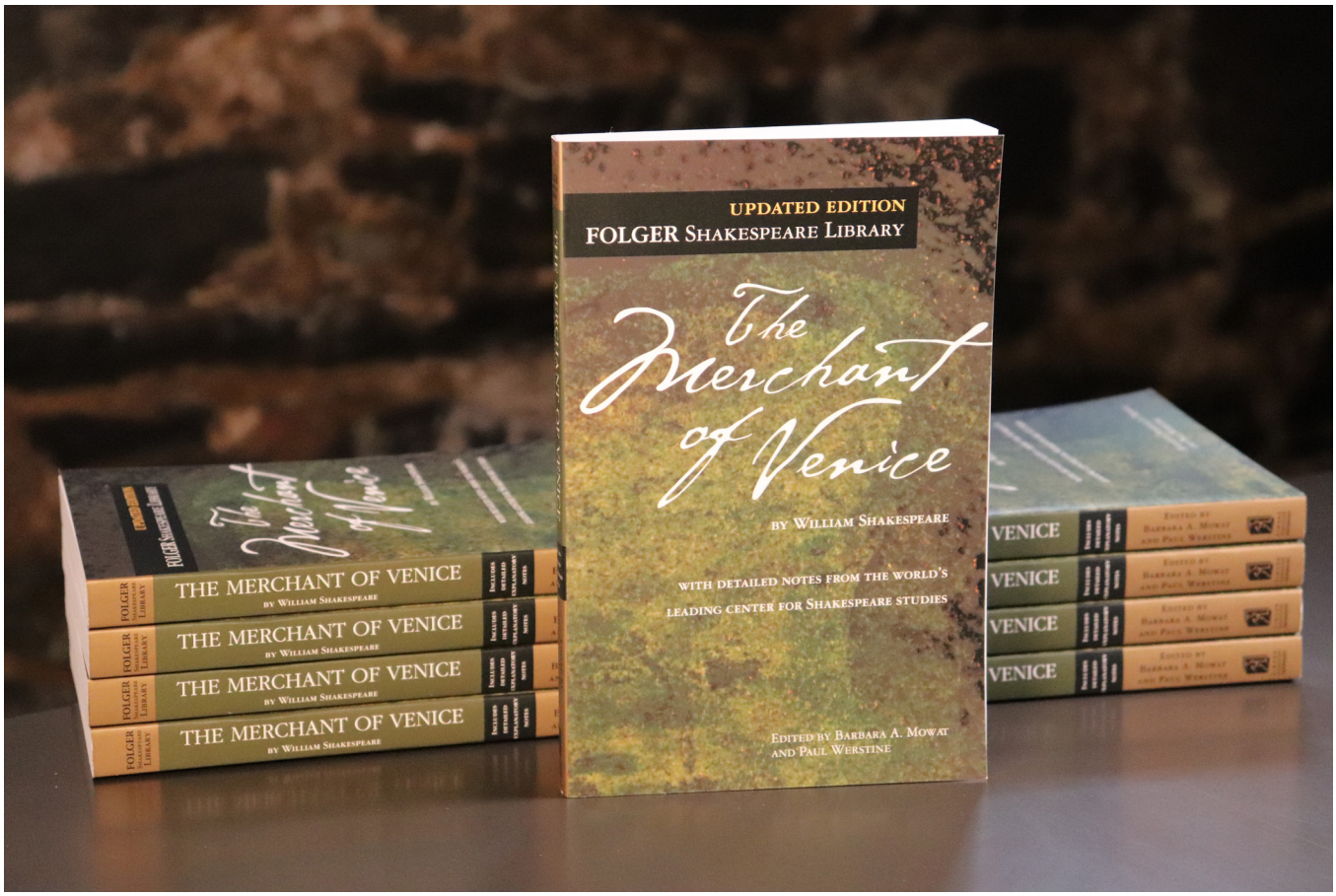
3. Harvard Houses peek out over the Charles River, the red and blue caps of Dunster and Eliot Houses provide a welcome sight to visitors and travelers returning home.

4. *The Great Conversation*, our flagship series, features printed volumes with excerpts from the western philosophical tradition. *Volume I: Origins & Empire* features ancient thinkers, and the cover is a fresco from the Villa dei Misteri outside Pompeii.

5. *The Great Conversation, Volume IV: Ideology & Emancipation* features modern thinkers, and the cover is Wassily Kadinsky's 1916 painting *Moscow. Red Square*.



6. *Sound & Fury*, a new reading group at the Abigail Adams Institute, features live readings of Shakespeare plays, followed by discussion. The Folger copies feature translations and explanations of old English words as well as striking cover imagery.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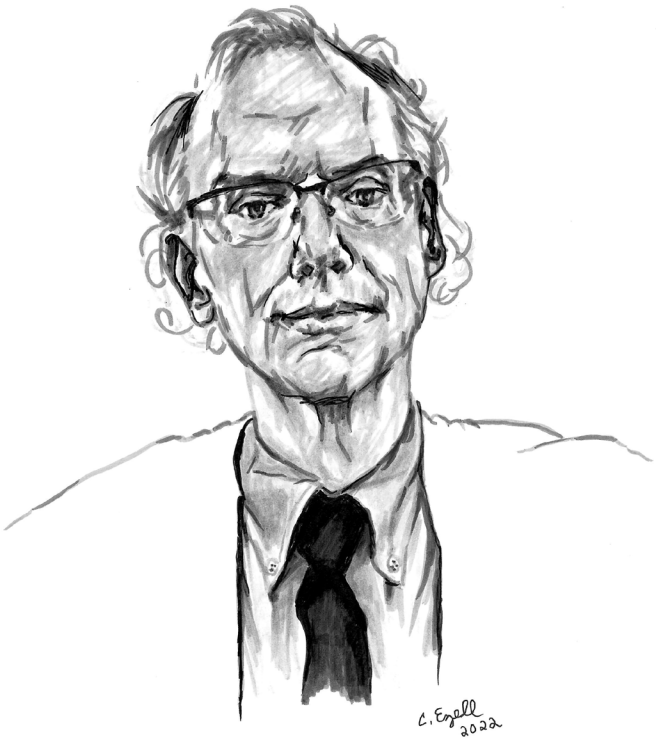
Portraits by Catherine Ezell

Abigail and John Adams exchanged tender and thoughtful letters, from 1762, during their courtship, throughout his political career to 1803, during the colonial period and the formative years of America becoming a nation.

These epistles reflect their warm companionship as well as her profound and historical influence upon him during his time at the Continental Congress and in Europe as a diplomat, when he was the first Vice-President under George Washington and during his challenging time as the second US President. Thereafter, John and Abigail lived on their farm in Quincy, Massachusetts.

John and Abigail Adams

Alfred Alcorn



Jonathan Locke Hart

Ivan Bunin

J.R.R. Tolkien

Biographies

Editors

Cindy Chopoidalo is the Assistant Editor of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* and a member of Editors Canada. Her publications include *Shakespeare's First Tetralogy, Epic Poetry, and Historiography: How a Dramatist Creates a Fictional World* (2014) and *Shakespeare's Possible Worlds* (2018), and she also contributed to *The Definitive Shakespeare Companion: Overviews, Documents, and Analysis* (2017).

Catherine Ezell has an advanced education in English literature and is a self-taught artist. She has experience in scholarly editing and writing and has devoted her life to drawing and painting. Combining her passion for good writing and art, Catherine creates portraits of authors that are meant to reflect the tone of their works.

Iosif M. Gershteyn is the Chairman of the Ajax Biomedical Foundation, Senior Fellow at the Abigail Adams Institute, Visiting Scholar at the Medical University of South Carolina, and a poet. His work has been published in *International Immunology, the Journal of Translational Autoimmunity, Researchers.One, Quillette*, and other publications. Alongside scientific and business pursuits he dedicates time to theater, philosophy, and literature.

Jonathan Locke Hart (Associate, Harvard University Herbaria) is Chair Professor, School of Translation, Shandong University, has held two Fulbrights at Harvard and visiting appointments in English and in Comparative Literature at Harvard as well as having various affiliations with Kirkland House, Harvard over 35 years, and is a poet, literary scholar, and historian who has published widely and also taught at Toronto, Cambridge, Princeton, the Sorbonne Nouvelle, Peking University, and elsewhere.

Danilo Petranovich '00 is the Director of the Abigail Adams Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Institute provides supplementary humanistic education to the Harvard intellectual community by exploring questions of deep human concern that cut across the boundaries of academic disciplines. Previously, Dr. Petranovich taught political science at Duke University and Yale University. He is frequently seen in Harvard's Kirkland House, where he is a dedicated member of the Senior Common Room.

Henry Stratakis-Allen is a Junior at the College of William & Mary majoring in Medieval & Renaissance Studies and Mathematics. His past work has included research in Byzantine Studies and medieval Middle Eastern art and political history. He is currently conducting pre-research for an Honors thesis focusing on religion and politics in medieval Iraq.

Contributors

Born in England, **Alfred Alcorn** moved to the US as a child, grew up on a dairy farm in Massachusetts, and graduated from Harvard, Class of '64. He is the author of 14 novels, which have been reviewed in the *New Yorker, NYT Book Review,* and other publications.

James Capuzzi graduated from Tulane University, where he concentrated in Classical Studies and Italian Language. He then completed a Master's degree in Sustainable Cultural Heritage from the American University of Rome. This degree focused on the unique business and marketing challenges that heritage sites, museums, and humanities institutions present.

J. David Franks received his PhD in systematic theology from Boston College, and was professor of sacred theology for almost a decade at St. John's Seminary. David serves as Chairman of the Board for Massachusetts Citizens for Life, which advances a liberal-arts and high-culture approach to reigniting civic conversation.

Anne Knechtges is currently a teacher of English Literature and Language Arts at Mason Classical Academy, in Naples, Florida. She is a previous employee at AAI and one of the original creators of The Great Conversation program. Her intellectual interests are wide-ranging, but her favorite disciplines are literature and philosophy.

Gabrielle Landry '22 is a junior from North Attleboro, MA, studying Philosophy and Education at Harvard College, and has worked as an AAI Student Intern. Outside of AAI, Gabby writes poetry, dances with Candela Dance Troupe at Harvard, and volunteers at the Beacon Leadership Program.

Yunfeng Ruan is a postdoc researcher in statistical genetics. Outside her job, she has an everlasting passion for literature and has always been a fan of art and history.

Advisors

Tom Conley is the Abbot Lawrence Lowell Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies and of Romance Languages and Literatures in the Romance Languages and Literatures Department at Harvard. He studies relations of space and writing in literature, cartography, and cinema. His work moves to and from early modern France and issues in theory and interpretation in visual media.

Donald Pfister is the Asa Gray Research Professor of Systematic Botany at the Harvard University Herbaria & Libraries. He studies fungi, particularly ascomycetes. In his studies he uses molecular, morphological, and life history information to understand the relationships among these fungi and their activities in nature. He also uses archives and museum specimens to document collections and their origins.