Editorial Introduction

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On 12 September 1940, as war was consuming Europe, four teenagers, near Montignac in France, followed their dog down into a cave and stumbled on paintings that turned out to be more than 15,000 years old. Later, Henri-Édouard-Prosper Breuil studied the Lascaux grotto and its more or less 600 painted and drawn animals and symbols and nearly 1,500 engravings, including red deer, stags, cats, cows, horses, and other possibly mythical and mysterious creatures, and a sole human figure, a man with the head of a bird and with an erect phallus. Why did these people paint? To express art or to represent the hunt and religious rites, or both, that is, for artistic and practical purposes? Opened to the public from 1948 to 1963, Lascaux closed as the lighting had faded the colours and allowed for algae to grow and, in 1983, a replica of the cave opened. The reception of art, the archeology, the role of science, all become part of the story of past and present, the delicate vulnerability of the past before the trample of the present.

In artistic mimesis, how much represents or imitates reality and how much, as in the replica, becomes a simulacrum? Art and interpretation prompt us to think and feel. Why did and do people create or record, and what do they mean to those who come after? Can we really know the motives for the making? Is it an early form of recording, of accounting, an attempt at understanding and knowledge? Is it possible that humans create for the sake of creation, their art a kind of play or reproduction, just as humans have reproduced themselves? Is that for practical reasons—that children help—or for the cycle of nature, or both? There are key unanswerable questions in human life, past, present and future, or those unanswered thus far, and these are some of the pressing issues, directly or indirectly, explicitly and implicitly, now and in time that Lascaux represents for those who come after. Humans have faced concerns over time and the works of the contributors to this issue and other issues of *Veritas Review* explore such issues. The past speaks to us as we move into the future, and what it and the world are saying is often difficult to know. And so, we explore, caught between the desire for certainty and the recognition of uncertainty.

Beyond the images of Lascaux, there are the alphabets and words of the earliest literate cultures, those who invented writing. The historical record can be humbling and curb the temptations of presentism and the triumph of time. In Sumer in Mesopotamia, near the Persian Gulf, the earliest known writing was invented about 3,400 B.C.E. Scribes or tablet writers wrote, after the basic records of food rationing, mathematics, laws, literature, and much else. About the same time, the Egyptians invented their own hieroglyphic writing. Cuneiform experts may use machine learning to read the many hundred of thousands of documents in that writing not yet deciphered. Present technologies help to read earlier technologies—writing joins past and present. There are still thousands of short inscriptions in the Indus Valley civilization writing of about 4,000 years ago that need deciphering. Another example is the oracle bones used to record divination in the House of Shang (1400-1200 B.C.E) in what is now China. People have been expressing themselves for so long now and the archive involves loss, traces, undeciphered signs and alphabets, and words we have slowly learnt to read. Even in English, only some of the words and images produced remain. In visual culture, some buildings, drawings, and paintings have also been ruined or lost. We contribute to understanding, knowledge, and the creation of words and images in every generation, past to present to future, and we face some of the same concerns people did long ago despite the changes in language, technology, and much else. In this issue, the contributors explore some elemental themes in our changing world.

The issue includes the work of poets, a scientist, artists, and humanists, and examines poetry, biology, film, portraits, Shakespeare, and the work of the Abigail Adams Institute (AAI) in words and images. This issue begins with Gloria Mindock's poems, which are accomplished in their explorations. In "Requiem," the speak-

er says: "Death confronts me at every turn. / Ignoring it, is what I do." She opens "Good-bye" with the striking lines: "I always liked getting lost in cornfields. / You never could find me." The relation between "I" and "you" is represented directly. In "Living with Ghosts at the Farlow Library and Gray Herbarium at Harvard," Donald H. Pfister, with great clarity, tells the fascinating account of his life at Harvard and explains cryptogamic botany and how, when he started out, he was in charge of three large, complicated and renowned collections, which document biological diversity, and how two key figures helped him. Pfister also recounts the story of lichen and a potato leaf as important and representative examples and notes that at Harvard he has taught many courses, including those about trees, forests, and fungi, emphasizing that behind specimens, there is a story. Part of that tale involves key figures such as Asa Gray and his student, William G. Farlow.

Discussions are part of what the Abigail Adams Institute does. In "AAI Film Night Introduction," Danilo Petranovich says because a good film can elicit important responses in students, the AAI and its students chose some classic movies. He provides three sample reflections. In the first, examining *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, Loren Brown sees this film in terms of the Western genre and of a good man and a bad man who are above the law, and discusses the question of the consequences of the dilemma of whether to give up the laws for great individuals. *It's a Wonderful Life* is the film Sarah Gustafson examines; she says that it takes us out of ourselves in the paradox that by sacrificing one's life, one will gain it. Ted Saad discusses *Barabbas*, a tale of a minor biblical character who gets another chance, a film that is rare today, an epic that enriches the soul.

Another important discussion is "Sound & Fury: Shakespeare Reading Group." Emma Towne says that Shakespeare's words were made to be spoken and dramatized, and the reading group had engaging evenings by combining debate and dramatic reading. Jennifer Gao enjoyed reading selections from the plays and the challenge to think about social issues relevant then and now. For Loren Brown, having a reading group that met in person was important, and he says that he enjoyed the discussion, and especially the dramatic reading of scenes from *King Lear, Cymbeline*, and *Macbeth*. The Shakespearean theme continues in "Drawing Hamlet" by Cindy Chopoidalo, a Shakespeare scholar who is also an artist influenced by classic cartoons but who can also use a realistic style. Among other topics, Chopoidalo notes the apparently earliest illustration of the character of Hamlet in 1646.

The issue ends with poetry and images. In "Grandfather's Bookshelf," a sequence of sonnets, Gabrielle Landry explores in words, in tandem with Tiffany Landry's illustrations. Once more the relation between word and image is significant. Gabrielle's words engage the reader from the first lines of the opening poem: "Tatyana, eight, always daydreaming, / Sat gently at the window bay." The beauty and power of books and the bookshelf—of reading—run through the sonnets. The sequence focuses on past and present, there and here—the generations—and ends, in the last of the eleven poems, with: "Well, time for me to say goodbye / Like Tanya's Grandpa's books—I fly!" In the "Afterword," Gabrielle Landry notes that the work is magical and intergenerational, representing connection, love, understanding and storytelling while noting the inspiration of Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*.

Danilo Petranovich discusses the mission of the Abigail Adams Institute (AAI), its fostering of traditional liberal arts education at Harvard and in the wider community in Boston schools and universities in the service of civility, free discourse and intellectual friendship. The Abigail Adams Institute finds a visual and verbal record in James Capuzzi's photographs and the attendant captions, which show the range of activities and intellectual engagement. Here is the interaction of image and text once more. Students, faculty, scientists, artists and others in the academic community and the community at large come together to explore, through pictures, words, and other means, to seek understanding.

Throughout the issue, there are the drawings of Catherine Ezell, which have helped to make *Veritas Review* distinctive, once more showing the allure of images and art, which has been with us from the caves and to the stars we now watch, study, and would wander amongst. In Lascaux, there was a singular human figure, male, mythological and part-animal, part fertility figure, among the many animals, and here, as in previous issues,

are portraits of men and women who work in arts and science, in culture and nature, dwelling in and making sense of the natural cycle, exploring life in the face of death to return to those lines I first quoted from Gloria Mindock, whence I began. We may explore life and death even as we sometimes desire to turn away.