Vol 4.1
2024

VR

Veritas Review

A Humanities Journal

Abigail Adams Institute

Statement of Purpose

The *Veritas Review* (VR) is a humanities journal of the Abigail Adams Institute (AAI), based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As we wrote in our inaugural issue more than three years ago, harmony is at the heart of AAI and the VR, and we continue to encourage all our students, alumni, and friends to come together in understanding through the arts, interpretation, and thought. This journal also serves as a written touchpoint for the ongoing humanities programs and events of the Abigail Adams Institute, and exists as much for our graduates and alumni as for the current students and faculty. The staff and the editors are all proud to be part of this effort to promote humanistic inquiry and expression. We hope you will join us in this work.

If you would like to submit your poetry, photography, artwork, reflection, movie review, book review, or short essay to the Veritas Review, please email director@aaicambridge.org.

Veritas Review Staff

Letter from the Editor

Veritas Review (VR) has been committed, for more than three years, to harmony – a key to the Abigail Adams Institute (AAI) and the VR. We have encouraged both individuality and community at AAI and have reached out to our growing community at Harvard and Cambridge, Boston and Massachusetts, in the United States and beyond. We continue to do so thanks to the alumni and to the contributors, editors, staff and students past and present. Understanding, thought, interpretation, inquiry, and expression continue to be central to VR and we welcome you to explore the humanities in relation to arts, science, and society. This issue builds on the previous issues but represents a change, a new direction.

The change begins with the cover and layout and is part of the original aim of the *Veritas Review*. That goal was to bring people together, to explore with civility and harmony, art, ideas, science and culture. An important part of that community was and is students. All those associated with AAI have contributed with much success to the journal, which also serves the humanities programs and events of the Abigail Adams Institute.

This new look to the *Veritas Review* is an innovation, a new reaching out, a welcome. This issue ranges from the paradox of Concord through a discussion of Oscar Wilde, a conversation about Christine de Pizan, poems, a close reading of a poem by George Herbert, a review of an exciting new film, photography, an examination of heavy metal music, an analysis of Empedocles and the archetype of Medea, an interview with Harry Lewis, a trip to the Harvard Art Museums to a consideration of *Timaeus*. Here is a mix of the classical past, the Middle Ages and the present, various modes of interpretation and a range of arts and genres. The contributors have distinct voices that intrigue and inform. This issue is a departure and continuation. It is bold – a bold invitation. Thanks to all the contributors and to the editors, colleagues at VR the past three years and to Danilo Petranovich and Maura Cahill for transforming the journal for its new phase. Continuity and change are a good combination for success.

Distinct voices and images in print and visual art speak to us in this issue of *Veritas Review* as they do from the past as we move into the future. The opening sentence of Thoreau's "A Winter Walk" is still moving: "The wind has gently murmured through the blinds, or puffed with feathery softness against the windows, and occasionally sighed like a summer zephyr lifting the leaves along, the livelong night." This image, even for those who have not spent a winter in or around Boston or New England, can be felt in the bones, resonate in our ears, eyes, all our senses in the mind, in memory. Another instance, this one from a letter from Abigail Adams, from Weymouth on 11 August 1763, to John Adams, also has staying power: "Humanity obliges us to be affected with the distresses and Miserys of our fellow creatures. Friendship is a band yet stronger, which causes us to [feel] with greater tenderness the afflictions of our Friends." There is a bond in feeling the afflictions of those close to us. This observation of humanity, friendship and friends speaks to us, stays with us. We might well extend feeling those afflictions of others close to us or not – our common humanity, our living in nature and culture. Abigail is wise and writes to John Adams, who along with Samuel Adams (and apparently the editor himself), is descended from Henry Adams, who arrived in Massachusetts in the 1630's from Somerset in England, and began to build something different and new. Humanity and friendship are always with us but can also be made in new contexts. Individuals and communities thrive on these foundations, and we need the human and friends more than ever in nature in all the seasons, to see the beauty in winter and not to make it "the winter of our discontent."

Best,

Jonathan Hart

Table of Contents

A Concord Retreat: Pondering Paradoxes in the Cradle of America 1
Maura Cahill

The Picture is Doomy and Gray 3
Joseph Quinn

Joining the Great Conversation from the Outside: *Christine de Pizan's The Book of the City of Ladies* 5
Isabel Hogben

Poetry 8
Paul Chin

Restored in Love: A Close Reading of George Herbert's "The Flower" 11
Paul Chin

Film Review: *Past Lives* (2023) 17
Elliott Jones

Photography 19
Thomas Juhasz

A Case for Heavy Metal 21
Tom Sarrouf

Empedocles' Love and Strife and Medea Adaptations as Archetype 23
Shani Agarwal Hood

An Interview with Harry Lewis 27
Scarlett Ford

PHIL 7 goes to the Harvard Art Museums 29
Mariana Beatriz Noé

Necessity and Nature in Plato's *Timaeus* 30
Peini Feng

Reflections on "The Machine Has No Tradition": An Intensive Summer Seminar at the Abigail Adams Institute 34
Danilo Petranovich and Gonzalo Cervantes

Biographies 36

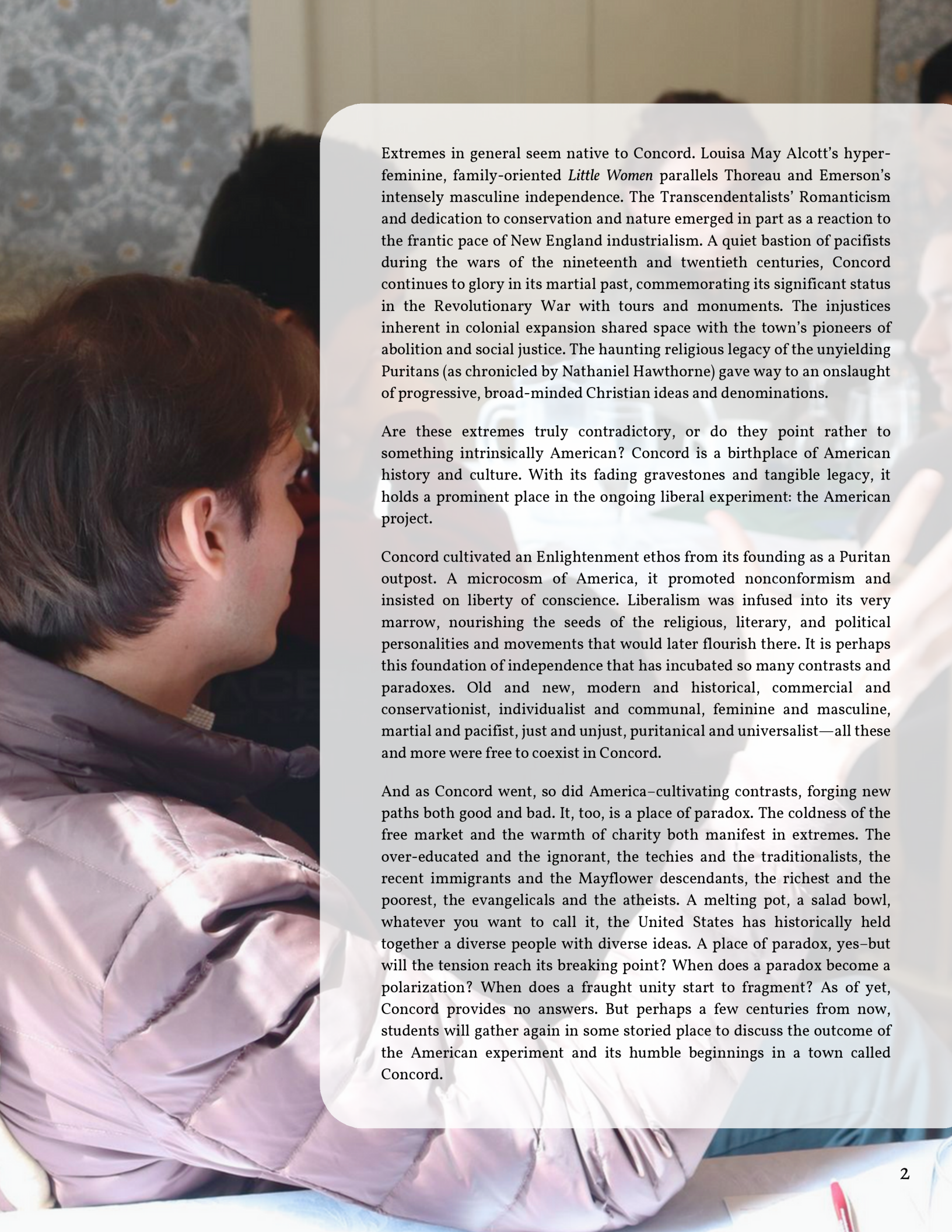
A Concord Retreat:
Pondering Paradoxes in the Cradle of America

Maura Cahill

On a cloudy April morning last spring, two dozen AAI students gathered in Concord's Colonial Inn, est. 1716, to discuss the great writers of that storied town. The history around us was electrifying–Thoreau once took up residence within these walls, Emerson had lived just half a mile down the road, Louisa May Alcott wrote *Little Women* nearby, Nathaniel Hawthorne's family boarded in town, and the Old North Bridge still echoed with the shot heard around the world. Concord, in some ways the cradle of the American nation, is saturated with poignant historical memory, possessing at first glance a unified and unbroken legacy. And yet– it is a town of startling contrasts.

Next to the old town hall and down the road from a four-hundred-year old burying ground is a yoga studio. Wooden colonial houses rub shoulders with gas stations and Asian fusion restaurants. The old Universalist Church erected in the 1840s is now a Catholic parish, adapting to a changing population. While the Colonial Inn itself maintains its eighteenth-century structure and adornments, it's also used as a venue for trendy bridal showers and–in our case–university student retreats. History and modernity exist in a fraught tension in Concord (as perhaps they do in any centuries-old place), but the town has always been a place of paradox.

As we explored the lives and works of Concord's literary greats that chilly spring day, we were struck by the coexistence of pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps individualism and thriving communal life in New England. Ralph Waldo Emerson championed the individual in "Self Reliance" while ruminating on the cosmic harmony between all human beings in "Oversoul." Thoreau's solitude at Walden, his great experiment, is as much a part of his legacy as his close-knit friendships with Emerson and the other Transcendentalists. Individualism and community, solitude and friendship, were lived out in their purest forms here.



Extremes in general seem native to Concord. Louisa May Alcott's hyper-feminine, family-oriented *Little Women* parallels Thoreau and Emerson's intensely masculine independence. The Transcendentalists' Romanticism and dedication to conservation and nature emerged in part as a reaction to the frantic pace of New England industrialism. A quiet bastion of pacifists during the wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Concord continues to glory in its martial past, commemorating its significant status in the Revolutionary War with tours and monuments. The injustices inherent in colonial expansion shared space with the town's pioneers of abolition and social justice. The haunting religious legacy of the unyielding Puritans (as chronicled by Nathaniel Hawthorne) gave way to an onslaught of progressive, broad-minded Christian ideas and denominations.

Are these extremes truly contradictory, or do they point rather to something intrinsically American? Concord is a birthplace of American history and culture. With its fading gravestones and tangible legacy, it holds a prominent place in the ongoing liberal experiment: the American project.

Concord cultivated an Enlightenment ethos from its founding as a Puritan outpost. A microcosm of America, it promoted nonconformism and insisted on liberty of conscience. Liberalism was infused into its very marrow, nourishing the seeds of the religious, literary, and political personalities and movements that would later flourish there. It is perhaps this foundation of independence that has incubated so many contrasts and paradoxes. Old and new, modern and historical, commercial and conservationist, individualist and communal, feminine and masculine, martial and pacifist, just and unjust, puritanical and universalist—all these and more were free to coexist in Concord.

And as Concord went, so did America–cultivating contrasts, forging new paths both good and bad. It, too, is a place of paradox. The coldness of the free market and the warmth of charity both manifest in extremes. The over-educated and the ignorant, the techies and the traditionalists, the recent immigrants and the Mayflower descendants, the richest and the poorest, the evangelicals and the atheists. A melting pot, a salad bowl, whatever you want to call it, the United States has historically held together a diverse people with diverse ideas. A place of paradox, yes–but will the tension reach its breaking point? When does a paradox become a polarization? When does a fraught unity start to fragment? As of yet, Concord provides no answers. But perhaps a few centuries from now, students will gather again in some storied place to discuss the outcome of the American experiment and its humble beginnings in a town called Concord.

The Picture is Doomy and Gray

Joseph Quinn

Though the novel is now more than a century old, much like its namesake, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* remains as vivid and poignant as ever. The impulses that infiltrate and dominate the life of Dorian Gray remind one very much of those that define our own times—decadence, luxury, and hedonism all have their venerated posts on the totem of contemporary society. The transient nature of popular culture, moving at mind-numbing speed thanks to the internet, recalls the fleeting tastes and styles that Dorian Gray affects, each in turn yielding to ennui and melancholy. Young men lead lives saturated by pornography, casual sex, substance abuse, and simulated violence that resemble Dorian Gray's own descent into iniquity with shocking similarity. Young women are hardly any better.

For all of these reasons and still many others, the term 'black-pilled' has become popular among talking heads and internet prophets. 'Black-pilling' is the conclusion that the maladies of modern society are beyond salvation; its culmination is a profound pessimism. The odd thing is that in our society, where it feels like virtually nothing can be agreed upon, individuals and groups across the political spectrum expound their own versions of 'doomerism'. Whether one follows mainstream media, subversive X accounts, or independent authors and journalists, 'doomerist' attitudes are almost inescapable. Right-wing fascists, environmental ruin, libertine corruption, and radical feminism are all blamed by accusatory voices (with varying degrees of reason). Fingers are pointed and moral indignation is mustered. Lamentations are heard bemoaning the irreversible state of affairs in which the post-modern Western world finds itself.

This, too, is an echo of Dorian Gray's ill-fated story. As Dorian reveals his changed portrait (now a sordid reflection of his corrupted soul) to its creator and Basil beseeches him to repent, Dorian replies, "It is too late." Dorian turns his back on redemption, choosing to murder Basil in the novel's climax, rather than humble himself and seek atonement.

Dorian continues to follow his path on the road to perdition, further indulging his hedonistic appetites in an attempt to forget his sins. Yet, contrary to the advice of his friend Lord Henry Wotton, he finds that the senses cannot cleanse the soul. He is consumed by despair and guilt, and the novel ends as he tries to destroy the portrait (now an unbearable testimony to his life of iniquity) thereby killing himself. In the final moments of the novel, Dorian remembers the Lord's Prayer, which is a call back to the murder of Basil, who is murdered only after he begs Dorian to pray the Our Father. "Not 'Forgive us for our sins,' but 'Smite us for our iniquities' should be the prayer of a man to a most just God," Dorian thinks.

If we were to believe the 'doomers' and their apocalyptic forecasts, then we would be tempted to agree with Dorian. We must not forget, however, that these very words— "Smite us for our iniquities!"—could easily have been said by Judas as he hanged himself in despair, and it was Jesus who cried out, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" as he hung dying on the cross. Basil Hallward prophetically tells Dorian—indeed, tells us— "The prayer of your pride has been answered," but he continues, "The prayer of your repentance will be answered too." I can sympathize with the 'black-pilled': the world in which we find ourselves feels broken beyond repair when you take an honest look. Our lamentations, though, must always check the despair of pride with the hope of humility. We may not be the masters of our own fate, but neither are the forces of evil that seem to tyrannize our lives and times. God's justice is not vindictive wrath, but gratuitous forgiveness.

Wilde writes in the preface to his work, “There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all.” I question his sincerity: though Wilde lived a life fraught with forbidden passion, it cost him dearly. His later poetry and prose suggest a profound disillusion with his philosophy of Hedonism. Indeed, his own scandals left him friendless and dying in a foreign land. Perhaps the greatest evidence that he realized his philosophy of youthful indulgence was untenable is his death-bed conversion to Catholicism. Dorian’s fate itself serves as a foreboding tale of the destination to where pleasure sought at any cost leads. Despite his insistence that art is not moral, Wilde’s book is filled with moral questions: are we responsible for our wickedness or is the world? are we capable of changing our ways? is redemption possible? In the final analysis, the grandeur of art does not proceed merely from its beauty, but from the way in which its beauty pertains to truth.

As Wilde writes about Dorian in his final moments one feels that he could be writing about us: “His beauty had been to him but a mask, his youth but a mockery. What was youth at best? A green, an unripe time, a time of shallow morals and sickly thoughts. Why had he worn its livery? Youth had spoiled him.” Our society is like Dorian, we too have errored in “…gathering [our] harvest while it was yet spring.” Today, we are programmed from a young age to indulge, consume, experiment. We must discard the mask of youth, behind which we are desperate for authenticity, completion, and renewal. The youthful longings of the heart, once innocent and unknowing, have learned too soon and become shallow lust. We must seek within the recesses of our soul that which we have lost, and above all we must hope. As Brendan Gleeson puts it, in Calvary, “The limits of God’s mercy are never fixed.”

Joining the Great Conversation from the Outside: Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies*

Isabel Hogben

Christine de Pizan presents her book to Margaret of Burgundy. An illustration from The Treasure of the City of Ladies. Paris BN fr. 1177, folio 114 c. 1475.

Half a page into my weekly reading for The Great Conversation, "my good mother called me to refresh myself with some supper," just as Christine de Pizan's mother called her. When I returned, I found myself resonating with Pizan, a female Italian writer of the Late Middle Ages. Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* opens with a scene some women of the humanities will find familiar: Pizan picks up a book, finds once again "wicked insults about women and their behavior," and wonders how it is "that so many…learned men" disparage women in their works. She is confused and begins to inspect her own "character and conduct" and those of other women she knows. Though she cannot understand how these claims could be true, she wonders why there seems to be such unanimous abuse of women across the spectrum of the minds she admires most; ultimately, she despairs. Pizan's distress continues today. I, a seventeen-year-old Great Books student, have often felt the same. The Western Canon, the collection of esteemed philosophy and literature of this hemisphere that history has deemed Great, at times seems to be full of misogyny. When I read Schopenhauer's "On Women," Rousseau on gendered virtues and vices, and Aristotle on the deficiency of the female person, I've wondered something akin to Pizan's cry of: "How can this be?"

The Western Canon and Great Books in general are no longer only accessible to the traditional recipients of a deep liberal arts education, the European male aristocracy. The gates of entry have been opened: every document is open-source and "Gutenberg'd" and at the fingertips of anyone with an internet connection, along with commentaries and articles and essays on every conceivable theme. But the gates have not been demolished. The question still remains: How should those historically outside the Western Canon, either condemned or barred or erased by it, approach? Gender is only one example that I am best equipped to attest to; this is not to mention the racial pseudoscience of many lauded Enlightenment thinkers, the anti-abolitionism of many of the American Founding Fathers, and many other exclusions of the Western Canon. This is a genuine question. It does not derive from "wokeism" or "identity politics" and is surely not a modern question if the medieval Pizan was struggling with it six centuries ago. Luckily, Pizan's process of struggle provides a robust answer to this question: in refusing to dismiss, deconstruct, defile, or submit to this conceptual behemoth of the Western Canon, Pizan embraces the task of which Ladies, Reason, Rectitude, and Justice, instruct: to build.

Justice, the Virgin and Saints, MS Harley 4431, f.361r, France, c.1410-14

The first error Pizan avoids is the tendency to dismiss – that those we deem "unenlightened" have nothing to teach us and we may discount the Canon because of the prejudices of many of its minds. This instinct is rampant today, seen everywhere from the decline of the humanities major to my freshman year science class, in which my teacher called Aristotle an "idiot" because of his outdated natural philosophy. Returning to the Founding Fathers, many reject the ideas of these men wholesale because of their racism and slaveholding status. While slavery was and is undoubtedly despicable, we must be able to acknowledge the prejudice of a thinker while still acknowledging their significance, seeking to examine and explain their work with thought, attention, and good faith. Pizan exemplifies this perfectly. Though she condemns the misogynistic words of those she reads as "lies," she acknowledges them as "upstanding men of old…made perfect in wisdom." Ovid, whose railings against women she criticizes, she still calls "a man skilled" with "great wit and understanding." In her castigation of Aristotle's historically influential "deficiency" rhetoric, she praises him as a "fine mind."

Pizan also resists an all-too familiar tendency to deconstruct. There is no hint of oppressor-oppressed dichotomy in her discussion of gender relations, only of goods and evils practiced by both. She imposes no created structure of hierarchy into what she reads but instead encounters the works as they are, investigating each claim for truth and goodness instead of filtering it into a dozen systems of power.

Neither does she defile it, labeling the Canon as uniformly evil, a fundamentally immoral body of work. First, she acknowledges its internal disagreements, even recognizing the misogyny she encounters as "diverse and varied." There is wrongness in the Canon, like any other collection of work written by fallible human beings. Pizan writes passionately that "sweeping ignorance never provides an excuse." But even apart from error, the Canon is imperfect in the ontological sense, incomplete by its human nature. As Aquinas, after a life of brilliant philosophy, recounted after a witnessing of the Beatific Vision, everything he created was "straw" in comparison with God Himself. But the study of anything is incomplete, and disciplines must exist to engage in anything interdisciplinary, in pursuit of a fuller truth. The study of the Great Books by themselves is a worthy pursuit despite their imperfections, even by those they have not historically welcomed. It cannot be abandoned.

Finally, Pizan averts a much subtler fallacy: complete submission to the Canon. A certain amount of reverence (or at least attention) is due to anything ancient, the Great Books included. Rainer Maria Rilke captures this due respect in his poem "The Archaic Torso of Apollo". Rilke describes a statue of the Greek God "suffused with brilliance from inside" that can "burst like a star" "from all borders of itself." In the light of the statue's downcast gaze there is "no place that does not see you. You must change your life." These Great Books make claims on us and emit their own radiance. Intrinsic or not, we must acknowledge their greatness and approach with varying degrees of deference. Pizan balances this while still understanding that something or someone's inclusion in the Canon does not mean their works are gospel truth. Pizan writes that "the words of philosophers" are not "articles of faith." She challenges historical models of wisdom such as Cicero, the followers of Albertus Magnus, and Cato the Younger. She understands that Great Books are not solely something to be studied and observed and bowed before, but a project of meaning in which to participate.

Pizan embraces this project, encountering in the piece three dream-visions of Reason, Rectitude, and Justice who instruct her to build the City of Ladies. Pizan's task is constructive and a wonderful example: Add. Clarify. Cultivate and gather the excellent historically excluded to function within this canon. Like Pizan writes, be "ready to…send forth new branches capable of bearing fruits." Using sex as a start, include Yelena Hahn in your mental list of the greats of Russian Literature. When you speak of the Scholastics, don't let St. Hildegard of Bingen escape mention. In any serious invocation of twentieth century philosophy, include Anscombe and Edith Stein. Like Pizan articulates, do not "shun what you know for a certainty and believe what you do not know or see or recognize." Pizan does not withhold "however" after her praise of Ovid. It is not an intellectual sin to call something diabolical "diabolical." If it's a lie, call it a lie – but do not forget to articulate the positive truth, which wields a power that mere criticism and dismissal could never command.

Pizan exemplifies a truly commendable attitude for approaching the Western Canon when one feels outside of it. She embodies intellectual humility, (acknowledging the brilliance of those she reads and labeling herself as the "simple and ignorant student"), intellectual autonomy (daring to reason herself, disagree and disprove), and intellectual productivity. She does not write a screed of theory, but a beautiful, insightful work that today joins Chaucer and Aligheri and Maimonides in this Great Conversation.

Christine de Pizan building the 'City of Ladies', from 'The Book of the Queen'; Paris, c. 1410-1414: Harley MS 4431/2, f. 290r

Paul Chin

The Stacks

*"We begin our journey in the expansive underworld of Widener Library: the stacks"**

Understand the demarcation of
the underworld but understand
too that you must not have
crossed into Elysium.
For if you had, you would know
how to get lost in vast tracts of land
where beyond the eyes can see
stretch miles and miles of corn;
and seen the leather skins
gleaming like husks under a Kansas sun,
the smell of dust, transubstantiated
in that same sun, and heard the corn
murmuring, each to each.

For I have crossed over thousands of times
and am acquainted with the sentinel;
and have not descended
but ascended
on a Thursday afternoon
into paradise; tiptoeing
past angels.

And have I not braved
the winter's bite, the gnashing
teeth of night, to attain this rest?
And seen the light, the light from far,
light bursting forth from
sepulcher?

Or do I betray myself.
For why else does anyone
brave the underworld
except to rescue Eurydice;
or ascend to Heaven except
to chance a glimpse of Beatrice
at her carrell, hidden behind
the angle of impossibly long
bookshelves, or perhaps
perusing German books
that neither of us
can read.

**Quoted from a Crimson article on the Stacks 1/26/24*

Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld, detail of an oil painting by Camille Corot, 1861; in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

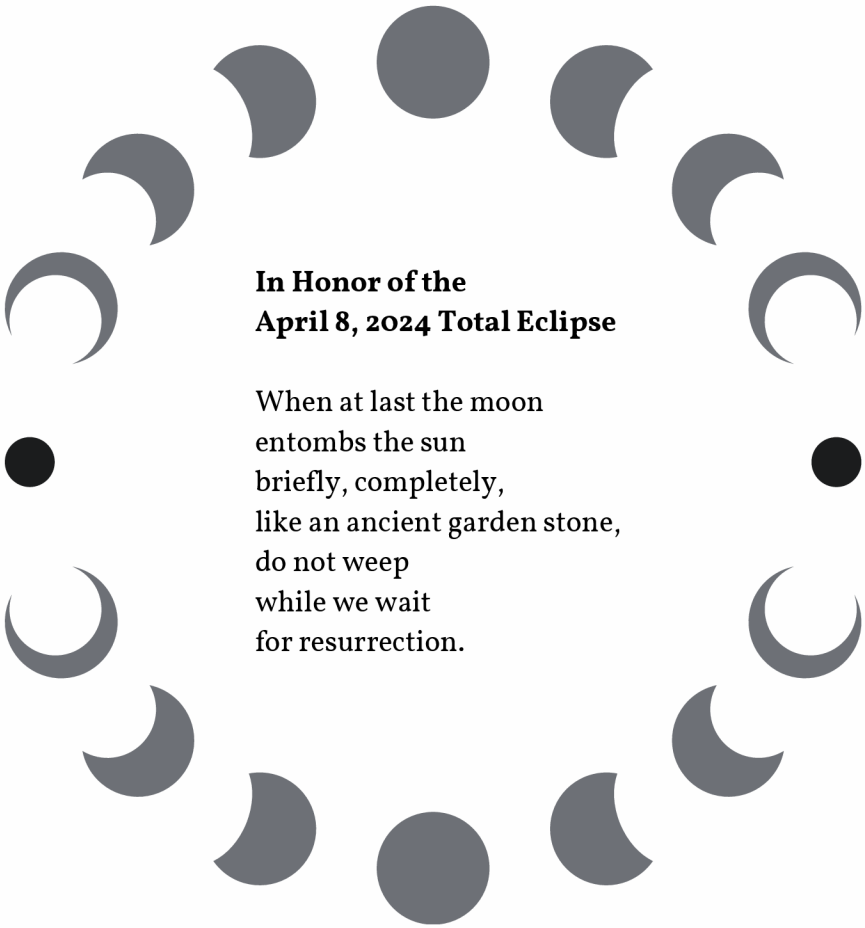
Paul Chin

Cum Laude

What to do for three Greek signs
Or phrases writ in deadened tongue,
To prove to friends that we were best
At toiling fast under the sun?

Despite ourselves we cannot help
That gripping need for subtle nods.
So on our hearts ambitions rest
immovable as household gods.

In all our life we strive for praise
and scarcely hear the reaper laugh.
A final transcript unbeknownst:
Emblazoned stone, epitaph.



In Honor of the April 8, 2024 Total Eclipse

When at last the moon
entombs the sun
briefly, completely,
like an ancient garden stone,
do not weep
while we wait
for resurrection.

Meditation on a stained-glass window

You are a stained-glass window
Giving birth to ancient color
In a cold, stone church

Paul Chin

The Flower

By George Herbert

How fresh, oh Lord, how sweet and clean
Are thy returns! even as the flowers in spring;
To which, besides their own demean,
The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring.
Grief melts away
Like snow in May,
As if there were no such cold thing.

Who would have thought my shriveled heart
Could have recovered greenness? It was gone
Quite underground; as flowers depart
To see their mother-root, when they have blown,
Where they together
All the hard weather,
Dead to the world, keep house unknown.

These are thy wonders, Lord of power,
Killing and quickening, bringing down to hell
And up to heaven in an hour;
Making a chiming of a passing-bell.
We say amiss
This or that is:
Thy word is all, if we could spell.

Oh that I once past changing were,
Fast in thy Paradise, where no flower can wither!
Many a spring I shoot up fair,
Offering at heaven, growing and groaning thither;
Nor doth my flower
Want a spring shower,
My sins and I joining together.

But while I grow in a straight line,
Still upwards bent, as if heaven were mine own,
Thy anger comes, and I decline:
What frost to that? what pole is not the zone
Where all things burn,
When thou dost turn,
And the least frown of thine is shown?

And now in age I bud again,
After so many deaths I live and write;
I once more smell the dew and rain,
And relish versing. Oh, my only light,
It cannot be
That I am he
On whom thy tempests fell all night.

These are thy wonders, Lord of love,
To make us see we are but flowers that glide;
Which when we once can find and prove,
Thou hast a garden for us where to bide;
Who would be more,
Swelling through store,
Forfeit their Paradise by their pride.

Restored in Love:
A Close Reading of George Herbert's "The Flower"

Paul Chin

In his influential essay on the metaphysical poets, T.S. Eliot points out that Herbert's simplicity of language is a "simplicity emulated without success by numerous modern poets." This simplicity of Herbert's, the lucidity of his verse but also the exactness of his expressions, has invited legions of imitators not only in his own day but in the centuries to come. Perhaps one of the reasons why so many were "without success" was because Herbert's poetry was really not simple at all. Though the literal meaning of each word may have been readily understood, their meticulous construction into an intricate whole is what makes Herbert's poetry highly intellectual and therefore, in one sense, metaphysical. Eliot elaborates on Herbert's deceptive simplicity further in his essay by contending that not only are "The structure of [Herbert's] sentences… far from simple," but they contain an immense "fidelity to thought and feeling." This fidelity to thought, the determined sensitivity to the true nature of one's own feelings and emotional and psychological interior, is one of Herbert's distinctive qualities, allowing even devotional poems to be appreciated by the non-religious. After all, how does one describe, let alone write a poem about, the universal experiences of shame, or the desperate need for redemption, the fleetingness of life, the joy of acceptance? To capture the vicissitudes of the soul's existence would seem to require expression superseding human language; that Herbert did so in poetry is nothing short of miraculous, if not evidence of literary genius.

Eliot's esteem of the likes of Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, and others has done much to revive the reputation of the metaphysical poets who were at one time regarded as, as the Samuel Johnson once declared, "Epicurean deities making remarks on the actions of men…without interest and without emotion." Since the renewed interest and scholarship concerning the metaphysical poets in the 20th century, after Eliot, few scholars have championed Herbert more than the eminent poetry critic Helen Vendler, whose insistence that Herbert be ranked higher than Donne – the poster child of the metaphysical poets – is as controversial as it is telling. In Vendler's introduction to her book on Herbert, she makes the case that Herbert has often been read superficially without attention to aesthetic motives, in addition to his formal innovations, and to prove her point, opens the book with a detailed reading of one of Herbert's most famous poems: "Vertue." In the introduction to the chapter, she also notes parenthetically that "I could as easily have begun with the readings of 'Love (III)' or 'Heaven' or 'The Flower'." In this paper, I affirm this assertion, that the depth of Herbert's poetry plumbed through an analysis of "Vertue" may just as well have been attained through "The Flower," where again Herbert's simple language masks complex structure.

Featured in his landmark collection of poems, *The Temple*, in "The Flower," Herbert describes what it is like to first lose and then be restored to God's favor by comparing himself to a flower which decays to death in the winter (it seems) but eventually revives in the spring. The language of the poem generally depicts simple nature (flowers, gardens) and Biblical images (Heaven and Hell); there are no extensions of language or far-reaching conceits as Donne might employ. And yet the poem's inner workings are surprisingly complex. Take the poem's form, for instance. "The Flower" contains seven seven-line stanzas where the first four lines alternate between tetrameter and pentameter, rhyming ABAB, which is followed by dimeter rhyming couplets, and then ends with a tetrameter line (rhyming with B). The initial tension in each stanza between tetrameter and pentameter mirrors a strain felt in the poem as the flower (and speaker) strive to attain restoration. The stanza's structure depicts this eventual "restoration" by leading up to the resolving tetrameter line through the two dimeter couplets, which, if added together, also contain four metrical feet. The number seven, a perfect number in the Bible, used twice by Herbert in both the number of lines and the number of stanzas, reinforces this sense of fulfillment in the poem despite the varying lengths and rhymes within each stanza.

In addition to the poem's formal structure, Herbert has also structured the narration to accommodate the poem's thematic aims. For example, although the only speaker of the poem appears to be the writer himself, Herbert nonetheless shifts, *stanza by stanza*, between an outward extolment of the wonders of God, and an inward sigh of self-reflection, creating a kind of implicit dialogue between him and God.

This pattern is discerned by observing Herbert's varied use of pronouns and his change of focus throughout the poem. In the first stanza, for example, he begins by describing the fresh returns of the Lord without any reference to self. But when we reach the second stanza, we find that his gaze has turned momentarily inwards as he now reflects on a past moment of despair, only to redirect his focus, in the third stanza, upwards, to another observation of the Lord, this time of His power.

The pattern sustains throughout the poem, moving from a meditation on who God is, to introspection, and then finally, in the last stanza, to a conclusion on the true nature of God's love. But each time the pattern is repeated, the details are never exactly the same, and this creates the drama of the poem which leads to its climax in the sixth stanza where the speaker experiences, in the making of the poem itself, restoration.

Caught between the subtle conversation between God and man is the audience who Herbert brings into the picture at various points to emphasize the universality of God's intended restoration – "**We** say amiss / This or that is" (lines 19-20) or "To make **us** see we are but flowers that glide" (Line 44). Thus, though Herbert possesses a "complete perception of his own moods," he has not, like David or Augustine to whom he must inevitably be compared, lost his sense of connection to the invisible God and to the world around him.

The felicity of the Lord's restoration sets the initial theme with its corresponding natural metaphors: "How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean / Are thy returns! Ev'n as the flowers in spring;" (Lines 1-2). Although we don't arrive at the "spring flowers" implied by the title until the second half of the second line, we find that the language which Herbert uses in describing the Lord's returns are still steeped in natural associations. In particular, that the Lord's returns are "fresh," "sweet," and "clean" remind us of the attributes of water – the rain, the rivers – which we might readily associate with cleansing and renewal, just as the bitter water made sweet at Marah rejuvenated the Israelites on their post-Exodus journey (Exodus 15:22-27). The joy of the Lord's returns water the earth, giving life to spring flowers.

But what are the returns of the Lord? Is it the *strength* that the Lord gives which restores us back to life, or is it literally the returning of the Lord *himself*. Most likely the former, but the suspended phrase: "Ev'n as the flowers in spring;" which lacks a verb and thus remains incomplete as a sentence, allows for a brief superposition of these two ideas. The rest of the stanza then builds upon the incomplete description of the Lord's returns, the comparison developing like the flowers themselves unfurling at winter's end. The "late-passed frosts" of winter bring "tributes of pleasure" to its mastering season, spring, and the grief of snow which annihilates by its blanketing white, "melts away…As if there were no such cold thing." The restoration, the allowed returning to life of the Lord, is so complete that present warmth erases memory of past cold.

The focus shifts both inward and into the past in the second stanza which begins with a question: "Who would have thought my shriveled heart / Could have recovered greenness?" The word "shriveled," in describing the state of his heart, is again deliberate as it readily applies to nature. We are no longer in the May of the first stanza, but sometime in mid-winter, perhaps January, when the leaves of the trees and the flowers of the field have wizened to nothing. And just as it seemed impossible for "no such cold" to have existed in May, now in the heart's winter, it seems impossible that deadened nature might ever "recover greenness." The rhetorical nature of the question implies the understanding that all mankind might share this sentiment of despair. "Who" – *among all living beings*, we may insert – "would have thought my shriveled heart could have recovered greenness?" Implicitly then, only God, who transcends the mortal, is capable of imagining restoration after the bleakness of winter, emphasizing our dependence on the supernatural for salvation. The next lines in the stanza further the comparison of man to flower: "… It was gone / Quite underground; as flowers depart / To see their mother-root when they have blown;" except now we see not the flowers' resuscitative aspect as in stanza one, but its descent to the underworld. Yet here is a rather surprising description in which Herbert imagines the flowers to travel to their birthplace, "their mother-root…/ where they together/ all the hard weather, / Dead to the world, keep house unknown." The flowers may be dead to the world, but since they are sojourning to a different world, an unknown place, they must, it seems, eventually return; that is, they only appear to be dead to those above ground. In comparing his own shriveled heart to the departed flowers, Herbert, while admitting that life seems impossibly dead on the surface, also intimates that the disappearance of life is more mysterious than final. After the "hard weather," might it be possible for flowers to reemerge from their "house unknown?"

As part of the poem's drama, the answer is not provided immediately; we'll have to wait until the sixth stanza ("And now in age I bud again") before witnessing the rebirth of the flower. Instead, in the stanza immediately following the second, we turn our focus back to the Lord. However, the tone of the speaker in the third stanza, and the corresponding descriptions, strike strangely. The language has become more severe. In contrast to the first stanza, Herbert meditates not so much on the Lord's goodness and mercy, the thematic anchor of the poem, but on the awesomeness of his power: "These are thy wonders, Lord of **power**, / Killing and quick'ning, bring down to hell / And up to heaven in an hour;" The God we see here is terrifying in his inscrutable power. The ground may open up beneath us in an instant, sending sinners to Sheol, as happened in Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16); or, in an act of unexpected mercy, man may be resurrected, as the widow's son was by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24). The range of Herbert's religious imagery has also broadened to express God's cosmic reach and the regions of heaven and hell. Nature or flower imagery, germane only to the physical earth, have no mention here, and the abstractness of the last line of the stanza: "Thy word is all, if we could spell" matches the theological tenor of the preceding images. All of this is mirrored in the prosody of the third stanza which contrasts the steady iambic rhythm of the previous stanzas. In the first line, for example, dactylic then trochaic rhythms appear for the first time: "**These** are thy **won**ders, **Lord** of **pow**er" (the bold being the unit of stress) which interrupts the poem's brisk iambic rhythm, seen clearly in the poem's opening line: "How **fresh**, O **Lord**, how **sweet** and **clean**." Additionally, the caesura in both the first and second line slow the verse even more, emphasizing the range of God's power. In describing the reason for Herbert's description of God's might, his ability to dispatch puny man in an instant, eludes us for now, and won't be resolved until the last stanza when the first line pertaining to the wonders of God is repeated with a modification. If we are to remember the "quick'ning" of the Lord, we must first also remember his "killing" – in that order, the most anomalous and unsettling of the stanzas.

The poem returns to its iambic form and metaphor of the flower in the next two stanzas. In the fourth stanza, we turn specifically to the life of the speaker, in keeping with the structure of the poem, but this time, the speaker recalls his life *before* its decay described in the second stanza. The speaker reminisces how "many a spring I shot up fair, / Off'ring at heav'n, growing and groaning thither." There used to be a time of great vivacity. In the description, the growing of the flower makes sense to the reader, but the groaning does not, like the queer "angry and brave" hue of the sweet rose in "Virtue." The groaning is in part informed by the first line of stanza four which starts with an exclamatory "Oh," which is, in a sense, a sort of groan: "Oh that I once past changing were." The flower may grow, as does one's faith or heart during times of prosperity, but the consciousness of its own mortality, or the limitations of its own purity, or as we'll see in the next stanza, God's wrath, causes the soul (the flower) to groan, that is to yearn for heaven where "no flower can whither!"

The flower's groan for paradise echoes Apostle Paul's own yearning for deliverance from his corrupting flesh expressed in his epistle to the Romans: "For we know that the whole creation has been **groaning** together in the pains of childbirth until now" (Romans 8:22). The groan for immortality, for paradise, for the shedding of the sinful self ("Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver from this body of death") is a universal sentiment felt among all believers striving for an eternal steadfastness. There is a self-confidence, though, in the poem's speaker, that would lead one to think such security is attainable by a force of will. The self-confidence is evident in the fact that the initial growth of the flower is promising and "fair." In fact, the flower declares that there is no need of "a spring shower" for nourishment. Somehow, the antithetical sin and self have joined forces to reach the heavens: "My sins and I joining together."

However, the "But" of the fifth stanza immediately undermines the enthusiasm of the young flower, exposing its presumption in supposing that "heav'n were mine own." And then a description of God's wrath appears: "Thy anger comes, and I decline" which marks the beginning of the flower's descent into disfavor. The frosts here are not "late-passed" as they were in the first stanza; their icy grip is just beginning to punish the flower in its overconfidence. And now everywhere, it seems, is God's wrath: "What frost to that? What pole is not the zone, / Where all things burn, When thou dost turn, / And the least frown of thine is shown?" The rhetorical questioning of whether a place on earth might exist where God's judgment remains unanswered. So severe is God's punishment, that everywhere one turns, only the frown of disfavor is perceived. The rapid succession of questions in the fifth stanza imbues a sense of urgency and despair that must be resolved later in the poem. It is a kind of despair which we have already seen in the second stanza where the speaker had previously asked, also rhetorically, whether his shriveled heart "could have recovered greenness?" In the judgment of the Lord in the fifth stanza, this question of redemption still remains unanswered. Surely we know from stanza three that the Lord is powerful, that he is capable of resurrecting us, so the question is not whether God can restore us but if He *will*. As God says to Moses, "And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Exodus 33:19).

Thus we reach the crux of the poem in stanza six. And what greater sigh of relief can be heard than in the line "And now in age I bud again." Yes, the soul can and *will* live again, but it is not until many deaths have occurred that he has learned this fact. These are the seasoned words of man who has weathered many ages of life, who reflects with melancholy on his past sufferings, but still lives on, by God's grace, to appreciate the sensation of life, symbolized in the smell of rain. In even this small detail of the "dew and rain," we find that the speaker no longer identifies with the flower of stanza four who has no want for a spring shower. The valleys of life have wrought a deeper appreciation for life, and there is an enduring sense of wonder at one's own survival – "It cannot be / That I am he / On whom thy tempests fell all night."

The revival has also led the speaker to once again take up his pen and "relish versing." This is not only a return to profession, but the writing also refers to creation of the poem itself. That is, the poem's very confession could not have been written if the poet first had not been restored. Thus, in the sixth stanza, we discover, extraordinarily, that the poem's very existence proves God's miraculous restoring power.

The chastisement and subsequent restoration which has brought upon a renewed sense of self has also wrought a new perception of God, and this is where the poem ends. The first line of the seventh and final stanza, "These are thy wonders, Lord of love," exactly matches the first line of the third stanza, "These are they wonders, Lord of power," except now the Lord's wonders are perceived not as an act of power but of love. This represents a fundamental change in the speaker's perspective. In the third stanza, the raising up and the bringing down "in an hour" appeared to be acts of an inscrutable God; our attempts to discern his will were futile: "We say amiss / this or that is." But now the speaker realizes that the experiences of shriveling and judgment were acts of God's love for us, "To make us see we are but flowers that glide," that is, for us to acknowledge that we are not flowers who can attain to heavens by our own strength. Thus the lesson of suffering and restoration, symbolized by the flower's death and rebirth, is ultimately a lesson in humility. Once we are rooted, literally, in humility, then we discover and come to accept that God "hast a garden for us," an ordained place for us "to bide." There is no need to strain for heaven; the garden which God chooses for us to live in is His will for us on earth. And as the last three lines show, he who could want anything more than to thrive in the garden into which God has placed him, to resist "blooming where planted," would be foolish, and "forfeit their paradise by their pride."

Through the description of the life cycle of a flower, Herbert has expressed how the heart experiences renewal by God's mercy. But unlike the cycle of a flower's rebirth which restores the flower to merely its past glory, the restoration of man to God leaves him changed. "The Flower" is not merely about restoration, as a cursory read may lead one to believe, but transformation. The speaker learns, through the course of the poem, that the fearsome power of God to strike down and raise up is really an act of love meant to teach us to rely on His power and not on our own "stores." The various ways in which "The Flower" achieves its effect, either through its form, apostrophic dialogue, or internal referencing, makes it a wonderfully complex poem belied by the simplicity of its title and language. Above all, "The Flower" is a poem that demands, as the best of Herbert's poems will, an extended close reading, but which then promises, for those attentive to his whispers and subtle turns of thought, a partaking in the same renewal Herbert himself once experienced in the poem's creation: evidence, once again, for the profound moving power in George Hebert's poetry.

References

Eliot, T. S. *Selected Essays*. New ed., Harcourt, Brace, 1950.
Vendler, Helen. *The Poetry of George Herbert.* Reprint 2014, Harvard University Press, 2014.

Film Review: *Past Lives* (2023)

Elliott Jones

Past Lives (2023) is a romantic drama written and directed by Korean-Canadian director Celine Song. This debut directorial film is a semiautobiographical work based on her childhood in Korea and an unexpected move to Canada in middle school that disrupts a would-be flourishing romantic friendship. Celine is played by the protagonist Nora (Greta Lee), formerly Na Young, who is an aspiring writer in New York City married to a Jewish-American writer named Arthur (John Magaro). As a child in Korea, Na Young met Hae Sung (Teo Yoo) in elementary school and as soon as they go on a friendly date in middle school, Na Young's family decides to emigrate to Toronto for career aspirations. Twelve years later, Na Young, now Nora, hears that Hae Sung wants to reconnect through social media. Through videocalls, they reunite and realize the profound connection and capacity for friendship they have. But over time, they have to drift their separate ways to pursue their respective careers. Another twelve years pass before Hae Sung, heartbroken and lost in life, plans a trip to New York City to hopefully reconnect with Nora once again. The latter half of the film follows this second reunion, the realization of the potential for romantic friendship, the apparent stumbling block of Nora's marriage to Arthur, and, however, one might interpret the last scene of the film, the eventual resolution.

It is as much a story of the immigrant identity as it is about romantic love and temporality. Nora, Hae Sung, and Arthur equally reflect the what-if of Nora's emigration from South Korea. They all know what would have happened–namely, that Nora and Hae Sung would have gotten married and Nora would have never met Arthur. Arthur exercises this past possibility and sees himself as a stumbling block to lovers who are obviously destined to be. This insecurity is born from his idea that Nora's Koreanness is a part of her that he can never know or understand. At one point, expressing his frustration, he tells Nora, "You dream in a language I can't understand". The tension of this insecurity is brought to a climax when they all go out for dinner. Halfway through the conversation, Arthur is forgotten as Nora ceases to translate her conversation in Korean with Hae Sung as they engage in their own what-ifs.

Despite what might be argued as lustful imaginings or obsession with the past and would-be future, there is a profound acceptance of the temporal reality and the impossibility of the what-ifs without denying the friendship that exists been Nora and Hae Sung and the marriage between Nora and Arthur. But as Nora comments, she and Hae Sung were never in an official romantic relationship, and they always were in a state of potentiality. The film raises a question about an overlooked idea in today's culture, namely, the idea that love is not free: that romantic love just happens to us and we have no say regarding our judgment, assent, or denial of the will. This idea is baked into the notion of "soul mates", that not only views the goal of marriage as romance, but that this romance and love is destined by an outside force.

Past Lives does not reject the emotive power of falling in love. It doesn't argue that love is purely a matter of rational judgment separate from our emotional responses. The important dichotomy in this film might not be between reason and emotion, but between decisions and temporality. What is upheld in this film above all else is the importance of living by our decisions— taking a leap of faith and standing by the decisions we have already made. The film upholds the importance of acceptance one's circumstances and one's choices, especially those choices regarding friendship.

It is this acceptance of the permanence of our decisions that is paired with the impermanence of time, reality, and imperfection in our lives. This is the Japanese aesthetic notion of *wabi-sabi. Wabi-sabi* is a standard of beauty that claims that the imperfection and impermanence of things (like nature itself) can be beautiful. This is disagreeable to the Western mind fueled by Platonic notions that that which is most beautiful is Beauty itself which as a Form is immutable and therefore eternal. Anything that is in a state of flux and therefore impermanence is ontologically inferior to something that is stable and permanent. One way to grasp this Eastern notion of beauty is empirically through eastern art that comes from and is a part of nature itself: think of bonsai, ikebana, and Zen gardens. These art forms are themselves alive and subject to the change of nature and the intentionality of the artist.

Thematically, *Past Lives* grapples with the portrayal of impermanence, imperfection, temporality in regard to romantic friendship. For Nora and Hae Sung especially, this means that if a resolution is to occur, it means an acceptance of the past, the present circumstances, and what the future will hold. Whether this acceptance occurs is what fuels the drama, and the only thing that gives them hope is a stable (yet unpredictable) power of nature known as "In-Yun" or *inyeon*. The notion of "past lives" comes from what Nora calls "In-Yun," which is a Korean idea that every circumstance in the present is caused by a previous life that we had that led to this moment. Resembling ideas of reincarnation, karma, or the idea that "everything happens for a reason", this gives order, resolution, and acceptance to Nora and Hae Sung's decisions and a hope for the future for the next life (presumably where their friendship might be actualized, romantic or not). It is this idea that explains the lack of passions of anger, lust, or an over-exertion of the will within the characters. Instead, subjecting oneself to *inyeon* involves a deep humility in spite of regret and the nostalgic and hopeful what-if.

Celine Song both creates a portrait of an artist-migrant in *Past Lives* and grapples with existential questions of the permanence of our decisions in a world in flux. Of aesthetic importance, *Past Lives* is a simple, concise, and aesthetically pleasing film both in terms of filmography and score. The aesthetically calm, structured, and flat shots create the sense of a perfecting and permanent order above the experiential reality of imperfection, impermanence, longing, and what-ifs of the characters–perhaps the structure of the filmography itself resembles the very power of *inyeon*.

Photos by Thomas Juhasz

Photos by Thomas Juhasz

A Case for Heavy Metal

Tom Sarrouf

Allan Bloom's seminal *Closing of the American Mind* was a jeremiad to the political, intellectual, and spiritual conditions that made liberal education possible. The torrents of the culture–an extreme and perpetual "openness" stemming from modern relativism—made people "closed" to the possibility of closure on the essential and fundamental questions of human life. One example Bloom gives is the influence of music on his students. Modern music represented a collapse between "high" and "low" culture. By appealing to the base aspects of the human person, rock music, with its "orgiastic thumping," offered students a frenzied pleasure, promoting separation, individualism, sexual looseness, and drug abuse. All of this, Bloom concluded, left people unable to properly orient themselves to the deepest truths of human life, making liberal education impossible.

Some forty years later, much of Bloom's analysis has retained its potency. Pop stars are cultural icons and idols with immense power: some, like Taylor Swift, could even be said to have a devotional status, with the power to inspire a "Baby Boom." Mick Jagger-esque androgyny has accelerated into transgenderism. Marijuana has been legalized and normalized in large parts of the country. Porn is ubiquitous, and studies suggest that virginity is exceedingly rare. Musically, modern music has become less dynamic, less structurally and harmonically complex, and more repetitive.

But Bloom's trenchant diagnosis misses something important from within the culture of modern music. *Metal* music and its subculture take things in a different direction: metal has anti-modern tendencies. Had Bloom lived longer,[1] he may have come to appreciate metal music for both its technical genius and its deeper interaction with enduring truths.

Metal music recovered the full-minor scale, and features musical complexity and sophistication, maintaining a strong emphasis on playing and mastering instruments. It is also spirited in an age of enervation, and a last bastion of masculinity in a feminized world. Thematically, lyrics and themes vary, but at its core it deals with permanent questions: death, despair, religion, war[2], and an existential sense of meaning.

First, technical precision and mastery is an essential draw to metal music. The musicians are talented. They take years to hone the skill of playing their instrument. It requires a discipline of the spirit, the mind, and the hands to make the music. Guitar players create impressive solos.[3] Harmonically and melodically, the music is complicated, using key changes, tempo changes, and layered harmonies. We could call metal musicians the bodybuilders of music, pushing technical skill and ability to the limits. Innovation and creativity are to be found here.[4]

Much is made of "screamo" as evidence of the depravity of metal music, but this actually speaks to the technical rigor of metal.[5] Screaming well takes precision and care in order to not destroy a singer's vocal folds. Those who take such care can scream night after night with no damage; order, rather than disorder, makes such performance possible. Hearing the "beauty" of screamed vocals can only be understood by listening to a lot of it, but the nuances to the "art" of screaming is there for all to hear.

Moreover, metal music recovered the full minor scale in Western music. The distinction between popular and traditional music is found at this juncture: rock and the blues opted for pentatonicism and ran with the basic four-chord structure that is still the basis of much of modern pop. Metal recovered the fullness of the minor scale in the composition of harmonies, melodies, and solos. Being fuller and more complete, it is a reaction against the simplicity of "low" pop music made for mass culture.

Second, metal is masculine in its vital energies. Both the aggressive aspects of the music itself and the socially acceptable displays of physicality that take place at metal concerts, "moshing," offers a display that is properly masculine in a society that rigidly tamps down manifestations of physical power. Metal concerts could rightly be described as "fight club to a soundtrack." Certainly, women do attend metal concerts, do enjoy metal music, and even perform in bands, but it is predominantly a male space, and one characterized by masculine energies of raw power.

Lyrically, the themes of metal music speak loudly. Metal has been associated with Satanism and the occult, and while there are some parts that either lean into or fully embrace dark spiritual practices, much of metal lyrics deal with religious themes[6] in a more serious way, raising the existential and fundamentally human[7][8][9] questions of belief, the afterlife, addiction and abuse, war and politics, and why we often feel so badly. Enlightenment and modern reason were supposed to replace religion as the source of happiness, peace, and prosperity, so metal music speaks to the fact that something has gone wrong in our turn from religion.

For instance, Slayer's album,[10] *God Hates Us All*, is a theodicy. Guitarist Kerry King offered: "I definitely wanted to put more realism in it, more depth. *God Hates Us All* isn't an anti-Christian line as much as it's an idea I think a lot of people can relate to on a daily basis. One day you're living your life, and then you're hit by a car or your dog dies, so you feel like, 'God really hates me today.'" These questions are as old as philosophy itself. To be sure, using one example as representative of all metal music is impossible, but it is fair to say that metal music finds itself sitting in the muck of nihilism at the heart of modernity.

Being a metalhead is an identity. In that way, Bloom's notion that music is a deep source of meaning to young people rings true. But metal engages with important, human ideas, questions, and practices, and so opens man to what is most central to life, rather than closes him off from it.

1. Bloom died in 1992. There were well-known metal bands by that point, and Tipper Gore's "Parental Music Resource Center" had successfully launched a massive publicity campaign in 1985 to get "Parental Advisory" labels added to records, including heavy metal records. During the Congressional hearing associated with the campaign, professors and psychiatrists testified about the negative effects of "heavy metal." The controversy took place before the publication of *Closing of the American Mind*, and it is likely that Bloom would have had some familiarity or exposure to metal music, though I have not found any reference to writing where he talks about it. In the "Music" chapter, he only focuses on rock music, and so perhaps he lumped metal music as a species of rock n' roll, but by the 1990s and 2000s, the differences became clearer as both genres developed their respective styles. Even today, some bands straddle the line between rock and metal (for instance, Disturbed, Alter Bridge, and many others in the "alternative metal" genre), but moving towards the extremes, the differences are clear.
2. With often a strong critique–see Metallica's "Disposable Heroes" and Black Sabbath's "War Pigs" for examples.
3. There are too many examples to cite, but see Arch Enemy's "War Eternal" solo from 2:20-3:37.
4. Polyphia's "G.O.A.T." is evidence of this claim.
5. Compare "Counting Worms" by Knocked Loose with "The Heretic Prevails" (3:15-3:49 in particular) to see the difference. Having seen Knocked Loose perform live on multiple occasions, it seems that lead singer Bryan Garris has damaged his singing voice from improper technique. Lamb of God's Randy Blythe, conversely, has been active as a singer for almost 30 years.
6. Disturbed's album, *Believe*.
7. Alter Bridge's "Words Darker Than Their Wings" "Show Me a Sign" and "Blackbird" all speak to this theme, the former song being a dialectic between lead singer Myles Kennedy and lead guitarist Mark Tremonti. See also Killswitch Engage, "Always."
8. Metallica, Megadeth, Slayer, and Anthrax, collectively known as the "Big Four" of thrash metal, all have written songs about war. Modern thrash metal band Havok's 2017 album *Conformicide* took inspiration from Orwell's *1984* in its lyrical criticism of the contemporary United States. In 2022, Falling in Reverse released "ZOMBIFIED," a critique of political correctness and the COVID-19 lockdowns and medical tyranny.
9. Hardcore band Beartooth's discography is just one of many good examples.
10. Lead vocalist Tom Araya is a practicing Catholic, even though some of the lyrical themes throughout the band's career (largely written by Kerry King) and imagery are satanic or devilish.

Empedocles' Love and Strife and Medea Adaptations as Archetype

Shani Agarwal Hood

Once upon a time, before there was the 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian,' there were the cosmic forces of Love (φιλότης) and Strife (νεῖκος), the double-headed font of all creation, or so said Empedocles in the 5th century BC.[1] Empedocles understood the cosmos as locked in an eternal cycle between these two forces:

> "For they are, as they were before and will be, nor do I think that endless time will ever be empty of these two." [2]

According to him, in the very beginning, when Love first dominates Strife, there is complete harmony and all elements are inert. As Strife grows stronger and dominates Love, there is chaos and the elements run amok. Life and creation as we know it only come into being during the process of contention between these two forces—the elements arrange themselves in various relationships of contrasts as they are acted upon by both Love and Strife in different ways. Creation exists in a fragile limbo and is ultimately destroyed when Strife overpowers Love and chaos ensues–then, this generative cycle can repeat all over again. While we might reject Empedocles' theory of cosmic creation today, his thought is helpful in understanding the primordial archetype of Life (and Soul) as a tense duality. Modern thinkers, especially in the Freudian school, have also picked up on this ancient dual understanding of the psyche, now reimagining these forces as the two drives of 'Eros' (life instinct) and 'Thanatos' (death instinct).[3] While I don't think real human psyche is quite so easily understood, I do think this Love/Strife duality is a helpful way to conceive of mythical and fictional archetypes. Here, I use 'archetype' both in the colloquial sense, as in a recurring character-model or motif, and also in the Jungian sense, as a primitive self-image of the human embedded within our 'collective unconscious.'[4] After all, what is mythology if not the eternal stories that reveal truths about this collective unconscious?

I think the most fascinating example of the Love/Strife duality embodied in a character is Medea, the most controversial anti-heroine/witch/villain of Greek legend. She is particularly suited for a primordial essence since she is a princess of the far away land of Colchis, outside of Greek civilization. Moreover, as a sorceress, she is also *transformative* by her very nature, which is also the crux of the Love/Strife duality. In Apollonius of Rhodes' *The Argonautica* (3rd c. BC)–as also in other older versions of the myth–Medea, hit by Eros' arrow, falls in love with the hero Jason and helps him and his argonauts steal the Golden Fleece from Colchis and return to Greece.[5] In exchange, she is promised his love and his hand in marriage. Here, it is 'Love' (Ἔρως) as a divine force that drives the plot; harmony is achieved when Jason triumphs *with the help* of Medea's love. Yet, although her love is powerful it is precisely this power that also makes it destructive, which Apollonius narratively foreshadows right at the moment she falls for Jason:

> "...just so was the destructive love which crouched unobserved and burnt in Medea's heart." [6]

Medea Sarcophagus. 140 - 150 AD, Altes Museum Berlin. Marble. Photo by Carole Raddato.

Euripides explores this further in his own tragedy *Medea* (431 BC), set after Medea and Jason's return to Greece, when things are not going well for them.[7] Some time has passed, and having already had two children with Medea, Jason must now marry the Corinthian Princess Glauce instead in order to secure his rightful place as a Greek prince. He also has to send Medea and their children into exile as a sign of his commitment to Corinth and King Creon, since Medea refuses to quietly accept Jason's new marriage. Jason's calculated choice is devastating for Medea, who sees matters of the heart in an emotional and more primal way than Jason, as he himself criticizes her for:

> "Although you could have stayed in this land and house by lightly bearing the deliberations of your betters, you will be banished for your foolish talk." [8]

Unable to accept his betrayal, Medea's Love transforms into Hate (see here: Strife) and she plots her revenge on the people and society that have wronged her. She kills not only Glauce and King Creon, but also, shockingly, her own children by Jason as a way to seek revenge upon him and his legacy. At the end of Euripides' play, by the time Jason is able to confront her, Medea is already making her escape to Athens in a chariot sent by Helios. Interestingly, she is also taking the bodies of their children with her, in order to bury them with the proper rites in Hera's precinct. Thus, although there is hatred, divine vengeance, and infanticide, the smallest sliver of love may still remain in her heart in this final attempt to bury her children. Euripides ends the play on this ambiguous note, and the audience is left to wonder about Medea's humanity vs. her divinity in more ways than one.

While these horrific murders, and especially the infanticide, dehumanize Medea, perhaps that's precisely how we're meant to read her. In Euripides' tragedy, she exists beyond human morality and human rationality. Even the chorus–functioning as a bridge between the audience's emotional response and the narrative of the play–identifies how Medea acts in a manner that is incomprehensible to human beings:

> "Sorry creature, why does mind-oppressing rage fall on you and frenzied murder follow these other deaths? The stain of kindred blood is hard for humans" [9]

Moreover, her escape at the end of the play in a *deus ex machina* manner–quite literally, in a divine chariot lifted into the air by the μηχανή ('mechane') Greek theater device usually reserved for deities[10]–speaks to the fact that on some level she is *outside* of polite Greek civilization, and by extension, humanity itself. Thus I wonder, is she simply a 'girl-boss gone rogue' as some (superficial) feminist readings have suggested, or is she an embodiment of something even more ancient and mysterious than the female herself? I suggest, if we give Euripides some credit, it is this latter more complex thing. To return to the Empedoclean Love/Strife duality as an archetype, I posit that this is perhaps the clearest way to understand Medea's character. She is these primordial forces embodied; a commentary on the fragility of creation itself. Not only is she transformed by Love and later by Strife, she is also *the creator and the destroyer*—both of Jason's legacy (see: κλέος) as a hero, and also of the very children she birthed herself. This is to say, she destroys precisely that which she first created out of Love, with no regard for the woes of humanity and morality. I am not giving a positive spin on Euripides' *Medea* or celebrating her as some 'empowered woman'; in fact, I argue that she can only be truly understood as a primordial force because she is so *unwomanly* and *non-human* in this story. It is worth keeping in mind, also, that as a princess of Colchis and as a sorceress with mysterious powers, she represents all that is foreign to Greek civilization. Her inability to fit in once in Greece with Jason reflects not only that her purpose in the creation of Jason's legacy is served, but that now she herself will be the harbinger of his destruction. Her foreign and magical aspects are key; if Greek civilization represents humanity, rationality, and ordered creation, Medea instead represents the primordial, the irrational, and the chaotic. For this reason, I suggest that the character of Medea can be understood as the *microcosmic* representation of the archetypical Empedoclean Love/Strife *cosmic* cycle–with creation and civilization as the fragile, negotiated limbo between these two unconscious forces.

Salvator Rosa, 'The Death of Empedocles,' painting, c. 1665-1670

The Ancients recognized this archetype in the Medea myth implicitly, since all variations and artistic depictions of her story emphasize her divine and mysterious nature. This understanding is inherited by the Romans as well in their adaptations of the Medea story such as in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* [11]and *Heroides*,[12] and this is also seen in later depictions of Medea on ancient grave stelae and sarcophagi. Here, interestingly, we might ask why the ancients connected Medea to funeral rites, death, and the afterlife. Besides the obvious fact that she divinely escapes death in her various narratives herself, there might also be an implicit recognition that Medea's archetype is one of destruction and rebirth. Not only does she rise from the very ashes she creates, she goes on living and being 'reborn' through the many variations and additions to her story–much beyond her life with Jason–that have spawned since Euripides' time. Indeed, much more can and has been said just on this connection between Medea's many lives and ancient funeral rites.[13] Given this richness of Medea's interpretive tradition and the fact that her myth also existed much before Empedocles ever wrote his philosophy, I am not so much arguing that Medea was intentionally Empedoclean as much as I am arguing that she represents a mythic archetype in the ancient unconscious that develops and becomes manifest in Empedocles' philosophy of Love and Strife.

Our continued fascination with the Medea archetype even in modern times speaks to how we're all still drawing from that 'ancient unconscious,' at least in our storytelling and art. One such example I personally enjoyed is Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Medea* (1969); an adaptation of her story largely based on the narratives of *The Argonautica* and Euripides' own *Medea*.[14] Much like her Euripides counterpart, Pasolini's Medea is foreign, primal, magical, and temperamental–juxtaposed sharply against Jason and Greek civilization. Played by the beautiful and exotic-looking Maria Callas dressed in vaguely 'oriental' garments, Pasolini's Medea brings to the vivid big screen the essence of the Greek myth. Her clothing, her makeup, her enchanting beauty, etc. all speak to her characterization as a powerful sorceress and femme fatale from a strange land. Pasolini is also quite intentional in how he characterizes Medea's homeland. The Colchis scenes are all filmed in the rugged landscape of Cappadocia, Turkey and the peculiar mix of Tibetan, Persian, and Balkan music and soundscapes adds to this mystical and foreign atmosphere. In contrast, Pasolini depicts Jason and Greek society as an almost Apollonian-ideal; a mise-en-scène of gleaming white marble, order, and of 'virtuous' citizens. However, chaos is always bubbling under the surface in Pasolini's film, as in Euripides' play. The final moment of catharsis in the film is when Medea achieves her revenge on Jason and Corinth, not just by her murderous acts but also by setting fire to the palace (Pasolini's own narrative invention).

I suggest that Pasolini is recognizing the importance of the 'primordial' to the Medea archetype here–the element of fire, and through it Medea, becomes a destructive force much stronger than the civilized world. Like Euripides' version, Pasolini's Medea is not only not morally good, but she is also completely outside of the bounds of human rationality and can only be understood as a cosmic mystery. I highlight that through this recognition and visualization, Pasolini implicitly shows Medea's Empedoclean aspects play out on film; her primordial magic both creates and destroys Jason's legacy, and civilization by extension. Thus, Empedocles' cosmic duality of Love and Strife are at work not just in the ancient versions of Medea I previously discussed, but also in her more modern adaptations. To be sure, Medea becomes an archetype not just in the colloquial sense, but also particularly in a Jungian sense, as a representation of some collective ancient unconscious manifesting in our art even today.

Maria Callas as Medea, Image from: Pier Paolo Pasolini, dir. Medea, 1969 (Italy; Port Washington, NY: Entertainment One, 2011, DVD).

One could go even further along this exploration, and, as some have done, consider Medea as an embodiment of another generative ancient duality, namely that of the 'Apollonian and Dionysian,' as explored by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*[15] and also as later developed by Camille Paglia in her *Sexual Personae*.[16] This is certainly relevant, not just for understanding Medea, but also for all of Euripides' tragedies in general. Relatedly, the Freudian 'Eros' (life instinct) and 'Thanatos' (death instinct) also speak to the idea of the dual tension involved in the creative processes of civilization–similar to what Empedocles' philosophy outlines.[17] There is much more that can be written comparing these various creative dualities. For now though, I think it is safe to say that the Medea myth is most interesting when read as a cosmic archetype. In fact, to view her story simply as that of a human woman–'anti-heroine,' 'feminist,' 'villain,' or otherwise–might be to miss the point of her myth entirely. I underscore that when it comes to the domains of art and mythology many mysterious and ancient dualities operate both intertextually and metatextually (via adaptations), more than any of us realize. Myth is not *Truth*, but it isn't *untrue* either. It is powerful precisely because it is eternal, adaptable across the ages, and reveals something truer than plain fact is able to. This is also why mythology and philosophy always shared a close and bidirectional relationship for the ancients. Myth exposes our own impulses to us, and in the Jungian sense, connects us back to some primitive shared unconscious, long forgotten or outgrown now, but still occasionally manifest in our artistic and literary traditions. Therefore, if nothing else, I wanted this essay to highlight the ways in which even an ancient like Empedocles may still whisper to us moderns, from deep inside the primordial fires of Mt. Etna.

1. For a good English translation of the fragments, see: Brad Inwood, *The Poem of Empedocles* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).
2. "ἦι γὰρ καὶ πάρος ἔσκε, καὶ ἔσσεται, οὐδέ ποτ', οἴω, τούτων ἀμφοτέρων κενεώσεται ἄσπετος αἰών."; Empedocles, "Fragment 20/16," in Inwood, *The Poem of Empedocles*, 213
3. See: Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 1923, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990).; Also: J. Laplanche and J-B. Pontalis, "Thanatos," in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W.W. Norton & Company: 1974)..
4. See: Carl Jung, *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious*, *Collected Works* vol. 9 pt. 1, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1981).
5. See: Apollonius of Rhodes, *The Argonautica*, trans. Richard Hunter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
6. "τοῖος ὑπὸ κραδίῃ εἰλυμένος αἴθετο λάθρῃ οὖλος Ἔρως"; Apollonius, *The Argonautica*, Book 3, trans. Hunter, 72.
7. See: Euripides, *Medea*, trans. Diane J. Rayor (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).
8. "σὺ γάρ, παρὸν γῆν τήνδε καὶ δόμους ἔχειν κούφως φερούσῃ κρεισσόνων βουλεύματα, λόγων ματαίων οὕνεκ' ἐκπεσῇ χθονός;"; Euripides, *Medea*, line 448, trans. Rayor.
9. "δειλαία, τί σοι φρενοβαρὴς χόλος προσπίτνει καὶ ζαμενὴς (...) φόνος ἀμείβεται; χαλεπὰ γὰρ βροτοῖς ὁμογενῆ μιάσματ' (ἐπὶ γαῖαν αὐτοφόνταις ξυνῳδά) θεόθεν πίτνοντ' ἐπὶ δόμοις ἄχη."; Euripides, *Medea*, line 1265, trans. Rayor.
10. See an overview of 'mechane' as used in the Athens theater here: Thomas G. Chondros, K. Milidonis, G. Vitzilaios, and J. Vaitsis, ""Deus-Ex-Machina" reconstruction in the Athens theater of Dionysus," *Mechanism and Machine Theory* vol. 67 (Sept. 2013): 172-191, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mechmachtheory.2013.04.010.
11. See: Ovid, "Medea and Jason," Book 7, *Metamorphoses*, trans. David Raeburn (New York: Penguin Classics, 2004).
12. See: Ovid, Letter 12, *Ovid's Heroides: A New Translation and Critical Essays*, trans. Paul Murgatroyd, Reeves, and Parker (London: Routledge, 2017).
13. For a discussion of Medea in Roman sarcophagi, see: Sophie Buchanan, "Representing Medea on Roman Sarcophagi: Contemplating a Paradox," *Ramus* vol. 41, no. 1–2 (2012): 144–60, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0048671X00000291.
14. Pier Paolo Pasolini, dir. *Medea*, 1969 (Italy; Port Washington, NY: Entertainment One, 2011, DVD).
15. See: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 1872, trans. Shaun Whiteside (New York: Penguin Classics, 1994).
16. See: Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).
17. See: Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1929, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, reprinted, 2010).

Medea in Helios' Chariot (side A), Red-Figure Calyx-Krater, South Italian, 400 BC, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH, Image from: https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1991.1.

Multidisciplinary Learning at the University: An Interview with Dr. Harry R. Lewis

Scarlett Rose Ford

In the fall of 1964, Harry R. Lewis first stepped foot on the campus of Harvard College as an undergraduate student. 10 years later, in 1974, he joined the Harvard faculty. Now in 2024, 60 years after his first arrival, Lewis is beginning his 51st year on faculty at Harvard University. Over these years as a student, professor, and Dean of the College, Lewis has developed a unique love for the University — a love that pushes her to grow to her greatest potential.

On September 27, 2024, Lewis came to the Abigail Adams Institute (AAI) and spoke about what this constructive love looks like. How can Harvard grow back into what it once was? Lewis discussed much of this in his book on higher education, *Excellence Without a Soul: Does Liberal Education Have a Future?*, which focuses on the failures that a university subjects itself to when it focuses so heavily on academic excellence that it loses sight of its ultimate purpose: turning young people into educated, well-rounded, and responsible adults.

In this conversation at AAI, Lewis accredited this shift in higher education to artificial disciplinary divides and the reluctance of students to stray from their selected departments. Lewis promotes the opposite; he encourages students to take classes outside of their fields, using their time in school to experiment and grow.

While discussing the importance of multidisciplinary learning, Lewis spoke on how his educational journey and experience at Harvard led him to view the humanities as an essential part of forming a holistic student. He noted that disciplinary divisions are not inherent to the education system, but are a rather recent academic development.

“Disciplinary divisions are an artifact of the way the academic enterprise has developed, not in ancient times, but really only in the last century/century and a half,” Lewis said. “It used to be that everybody taught everything, and you were supposed to know everything. We understand why that's not feasible anymore.”

Lewis made sure to distinguish between interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary learning, clarifying his preference for the latter. “It's not like these are discrete, opposing things interacting,” he said, drawing from his undergraduate advisor Tony Oettinger, who was both a linguist and computer scientist. “The individual should draw from multiple threads to inform their learning.”

In an attempt to bring multidisciplinary learning back into the 2020s classroom, Lewis started teaching a class in his retirement titled, “Classic Papers of Computer Science.” The course is open to all of Harvard and was attended by over 100 students last year. It goes through 50 papers on the history of computer science, ranging from Aristotle to the 1980s.

“We start with Aristotle’s *Prior Analytics*, true and false,” Lewis said. “I start the class with Raphael’s *School of Athens*, where everybody's talking, everybody's listening, nobody's alone. Nobody's sitting there waiting for somebody else to explain something to them. This is what we're trying to create. Everybody's got a different background, and they bring different things to the table.”

While speaking on this class, Lewis criticized the modern territoriality in academia and advocated for a more integrated approach to education. “There's a very strong disincentive for faculty to be multidisciplinary because they will get stuff wrong, and they're embarrassed when they do,” he said. “It would be an ambition for me for the perfect university to, among all of the other things we need to address, lower the level of resentment and offense when we wander out of our designated lanes.”

In saying this, Lewis stressed the need for open mindedness across the whole University — for faculty as well as students. All must not be scared to branch out of their disciplines to form a more holistic education, both for themselves and for others. This will inevitably involve some failure, but as Lewis argues, that’s the beauty of great academic adventure.

Dr. Harry Lewis’ Book Recommendations

Q: *What’s a book that changed your life?*

A: “I read *The Origin of Species* in my early teens, and it completely changed my understanding of time and of the order of the universe. There was no going back after that — I have ever since been a materialist, skeptical of metaphysical explanations, and always try to see things from through a lens of gradual changes over incomprehensible spans of time.”

Q: *What book would you recommend that all students read while in college?*

A: “It would be cheating to recommend *Excellence Without a Soul*! I am trying to write an advice book for students going to college. But I don’t have it yet. I’m just going to recommend two of my favorite books — really the only books I reread regularly.”

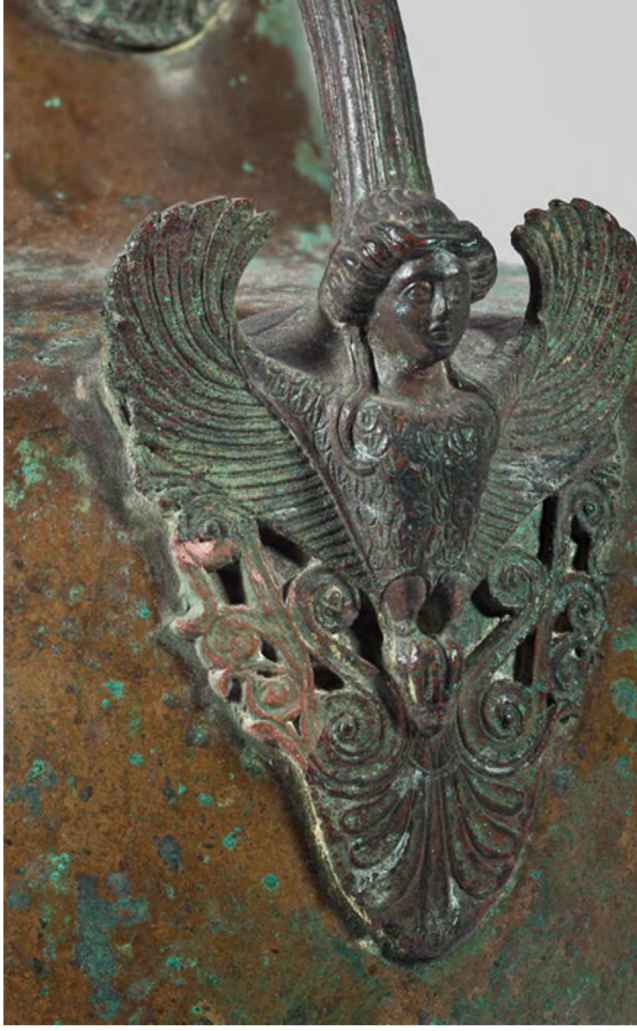
“George Orwell’s *Coming up for Air*: It’s an easy read, funny and absurd, but it’s also about our relation to our younger and older selves, and to our sense of home and belonging, the constancy and change in our lives. And an uneasy sense that we are on the precipice of a catastrophic war, as we always seem to be today. [It’s] humorous but not cheerful.

“Norman Maclean’s *A River Runs Through It*: This is a cheat because it’s about the part of Montana where my summer place is, except that it’s also about love and aging and death, and the eternity of natural beauty as a setting for the messes we make of our human lives. But the main reason to read it is that the prose is moving and spectacular and pellucid.

These are two books which are not only good reading for college students — they are two books that are short and riveting enough that you could actually get college students to read them!”

PHIL 7 goes to the Harvard Art Museums

Mariana Beatriz Noé



On the crisp morning of December 2, I led my PHIL 7 class, "Introduction to Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy," to the Harvard Art Museums. For months, we had delved into the thoughts of Ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, navigating through intricate concepts, arguments, and counterarguments. Yet, every civilization is steeped not only in ideas but also in tangible artifacts. The Ancient Greeks and Romans left behind coins, drinking cups, toys, pitchers, tools, dishes, graves, and a myriad of other objects. While texts offer us a fascinating glimpse into their minds, these artifacts open another door to understanding. I sought to present both facets to my students, so on that chilly Saturday, we ventured to the museum.

As we crossed the threshold of the Ancient Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Art rooms, we were greeted by the imposing presence of an Etruscan Sphinx from 550-540 BCE. These enigmatic creatures stood at tombs entrances, safeguarding the dead and their treasures. In ancient cemeteries, sphinxes of varying sizes adorned monuments of differing heights—a sight that must have been awe-inspiring. Yet, the students and I discerned a paradox inherent in the museum's sphinx: once a guardian of the dead against intruders, she now guards the entrance to an exhibit showcasing the dead's possessions.

Passing the sphinx, we soon found ourselves before a case brimming with ancient coins. In our contemporary world, we view coins as mere symbols of value. Melt a quarter, and it yields a modest spoonful of copper and nickel, worth less than the coin itself. But the coins in the museum's cases, forged from silver and gold, held intrinsic value. Melt them, and they retained their worth in a different form. For the ancients, coins were far more than symbols. Among these treasures, my favorite is a silver stater from Knossos (Crete) dating from 300-270 BCE. This city was home to the legendary King Minos, who commissioned Daedalus to construct a labyrinth for his son, the Minotaur. The reverse of the stater reveals this intricate labyrinth.

Beyond the sphinx and the Minotaur's labyrinth, the students discovered a third mythical creature lurking in the museum: a siren perched atop a bronze hydria—a water jar. Some students, expecting the enchanting fish-tailed maidens, were surprised to see the museum's siren as a human-headed bird. Greek sirens were indeed avian, not mermaids. This revelation reshaped their understanding of the famous episode in the *Odyssey*: Odysseus did not fear the sirens' seductive beauty, for they appeared quite fearsome. Instead, it was their mesmerizing song that posed the real danger.

Images from Harvrard Art Museum

Necessity and Nature in Plato's *Timaeus*

Peini Feng

"It is not in the still calm of life, or the repose of a pacific station, that great characters are formed. The habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties. Great necessities call out great virtues."

— *Abigail Adams*

We all know that necessity compels us. When necessity forces us to sleep, we sleep; when necessity forces to us eat, we eat. And, as Abigail Adams says, when necessity forces us to have great virtues, we attain great virtues. I believe Plato also agrees with this. More extraordinarily, Plato thinks that necessity, or nature, compels us to seek that which is beyond necessity. Necessity compels us to desire something good, but we may not always have the good we want in the present nature. In the pursuit of the good, we are forced to seek beyond the present nature. However, in this process, we will encounter our own limitations due to our *human* nature. Although nature encourages us to seek itself, it discourages us from going beyond our own human nature. This tension between nature and human nature is beautifully revealed in Plato's *Timaeus*. This Platonic dialogue contains three parts: Socrates' descriptions of the best regime and its men, Critias' accounts of old hearsay about Atlantis, and the *nomos* of Timaeus. Through a close reading of these three parts, we will see how they consistently address the tension between nature and human nature, and prudently stay within the proper limit of human nature while pursuing things beyond mere nature.

The beginning conversation between Socrates and Timaeus indicates an insufficiency of nature in human affairs and a need for mankind to rectify it. Socrates starts the whole dialogue by counting the people present and noticing that "our fourth" is absent today (17A-B). This conveys an impression of incompleteness. With this impression, Timaeus's response to Socrates tells us the cause for this incompleteness: the person is absent due to some illness, and "he wouldn't have been left out of this meeting willingly" (17A-B). This shows two things: nature can cause a sense of incompleteness, and man wants to rectify it. Illness, which is an unbidden natural disaster, stops people from doing what they want and causes some incompleteness in human perception. Nature causes a problem that man detests, and man wants to rectify it. This desire of rectification is further supported when Socrates asks Timaeus whether other present people will do "the task of filling the missing one's part" (17A-B). Socrates asks this because he has the desire to rectify the incompleteness caused by nature. In addition, as Timaeus then accepts the task, the first aim of this whole dialogue thus appears: rectifying an incompleteness caused by the limitation of nature.

After this aim is set, Timaeus asks Socrates to recount from the beginning what he said the day prior about the best regime and the men made by it. Socrates then starts to recount the principles of the best regime and its men. These principles are agreed upon by Timaues, Critias, and Hermocrates as well, because Timaeus says that "the regime you recounted was very much to the mind of us all" (17C-D). Socrates starts his description of the best regime by separating "the class of those who were to make war on the city's behalf" from all other classes (17C-D). This may indicate that for Socrates, the class that makes war is the most notable part of the best regime and should be distinguished above the others. After that, Socrates further elaborates on the mission of the war-making class. He says, "Those who had to make war on behalf of all, and they alone, had to be the guardians of the city if anyone from outside or even of those within might set out to do her harm" (17D-18A). The class is here specified as "the guardians of the city", and its mission is to protect the city from within and without. This shows that the potential harm of the city could come from not only what is outside the city, but also inside the city. What is outside the city is not ruled by the guardians, while what is inside the city is ruled by the guardians. As the harm of the city could come from within or without, harm could come from both people *not* ruled by the guardians and from people ruled by the guardians.

Then, Socrates immediately adds something that seemingly contradicts himself. He says, "They'd [the guardians] be gentle in dealing out justice to those ruled by them since they were by nature friends" (18A-B). But why would the guardians need to guard the city against the people who are "by nature friends"? If they are natural friends, there *naturally* would not be danger among them. But due to some unexplained reason, potential harm arises from natural friends, and the guardians need to guard against them. The intervention of the guardians is indispensable even in the best regime because nature, or natural friendship, is insufficient to preserve the city. We may thus suggest that nature itself is not sufficient for the city to maintain itself, and the rectification of human beings is always necessary for the city to sustain itself.

This necessity to rectify nature is further revealed when Socrates discusses procreation in the ideal regime. Socrates recounts that, in order for the people in the best regime to become "as good as possible in their natures right from the start", "the rulers, male, and female, had to contrive some sort of lottery by secret ballots for marital coupling so that the separate classes of bad and good men will respectively be mated by lot with women who were like them" (18D-E). Socrates further says that the ruler should "keep a sharp lookout" to keep the worthy ones nurtured and the unworthy ones dispersed (19A-B). This indicates that Socrates thinks the best regime should secretly manipulate the marital coupling to ensure that good people and bad people are separately mated. On this basis, the rulers should also look for worthy people in bad situations and bring them to good nurture while dispersing bad people. This reveals that nature would mate good people with bad ones and put good people in bad situations. Nature is not sufficient for good people to have good mates and be nurtured properly. This then generates the necessity for the rulers in the best regime to rectify nature and make it good for the state. Thus, we see again the insufficiency of nature and the necessity of mankind to rectify it.

Moreover, when Socrates finishes his account of the best regime and desires to see the city in motion, which is the second aim of later speeches, the specific thing that Socrates wants to see may further prove the insufficiency of nature and the necessity of man to rectify it. Socrates firstly indicates that he wants to see the city actualized, and then specifies what he hopes for by saying:

> "For I would gladly hear someone give a full account of her [the best regime] struggling against other cities in those contests in which cities contend—how she made a fitting entrance into war and rendered appropriate payment to her education and nurture in her dealings with each of the cities, by the way, she acted in her deeds and negotiate in her speeches" (19B-D).

Later, Socrates specifically requests that "you alone of those now living would render her [the city] engaged in a fitting war" (20B-C). This shows that, the main content of the city in motion is the city in war. What does it mean to have a city in motion rather than in stillness? When a city moves, it starts to interact with others. And this interaction is described by Socrates as the struggle against other cities. In addition, the first example of a city in motion Socrates mentions here is "how she made a fitting entrance into war", and the last thing he mentions he wants to see is "her [the city] engaged in war". Even the best regime, when it starts to move in the course of nature and interact with the other elements of the world, enters war. As Socrates says, the war of cities is triggered because the guardians of the cities sense harm from outside or within the city and try to protect the city (17D-18A). This suggests that even in the best situation, harm exists. This may further imply that the cosmos is hardly a harmonious structure due to the constant fight between its compositions. The world, or the natural structure of the world, is disharmonious because mankind always needs to protect itself from continuous harm.

After Socrates's speech, Critias tells an account from old hearsay that shares the same perception of nature's insufficiency for human beings. When Critias tells his account, the priest in the anecdote implies that nature is not only insufficient for mankind's living, but also destructive in most cases. Nature is a threat to human beings because natural disasters, such as fires and floods, have destroyed many peoples (22C-23B). In addition, even when the geographical and physical situation is suitable for a city to survive, it is not sufficient for human beings to live with it alone. As the priest says,

> "Now at this time, the goddess, having arrayed you before all others with all this arrangement and order, settled you by singling out the region in which you were born, since she observed in it a good blending of seasons, one that would bear the most prudent men…and you dwelled in the observance of such laws as these" (24C-E).

"The goddess" provides two things for her people in the city: a suitable physical position and laws. For "the goddess", a suitable physical position is not enough for her state and must be aided by laws. Thus, in Critias's speech, nature itself alone is insufficient for the living of human beings as well.

Critias also in several places implies the limitations of human beings. When the priests have a conversation with Solon, "the very oldest of the priests" says to Solon, "Greeks are always children…for in those souls you don't have a single old opinion derived from ancient hearsay or any study hoary with time" (22B-C). After that, the priest starts to describe what happened before Greek's oldest account of history. This implies that the Egyptians are superior to the Greeks in this situation not because they have more knowledge, but because their hearsay is older. Fundamentally, hearsay can only give them opinions, but opinions are disparaged in the dialogue. Later in the dialogue, Timaeus says "Now the one is grasped by intellection accompanied by a rational account since it's always in the same condition; but the other in its turn is opined by opinion accompanied by irrational sensation since it comes to be and perishes and never genuinely is" (28A-B). This shows that opinion is something accompanied by irrational sensation because it is not always true. Furthermore, Timaeus says that "if he [demiurge] should look to what has come to be, using a begotten model, the thing isn't beautiful" (28B-C). This shows that things that come out of what comes to be, including opinions, are not beautiful. Thus, the opinions of Greek and Egypt are both irrational and unbeautiful, but they live by them. Human beings who live by opinions live by irrational and unbeautiful things. Therefore, human beings are limited as they need to depend on irrational and unbeautiful things.

Moreover, as human beings are limited, their over-manipulation is bad. The priest says, among the many great deeds that are done by ancient Athenians, "there is one that rises above them all in magnitude and virtue" (24E-25A), which is the deed that "stopped a great power…in insolence". The great power, which is the kings on the island of Atlantis, "gathered together into one" and enslaved other regions. Athenians in turn stopped them by preventing other cities "from being enslaved" and liberating other cities from enslaving "all ungrudgingly" (25C-D). Athenians here are praised because they stop an insolent power from enslaving other regions. This indicates that insolence and its corresponding enslaving are not good. *Insolence is the ignorance of the limitation of human beings.* Thus, it is good to understand the limitation of human beings and avoid insolence.

Furthermore, at the end of Critias's speech, he lays out the plan for later speeches, and this plan shows that nature alone without the aid of human beings is not enough for the best regime. From Timaeus's speech, Critias will learn about the nature of men, since Timaeus knows the nature of all. From Socrates, Critias is going to learn how to educate men to the highest degree. This shows that, in the construction of the city, Socrates's part is about the nurture of human beings, and this is based on the understanding of the nature of human beings. This may suggest that, even if human nature is understood, it is still necessary to *modify* it to have the best regime.

Timaeus' speech comes after the speeches of Socrates and Critias and shares some explicit or implicit premises with them. They share the fundamental attitude of the later part of the speech dealing with the construction of the cosmos. After Timaeus indicates that the cosmos has come to be by some cause, he says: "now to discover the poet and father of this all is quite a task, and even if we discovered him, to speak of him to all men is impossible" (28C-29A). Why is it impossible "to speak of him to all men"? I would suggest that this is due to the fundamental limitation of human beings. As shown in Critias's speech, human beings need to depend on opinions, which are something irrational and unbeautiful. As opinions are believed irrationally rather than acquired rationally, there would be difficulty in communication between human beings. In addition, in Socrates's speech, the emphasis on the constant war between cities also implies this difficulty in communication between people.

This reservation of Timaeus is more explicitly emphasized when he says they should be satisfied by "a likely story" (29C-D). He says:

> "But if we provide likelihoods inferior to none, we should be well-pleased with them, remembering that who speak as well as you my judges have a human nature so that it's fitting for us to be receptive to the likely story about these things and not to search further for anything beyond it (29C-E)."

Human beings are always limited by their human nature, so they would be satisfied with a likely story and not look beyond it. Human nature does not allow us to have something more. This warning of Timaeus recalls the censure toward the insolent kings in Critias's speech. Those insolents who attempt to surpass a likely story and pursue a universal empire fit for everyone are ignorant about the limitations of human nature. In addition, a likely story is needed here because Socrates ordered Timaeus to rectify the incompleteness and present the city in motion. However, just as nature causes absence and incompleteness in the beginning of the dialogue, human nature causes Timaeus to be limited in a likely story; just as the absent one is willing to come but cannot come due to nature, Timaeus here is willing to know the whole but cannot give a perfect account due to human nature. Nature triggers human beings to rectify it while preventing them from perfecting it.

In conclusion, the speeches of Socrates, Critias, and Timaeus are consistent and share some fundamental views. They are conscious about human beings' will to rectify insufficient nature and the fundamental limitation of this rectification. This understanding of nature and human nature leads them to have a very cautious attitude toward the possibility of a universal empire and a thorough knowledge of the all. Nature forces human beings to seek that which is beyond nature, but human nature forces human beings to stay in that which is human.

Reflections on "The Machine Has No Tradition": An Intensive Summer Seminar at the Abigail Adams Institute

Danilo Petranovich

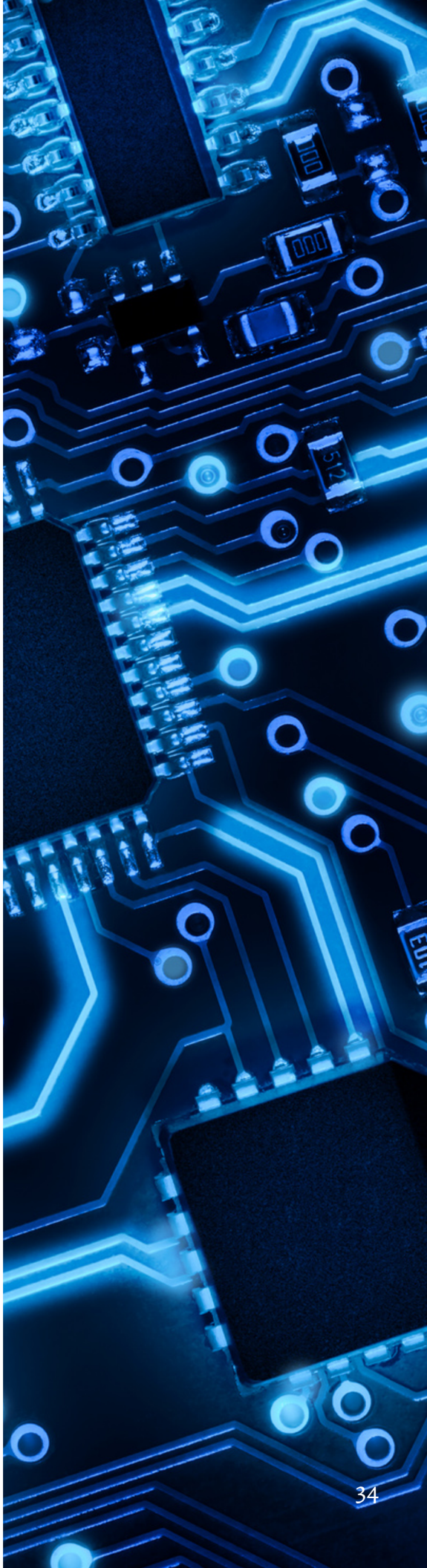
The distinctive feature of life today is that our lives appear to be technologically liberated from nature. We live in human-made physical, social and virtual environments. The human condition is unbundled, disrupted, and made optional, even as supposed human distinctives like speech, creation, and rationality are automated, simulated, and replicated.

The specter of technology raises afresh the question: what is a human being, and what does it take to stay one? In an immersive weeklong seminar, the students at the Abigail Adams Institute grappled with the essence of technology and life in a technological society. We explored how technology is reshaping our souls and our society and what a humanistic approach to technology might look like. We engaged with the best that has been said and thought about technology, while also hearing from both technology creators and practitioners of endangered human traditions.

The seminar further balanced a focus on the increasing technological mediation of human consciousness on the one hand, and the shifting material foundations of social life on the other. We looked closely into the transformation of economy, psychology, politics, gender, religion and culture: in short, the transformation of humanity.

As a pupil as well as lecturer in the seminar, my main goal was to understand the roots of our technopolitical order and to demystify the seeming complexities of our social and economic life under this dispensation. Especially intriguing and salient was the question of technology and capitalism, and trying to disentangle which features belong to one or the other, and what difference that might make to how we can live better today.

We also explored alternative technopolitical arrangements in the twentieth century, like corporatism and fascism, and interrogated their answers to the big questions. The applied portion of the seminar asked the participants to engineer humanistic solutions to some problematic aspect of our world that was brought about by some gains in efficiency. The seminar, therefore, looked to both top-down and bottom-up approaches to addressing and possibly ameliorating the more dystopic features of modernity.



Gonzalo Cervantes

In today's age, we're often caught up in the now, barely pausing to reflect on how we got here or where we're headed. It seems that in our rush to build the future, we're overlooking the lessons of the past, and sometimes it feels like the future has no connection to tradition. As a father to two young girls, I find myself often pondering what kind of world we're creating for them. My thoughts usually lean towards pessimism unless I'm imagining the exciting possibilities of rockets, spaceships, endless energy, easy access to knowledge, freedom of speech, and general prosperity—then I can't help but feel a spark of optimism.

However, my Catholic faith always brings me back to a more grounded perspective, reminding me of the transcendental nature of our existence and what should matter. This spiritual reflection often tilts me back towards pessimism (earthly wise), not out of despair but because I see a culture that's lost its memory—forgetting both its roots and its reasons. This makes the world a tricky place for those of us trying to save our souls.

"The Machine Has No Tradition" was a seminar that truly opened my eyes. It wasn't just an academic exercise; it felt like a deep dive into how our lives are being shaped by technologies we barely understand. Jon [Askonas], Nathan [Pinkoski], Mary [Harrington], and Danilo [Petranovich] led us through a series of real, tough questions, engaging with ideas from Karl Marx to Marc Andreessen without hesitation. This wasn't just about getting a clearer picture of technology's evolution and meaning but seeing its tangible effects on people I care about and recognizing its unstoppable momentum. This seminar is a great opportunity for anyone caught at the crossroads of technology and society, providing us with questions that challenge the status quo rather than easy answers.

To me, the significance of posing the right questions about technology and its future rests in the potential to enhance our freedom and independence from those who control the narrative. Often, social and technological experiments become entrenched in society either through public policy or through the widespread adoption of "highly successful" technological products. Once these trends are established, opting out can be nearly impossible. I believe that to actively shape the future we want for our children, we must engage more deeply with these technologies and their broader impacts on societal trends.

Approaching technology from a social and philosophical perspective is a great endeavor. It not only fosters a dialogue about technology's role in shaping our world but also inspires young minds to explore the fundamental aspects of our society and technology and its potential trajectory. This deep, thoughtful examination equips us to make informed decisions that are aligned with our principles and the future we envision. If this resonates with you, I highly encourage you to apply for the next version of the seminar.

Biographies

Contributors

Joseph Quinn graduated from Boston College in 2022 and recently returned from teaching English in France for two years. Joe is an alumnus of the Abigail Adams Institute.

Isabel Hogben is a high school senior living in the New York City area. Her favorite authors are James Baldwin and C.S. Lewis. This is Izzi's second year participating in AAI's "The Great Conversation" online weekly discussion group.

Paul Chin graduated from Harvard College in May of 2024 with a degree in Chemistry and Physics. In his senior year, he took three English classes – all on or closely related to poetry. He now teaches 8th grade science and high school physics at his high school alma mater, Boston Trinity Academy, and maintains his love of poetry by reading the works of Helen Vendler when he can. Paul's article on George Herbert is based on a Student Scholar Talk he gave at AAI in May 2024.

Elliott Jones is a junior at Boston College studying Philosophy. Beyond his studies, Elliott serves as Editor-in-Chief for *Dianoia*, Boston College's undergraduate philosophy journal.

Thomas Juhasz is a Harvard College junior studying classics and computer science. He enjoys Thomistic philosophy, loves learning new languages, and performs with various chamber and orchestral ensembles in the greater Boston area. Thomas is a Student Fellow at AAI.

Tom Sarrouf graduated *summa cum laude* from Boston College with a B.A. in History, Philosophy, and Secondary Education. He is the Senior Academic Programs Manager at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, as well as the co-host of ISI's podcast, "Conservative Conversations with ISI." He is also a teacher for World Youth Alliance, whom he has worked for as an intern and teacher since 2020, and whom he represented at the 54th session for the Commission on Population and Development at the United Nations. Tom was involved with AAI as an undergrad at BC, and his article is based on a talk he gave for AAI in February 2024.

Shani Agarwal Hood earned her A.B. in Classics from Bowdoin College in 2020, where she also minored in Film Studies. She received a fellowship to earn her M.T.S. from Harvard University in 2023, focusing on Medieval Religion and the Arts. Between her undergraduate studies and her time at Harvard, she worked as a teaching assistant at a Catholic school in Maine and held a position with the Classic Planning Institute. At Harvard, she was also a Teaching Fellow in the History of Art and Architecture department. Currently, she works as the Program Director for the Harvard Catholic Forum. Shani is a professional fellow at AAI and was a John Aroutiounian Fellow 2023 - 2024.

Scarlett Rose Ford is a current M.T.S. candidate at Harvard University. She previously attended the University of Alabama, where she received her B.A. in English and Religious Studies. In the interim between degrees, Scarlett Rose did editorial work in Vatican City, where she developed her current research on the history of Eastern Catholicism and trends within American Catholicism. While pursuing her M.T.S., she works as a news correspondent for Harvard Divinity School, a graduate assistant for Religion and Public Life, and a contributing writer for the Catholic publication *Aleteia*. When not writing, Scarlett Rose enjoys reading, baking, knitting, praying, and ambling around Cambridge. Scarlett is a John Aroutiounian Fellow at AAI.

Mariana Beatriz Noé received her Ph.D. from Columbia University in 2022 and her Licentiate degree in Philosophy (*summa cum laude*) from the University of Buenos Aires in 2015. At Harvard, she has taught Introduction to Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy (PHIL 7) as well as Art and Public Policy in Plato, Aristotle, and Beyond (PHIL 103A). Her areas of specialization are Ancient Philosophy and Ethics, but she also has teaching interests in the History of Philosophy. Her main research project examines how human nature shapes virtue, and she addresses this question at the intersection of ancient proposals and current concerns in ethics. Mariana is a John and Daria Barry Postdoctoral Fellow with the Harvard History of Philosophy Workshop, which is sponsored and supported by AAI.

Peini Feng is a junior studying political science at Boston College. He is particularly interested in the political implications of different metaphysical stances, and whether revelation is necessary for the best kind of life. Peini's article is based on a Student Scholar Talk he gave at AAI in May 2024.

Gonzalo Cervantes is an M.B.A. candidate at Babson College, interested in digital platforms, strategy, and product development with a concentration in Business Analytics and Machine Learning. He brings global experience, having developed and led projects in Argentina, Canada, Kenya, Mexico, the US, and Peru. His professional background spans social innovation, strategy consulting, public policy advisory for small governments, and academia, where he made his mark as an undergraduate communications management professor. Demonstrating a commitment to social impact, Gonzalo founded an NGO in 2015 focused on enhancing children's reading skills. Additionally, he pioneered a startup aimed at improving learning experiences for children during the pandemic, showcasing his innovative approach to education and technology. Gonzalo is a graduate Student Fellow at AAI and was an attendee of AAI's summer seminar, "The Machine Has No Tradition."

Founding Editors

Jonathan Locke Hart (Associate, Harvard University Herbaria) is an Honorary Professor at the School of Translation at Shandong University, where he was previously Chair Professor. Born in Canada, Jonathan earned a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from the University of Toronto and a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge. Affiliated with Kirkland House at Harvard over 35 years, he has held two Fulbrights at Harvard as well as appointments in English and in Comparative Literature. A poet, literary scholar, and historian, he has published widely and has taught at Toronto, Cambridge, Princeton, the Sorbonne Nouvelle, Peking University, and elsewhere.

Danilo Petranovich is the Director of the Abigail Adams Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Previously, Dr. Petranovich taught political science at Duke University and Yale University. His scholarly expertise is in nineteenth century European and American political thought, but his intellectual interests and loves are far more extensive. Dr. Petranovich received his B.A. in Social Studies from Harvard in 2000 and Ph.D. in Political Science from Yale University in 2007.

Iosif Gershteyn is the Chairman of the Ajax Biomedical Foundation, Senior Fellow at the Abigail Adams Institute, Visiting Scholar at the Medical University of South Caroline, and a poet. His work has been published in *International Iummunology, the Journal of Translational Immunology, Researchers.One, Quillett*e, and other publications.

Advisory Board

Tom Conley is the Abbot Lawrence Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies and of Romance Languages and Literatures 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 and 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.

Catherine Ezell has an advanced education in English literature and is a self-taught artist. She has experience in scholarly writing and has devoted her life to drawing and painting.

Henry Stratakis-Allen is a Ph.D. student at the University of Chicago studying medieval Islamic civilization. His research focuses on the political, intellectual, and cultural environment of the Islamic Near East during the era of the First Crusade, particularly focusing on the life of al-Ghazali and the impact of his work on contemporary political and intellectual conditions.

Cindy Chopoidalo is the Assistant Editor of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* and a member of Editor Canada. Her publications include S*hakespeare's First Tetralogy, Epic Poetry, Historiography: How a Dramatist Creates a Fictional World* and *Shakespeare's Possible Worlds*.

Managing Editor

Maura Cahill serves as the Director of Communications and Marketing at AAI. With a background in marketing and publishing, she handles the design and dissemination of all digital and print materials for AAI. She is also integrally involved in programming and all community-facing aspects of the Institute. Maura received her B.A. from Dartmouth College in 2020 with a major in English and a minor in Government.