

Colloquy

SPRING 2024

On Character



Cover art: Achilles 1&2 - Paul Harland-White

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Oblivion

Austin Suggs

I walk down shaded city streets, eyes low
To miss the gaze of a man who begs for
Just enough to eat, or not feel. Hungry?
Or nothing at all. Who am I to judge

The one who wishes for oblivion
When my gaze betrays I've long lived there too?
They say the rich and the poor inhabit
Different worlds. I think they just enter

Through separate doors to find the same bleak
Nothingness they sought, or stumbled into
Or were forced down. It's all so hard to say.
But soon enough, in life as in their deaths

They sink down into the deep, dark, dank ground
Having lived life chasing, but never found.



Poet's Nature Trail - Nadine Bucca

Sorrow

Stacey Rains

There is a reason that
hollow and hallowed
echo the same.

The word you mean to say
is not quirk or coincidence
but rather power, providence.

Like a hole made ready for planting
Like a pestle in mortar preparing the flavor
Like a discordance that yearns for the melody

Good redounds to good
and the painful echo
makes space
for the necessary silence.

Now I can hear "I am here."



Ripples - Paul Harland-White

Short Stories & Musings

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Contributors

Martha Franks

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Reading

Martha Franks

It was three o'clock in the morning, and Alison's mother sighed as she got up to go to Alison's room. Alison's father stirred and groaned at being woken untimely on yet another night. Again, again, again. Every night when she should have been sleeping and letting her parents sleep, Alison read books. Every night one of Alison's parents would come into her room at eleven or so, turn off the light and tell Alison to sleep. Alison would wait for her mother or father to leave, wait an extra few minutes for the coast to be all the way clear, and then turn the light on to read some more. Hours later one of her parents would get up again to turn off the light, hoping that by this time Alison had fallen asleep over her book and would not start the weary round again.

Punishment did not help. Alison submitted to whatever her parents imposed as if to a piece of bad luck unconnected to any cause and kept on reading. Once her exasperated parents tried removing the light entirely, but Alison found an answer to that. After waiting for the household to quiet down that night, she got up to curl in a nest behind the orange chair in the living room to read with the crystal glass lamp lowered to the floor. After Alison's mother had found her asleep behind the chair a few mornings running, the reading light was restored. Her parents decided that it was better to hope that Alison would eventually fall asleep in bed rather than behind the chair. They could see that there would be no surrender in this war.

Maybe war was the wrong word, as there was no malice in it. Alison needed to read and night was the time she had to do it in. She had no wish to battle or defeat her parents, it was just that reading was essential. Reading made the world livable. It made the world wide enough to dream of being somewhere else and someone else. The characters in books did not judge her or ask anything of her or shout at each other; they rescued her from the things that were hard about her life. She could ride along on their shoulders and feel with them as if she was experimenting with being them, making their mistakes and being proud of their successes in worlds that she could not have imagined on her own. Both of her parents understood all that, really, having

themselves loved to read as children. The battle among the three of them also united them.

On Christmas Alison found in her stocking a book with a French name, *Les Misérables*. It was fat and long, but it had amazing pictures and the first page drew her in immediately. Her mother, rushing around to arrange for Christmas dinner and celebrations, sighed as she always sighed at her own conflicting feelings about Alison's reading. She could have used some help with the cooking and table-setting, but her heart was glad when she saw Alison settle into a corner with her new book, the book that Alison's mother had loved most as a child.

Alison did not hear the bustle around her. She was in France, with Jean Valjean, stealing bread for his sister's children, being sent to be a galley slave as punishment, escaping and on the run from the police, the whole world against him. Then he was brought up short when, after he stole some silver candlesticks from a Bishop, the Bishop forgave him, and told him to keep them. Jean Valjean was paralyzed by this incomprehensible generosity just at the moment when Alison's father called her for Christmas dinner. She startled, looking up groggily into her suburban American home, nearly paralyzed herself by the contrast with her book. It took a while to remember who she was and what was expected of her.

Her imagination began to clear, though, after which it was fun to be with her aunts and her cousins. Alison spent the first part of dinner staring at the silver candlesticks on the table, lighted and glowing for the celebration. She watched the family's reflections moving and changing in the candlesticks' polished, elegant contours. No wonder Jean Valjean had tried to steal them—the images in them were beautiful, no matter how hard the life that they reflected. No wonder he had been paralyzed when the Bishop had given them as a gift—it's a world-changing thing to own something that can make a hard life beautiful, like books. The Bishop's gift was part of a bargain, Alison suddenly remembered, that Jean Valjean would no longer steal but become a part of society. She shook herself out of her reverie and joined the laughter of her family around the Christmas table.

School was out, so Alison could read all the next day. Jean Valjean began the

new life that the Bishop had demanded, disguising himself from the police. He did well for a while until the honesty he had promised to the Bishop forced him to reveal himself and return to his punishment in the galleys. Alison marked her place in the book and closed it in order to think about this dramatic moment of self-revelation. Her mother was cooking and Alison noticed for the first time how tired her mother looked. She put down the book entirely—she wanted to stretch it out and savor it anyway—and set the table for dinner without even being nagged. She was obeying the Bishop's bargain.

That night Alison and her parents slept undisturbed. In the morning Alison went eagerly back to the story to read about Jean Valjean running away from the galleys a second time. Having escaped, he went to find a little girl, the daughter of a woman to whom he had made a promise. The little girl was having a hard time where she was living. She had no books to help her, Alison thought, with pity. Jean Valjean rescued her and became her foster father, finding refuge in the shelter of a convent, in which she grew up. Reading about those thick convent walls with the quiet garden inside, Alison felt the enclosure of the book protecting her, too. Her parents had given her this world for Christmas.

There was a lot that Alison did not understand about the rest of the book. It centered around characters who rebelled from their parents and their country and fought for better, freer lives. She felt the power of it but it frightened her, as she was too young to imagine breaking with her own parents, no matter what their conflicts. It was not important, though, that she did not understand. The bargain struck between Jean Valjean and the Bishop held fast whether it was understood or not. On the night that she finished the book she wept over the death of Jean Valjean, reunited with his child at last in a poor, barren room graced and lit only by the flames of the silver candlesticks on the mantle.

Her mother found her asleep, the tears on her face, and turned off the light.



Forbidden Fruit - Nadine Bucca

Enkidu's Dwelling

Nadine Bucca

After they slew the forest demon, Enkidu and Gilgamesh celebrated their victory with great shouts and cries. They kissed each other.

"What great glory we have received," said Gilgamesh. "Tomorrow we shall cut seven cedars, but for now let us wash in the river and rest."

So, Gilgamesh and Enkidu bathed in the cool clear river at dusk, the sun's warm colors shining in the waters before disappearing with it behind the horizon.

Under the stars, they rested. They found a spot with few roots, a small clearing, and laid their cloaks there. The sky was bright with all its little lights. There were many cedars in the forest, tall and dark, reaching up to the heavens. They found a space between them, settled among them for the night.

In Humbaba's forest, there lived a great many creatures. Owls made their nighttime calls. They could hear a twig break, with a loud snap, as a fox roamed about.

It was not quiet like how the rest of the world seemed to still when they first wrestled each other or when Enkidu first laid his hand on Gilgamesh's heart.

Enkidu spoke. "Gilgamesh, my dear friend whose love is better than the love of Inanna, the goddess of love, we have slayed the forest demon. As he fell, so one day we must all fall. Do you fear death?"

"I have never known death." Gilgamesh looked up at the many stars, more than he had seen in the city. The dark sky seemed an endless river, with many small drops of sunlight sparkling on its surface. "Before I was only a thought, a small seed of a being," he said.

"Were you dead?" Enkidu asked.

“Yes, but I was waiting.”

“What if you had not become yourself? What if you had become a rock or a tree?”

“Then that’s what I would have been.”

They listened as another owl called and after, in the stillness that followed, there was the sound of the flowing river. Gilgamesh thought better of his answer.

“I do not know if I was dead before or if my mind was merely dormant. But Enkidu you came from clay, from the earth. Aruru shaped you. Were you content when you ate and drank with the gazelles? Were you alive?”

“My mind was wild but I was free. The priestess—she clothed me.”

“The priestess—she made you human.”

Enkidu turned from the stars to gaze at Gilgamesh, to see the dark rounds of his eyes. “No,” he said, taking his hand. “You did.”

“I didn’t feed you bread or give you drink. I didn’t pour forth knowledge for you.”

“Do you wish you had?” Enkidu whispered.

“I’m not jealous of a priestess.” Gilgamesh’s voice held firm.

Enkidu turned his gaze back to the stars, back to the slow moving clouds, covering and uncovering the light of the moon.

“I am,” he said, at last. “She is wiser than me.”

“I wish I’d done those things for you, but you have already gained all the knowledge you need.”

“Yet, I am ignorant,” said Enkidu.

Gilgamesh said nothing, but brought his hand to caress his lover’s knuckles, the grooves between his fingers, interlacing them with his own. Gilgamesh and Enkidu slept under the stars, resting in each other’s arms.

“Make me more human,” Enkidu said. “Make me more human than I am.”

Gilgamesh spoke, “What knowledge can we share together? We may hold each other, and you may kiss me, but what can two men hope to create?”

Enkidu replied, “We shall make what it is in our power to make.”

“Very well then. You are my companion formed from the earth. I cannot tame you.”

The next morning brought a chill over the water, a light fog. They gathered wood for a fire, ate the bread they had. The bread was still soft in the middle. It tasted to Enkidu like sweet grain, and nothing like the grass of the gazelles which now he hardly recalled.

“Do you understand,” Enkidu said. “The goddess made me because of the outcry against you—she made me to fight against you, to be your equal. You were a tyrant.”

“I know.”

“You were the worst tyrant. This pitcher wants water. The city down to its earth wants restitution.”

“I’ll make a monument then, build a wall. Maybe I’ll even make it to you,” Gilgamesh laughed and Enkidu followed.

“I expect more from someone who is one-third god.”

“Two-thirds actually.”

“Let me be your other third.”

“Why not half?”

“You must be careful, for then I may overtake you. You’re mostly god; I am completely man. I do not wish to be divine, but only as I am. Here, I have collected the seeds of a cedar,” Enkidu said. “Before we build, let’s plant.” Enkidu held out in his palm, the small seed cones.

“I wouldn’t take the hand of a lesser man,” replied Gilgamesh. He took the cedar seeds, then Enkidu’s hand, and they embraced.

“You have a great many questions and observations Enkidu,” said Gilgamesh. “We will cut down seven trees and build a raft, but first let this earth grow and nourish these little cedar trees to be, you who were born of clay.”

Enkidu blessed the earth. For seven days the two friends planted cedars placing each seed in the earth, and covering them, digging with their hands, washing in the stream. Both men found rest in their planting, a sweetness like honey, as strong as fermented grain, as potent as death.

And at the end of seven days, Gilgamesh dreamed. He saw the beginning, the separation of deep waters, the making of the gods.

The world became dark to Gilgamesh’s eyes.

Then Gilgamesh said, “I must run through a tunnel to catch the sun.”

And Enkidu responded, “Our days are numbered. Let me be your sun.” As he said this the leaves above him glittered with light.

“If only you were my sun,” Gilgamesh said.

In that garden, Gilgamesh and Enkidu lived.

Lady Sagredo

Cynthia Crane

Giovanni Francesco Sagredo (1571 – 1620) was a mathematician and scientist, and a friend of Galileo, who immortalized him as one of the interlocutors in his Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems. He attempted to solve the problem of measuring longitude with magnetism, and the English physicist William Gilbert called him the “great Magneticall man.” I imagine that like many know-it-all Renaissance men, he might have been difficult, if charming, to live with. Since he never married, I thought a bit of a romp with a nonexistent wife might serve us all to remember that even in the midst of greatness, we still want wine and chocolate for dessert, and we still want Galileo to talk about the stars.

“He’s coming tonight!”

“Who’s coming tonight?”

“Him!”

“Oh . . . him . . .,” Lady Sagredo said, and laughed at her husband the same way their son would laugh at Cook panicking about nothing.

“Stop that,” Sagredo said.

His wife said, “Stop what, darling Marito?”

“Stop smiling like that.”

“You want me to be sour?”

“I do,” he said, “I want you to be sour and rushed and hurry about and send Cook to market for fish and make the evening magnificent.”

“He wrote me last week,” she said.

“Last week?” Sagredo ran his fingers across his bald head as though his curls were still there.

“Hmmm,” she said, remembering his hair.

“Last week?” Sagredo repeated. “You didn’t tell me?”

“I assumed, darling, I assumed,” she said, pulling him close and interrupting his words with a long kiss.

Don’t worry, she explained, the menu is set, we’re having the cheese you like from town, and the peppered olives, as though cheese and peppered olives would put his mind at ease.

“And the Asti,” she added. He looked alarmed.

“The Asti? Are you sure?”

“Not with dinner,” she explained with some exasperation. He had stopped listening to her and was playing with the lace at her neck. He missed the pretty way the old ruff had framed her face when they first met, but he had to admit, the view behind the soft lace was lovely, enticing, suggestive.

“Stop, Marito, stop,” she said with a completely different laugh, and pushed his hand away, though not quickly and not with much force.

“The Asti will be perfect,” she reprimanded, “I got chocolate.”

“You didn’t.”

“I did.”

Sagredo stopped himself from asking about the money.

“It’s going to rain tonight,” he added.

“I know,” she said, “I know everything.”

She kissed him again.

“Therefore, chocolate,” she added.

“And Asti.”

He wanted to know if that was the dress she was wearing. No, she assured him, she had worn this dress last time they met in Venice, Galileo would remember it, and Maria Celeste would want to hear about something new. Sagredo objected, “but she’s at San Matteo,” meaning the convent where Galileo’s daughter had taken orders. “Precisely,” said his wife.

Ms. Sagredo turned to go but the locket at the end of her long necklace was stuck to one of the buttons of her husband’s vest. She pulled it away, though it was more than a little stuck.

Sagredo reddened.

“It’s magnetic,” she said indignantly. “You told me this was gold.”

She held the locket up to him.

“I did,” he said, “say that. I did say that it was gold, and it is gold, kind of.”

“Plate?”

“Not plate, better than that, but yes,” his voice petered out.

Making a disgusted sound, she turned away and left for the kitchen, not really angry, but also not ready to let him see her smile. She thought how Galileo would flirt and drink too much Asti and she would be able to get him to talk about the wandering stars and the rugged moon, and then it would be worth all the time and money she’d spent for an evening out of the kitchen and away from her books, dreaming of, well, she wasn’t sure what.



Tea at Laterna - Nadine Bucca

The Mode of Pi

Stephen Borsum

The air in the courtroom was stifling. So much so that it would choke the sturdiest of lungs, drying the trachea like the deep desert under a hot sun; save for the fact that the entire congregation was holding their breath. No breath, no air to choke on. A fly nipped at my ear, that droning driving the hair on my neck to stand at attention. Perhaps in my ignorance I should have slowed my mind to listen to its secret. But I neglected this opportunity, not recognizing it for what it could have been, for the prosecutor approached the bench, and seven pairs of eyes from the jury, confused, angry, concerned, watched every twitch of my face.

“Is it not true, that you are here on trial for the pursuance of fundamental truths of the Universe?” It was a misdirecting question from the prosecutor, delicately crafted, but asked too early to have the impact he clearly intended.

“It is true, that is what I’m on trial for.” I reply. The cold, procedural questioning was meant to envelop the emotions surrounding my case. Be they wonder or terror. And to discard that envelope, tossing it into the ever-burning fire of principle and logic.

“And you maintain your innocence?”

“Clearly.”

His wry grin flashed. The chase was on. He turned now to the jury, his audience.

“Please, if you’d answer this question for the jury, we might continue, all sharing an understanding of certain facts.” The prosecutor paused. This was a simple trick, one that school children learn when they share stories. The congregation would strain forward, pointing ears towards the forthcoming question. Each moment would raise the tension, increasing the stakes of my answer. No question in the trial until now bore such weight nor may any after, if handled deftly by the prosecutor.

“Would you deny,” another pause, delicately placed, precise, “that

your research and subsequent applications thereof, contain the possibility, no... the probability," a self-correction wielded like a dagger, concealed within the sleeve, "of altering the human soul, perhaps irrevocably?"

I did not hear the myriad of reactions from the room, but my heart sensed them. As if the jury and congregation had been shown irrefutable evidence, the murder weapon in my hand moments after using it, the bated breath was released and the heat of the room grew sticky with humidity. As if the capillaries of the lungs saturated the exhalation more deeply with moisture.

In fact this was only a baited question. My biting of this lure would open a new line of questioning from which I would be unable to return. To deny such a grandiose suggestion was to deny what my work had yielded, a fate worse than conviction, and death. To assent to this question was to guarantee such a conviction and to never see my work flourish as it could. As it must.

My defense attorney caught my eye. His were welling with tears as this was the question we had always prepared for. The undeniable question. And in no retort we had crafted had there ever been a convincing way through. When your attorney becomes an ally, beyond litigator, there must be power in what you've done. Even he denied me at first. Suggested that pleading guilty and discontinuing the work would be the only certain path to safety. But now he sees. He knows. Damn safety.

"Do you feel I have altered your soul, prosecutor?"

The judge spat at me, sharply, without a patience that was never granted in the first place. "You will answer the question in a statement. A dialectical maneuver will not suffice."

The prosecutor smiled a venomous grin.

"Yes, your honor." My turn to pause. To breathe. Perhaps this was my last free heartbeat and I would soak in the moment as if it could be stripped away. The room grew dry again, but I was careful to not let it linger so long as the prosecutor. His pension for showmanship was my only saving grace. "Not just the human soul, but that of the Universal."

It was certainly nonsense to most of the people in attendance. And the prosecutor recoiled. It was this essence of power that had faced the

least ridicule, for it was the least sensical to their ears. But the prosecutor recovered, too quickly for my liking.

“There we have it. Admission, and delusions of grandiosity. This, man, ladies and gentlemen here assembled, wishes himself a god!”

This drew chuckles, as the prosecutor turned to address the crowd, encouraging their pity and scorn for my contemptuous delusions.

“Not wishes. Wills.” I said, partially to myself but with enough volume to my baritone that the ears nearest me keyed in on it.

In this moment my mind returned to a series of memories that lay coiled in my conscience. There were first the resonances that established held a sacred balance akin to that of the celestial orbits. Inalterable, it was said they were. Yet a thoughtful nudge might disrupt such balance. Thoughtful, or reckless, I was warned on occasion. But who might undue the orbits of the planets themselves save the hand of God? And was I to supersede him? Or was I an act myself?

Flashing forward to two frequencies, one and the other containing a balance of sameness and difference together, threads of unison passing between both that would wax and wane as dissonant undertones built.

“It’s beautiful” she said. She had been the most apprehensive, and her skepticism was at first my only source of apprehension. Now her skepticism was not that it couldn’t be done, but what may happen if it worked? The nuclear age ushered in the power for mankind to undo itself, but this? The power to ascend, decay, evolve, dissolve, many possible paths that the frequencies alone would be the arbiter of. The slightest miscalculation meant a causal chain, the results of which could not be anticipated. Why had I pressed forth in the face of such potentialities?

“What remains in flux is how this emanates throughout the heavens.” The philosopher asked. And I returned a question that had not come to my mind until this moment.

“Is God’s soul that of the cosmos, or something beyond? What is the part and what is the whole?”

The smile he turned to me with was one of pensive reflection, apprehension and anticipation mixed in a swirl of emotion. “That is the

question, isn't it? Would that we could know the wholeness of creation. I fear you may learn the truths as you change them, if the Universe is constructed in one way rather than the other."

And then the final experiment. A tone slowly bending up, the tri-tone filling the resonant chamber, and the overtone singing the voice of heaven. But from which direction would the wave pattern collapse? Inwardly or outwardly, both were possibilities, with drastically different consequences. The overtone peaked as the rising tone angled back down, through the tri-tone, down past unison of the second and third octaves below the overtone, into something new. The undertone, and the ground began to tremble.

What my calculations never determined is how long the tone would have to sink and how far the undertone might fluctuate. I had never expected it to take days, even weeks. And then I was arrested. I was out on the street going to buy bread and a bottle of wine to distract myself for an evening because I had nothing to do but wait. And waiting seemed like a prison unto itself. But I had seen the signs, there would be a result that no one could control, and yet would alter everything. It was something that could not be resisted by stopping it, resonant waves expanded.

I was shaken from this reflection by realization. The courtroom around me had swelled to an uproar. Cries of heretic, blasphemer, and heathen rang of the walls of this stone room. The prosecutor even reeled for a moment before seeing the opportunity to deal the finishing blow.

"You see, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, he confesses! This is no mere tinkerer but one who'd assume you can supplant the will of God!"

The judge pounded at his desk with the gavel, crying for an order that he could not wrest from the crowd, not until the prosecutor, now firmly in control of the narrative, raised his hands.

"What I cannot be certain of," he turned to the judge, "your honor, is whether or not the defendant is insane." I hereby request that the trial be paused until such a time as we've had him evaluated both spiritually and psychologically, to allow the jury to fully assess the qualities of the defendant before delivering a verdict."

It was a smart move on his part. It showed a touch of sympathy, whether feigned or not. And it would lend credibility to the sentence the prosecution had originally sought, death by ostracization. A volun-

tary sentence that would cast me out and let me die how I pleased, removed from civilization so as to inflict no further harm upon it.

The judge was quick to acquiesce. In mere minutes I was once again chained and thrown into the back of a transport. Feeling the rumble of the road beneath me as it passed the waiting miles to the prison. I can't feel the rumble of a vehicle any longer without remembering the undertone. And they threw me back into my cramped cell. There I had several books, at this point nearly memorized and only used to pass the time. I felt I had milked all their secrets long ago, and every time I opened them now was just for a hit of nostalgia or to notice some hidden quirk of translation. Plato's *Timaeus*, Einstein's *Relativity*, *The World as Will and Representation*, and Marie Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It was a short list, but they all offered a kind of creature comfort.

Days passed. Then weeks. And I endured a barrage of tests designed for no other purpose than to assure I was as condemnable as it appeared. All the while I had only the ability to wonder about my experiment. The calculations supported a theory that even if they found it, destroyed it, sundered the equipment and stopped the tones, they had already emanated. But how long before I knew some sign of the impact was impossible to tell. Localization of experiment does not correlate to localization of phenomena, and a question the Philosopher once asked me was, "We know the speed of light, and the speed of sound. It remains to be seen if the speed of truth is beholden to such obstacles."

I am. Working?

Melissa Hicinbothem

When I considered what it meant “to be” I was unable to discover anything tangible. I could not grasp anything intrinsic to myself that revealed what it was to be. Considered another way “to be” might mean “I am”. Well, the problem emerges, I am, what exactly? How can I know what I am without something external? What condition tells me what I am in any given moment?

In this awkward position I began to consider my personal circumstances. Following seven months of unemployment I began a new job. My question took on a new cast. What does it mean “to be” working? What does it mean “to be” not working? Now, I found myself at a convenient demarcation point to consider my inquiry about being.

What did it mean to be working when previously I had not? Was my time more engaged? Was I less idle? The short answer is no. My new employment did not mean any greater engagement. It did not mean less idleness. I had a job now, but I spent a large amount of my working hours engaged in nothing purposeful. Certainly nothing urgent. Indeed, for the first time that I can recall, my new employers urged me to “relax” to “take it easy”.

What does this mean? It seems to mean that “to be” working involved or required no change internal to me. Nothing inside of me needed to change. So, nothing inside of me changed. Here I was, working again after a long hiatus, and I found no evidence that any change in my state had produced a change internal to me. I was not required to be more purposeful or serious. By the measure of my internal life “I am” working was just as intangible as “I am”.

Still, I was at a demarcation point and I knew that some change had taken place. “To be” working was indeed different from not working. If my internal life was unchanged by the demands of employment perhaps, I should look to more external factors. “To be” working meant that my time was no longer unstructured. Any given time of the day could no longer see me anywhere. Even if I had nothing important to do at work I still needed to be there. Did “to be” working mean that I was physically present at times dictated to me by my employer? Was this the absence of idleness? Even though I was doing very little, I was

structuring my presence around someone else's demands. There was nothing substantially different with me, but I was sharing external conditions with someone else.

Another possible answer for what it meant "to be" working was that I was earning money. Admittedly, this might be the best example. Money does seem to be an important distinction between gainful employment and unemployment. I had no sense of vocation integral to me, but as the result of meeting my employer's conditions I could expect to receive a paycheck. An agreed upon amount of money would be exchanged for my presence at dictated times.

Is this what it means "to be" working, the shared understanding of external conditions between my employer and me? If I cannot discover what it means "to be" working independent of any external conditions, have I established a phenomenological account of myself?

It seems to be Hegel's conjecture that the Greeks possessed shared external conditions similar to those between my employer and me. In the case of the Greeks, they had a shared aesthetic sense. A shared understanding of what was beautiful. My employer and I only come together for the expectations of work, and the Greeks lived in separate city-states that were bound only by a shared aesthetic. I know virtually nothing of my employer beyond what it is necessary to meet the shared conditions of work. Yet, we are able to work together because of that shared understanding. Is the unity of Spirit a shared understanding of external conditions?

I do not think so.

Hegel believes the Greek unity was fragile. That it was undone by Thought. Does this mean that a shared understanding of beauty could not hold the Greeks together in the face intellectualism? If a culture cannot be held together by a set of shared external conditions what is necessary for prolonged survival? If not, what role does intellectualism play in building the unity of spirit? If the Greeks did not have unity of Spirit, were they the first step in a long historical journey to find the unity?

Let me assume that the Greeks do not have unity of Spirit. They are indeed missing something. The Greeks see beauty as I see my employment. A set of shared external conditions. Am I missing something too? I have already remarked that upon commencing my new job I felt no internal change. When I perform my duties, I know neither what

I am doing in a meaningful sense, nor why I am doing them. I know I am working, but I do not know why.

I suppose I am in the same position I was in when I began this essay. And now I am running out of time to reach a conclusion. Like Hegel's reading of the Greeks, I have observed phenomena in my life. The phenomena (presence and compensation) occur as the result of my shared understanding with my employer. But, does this shared understanding prove any unity of Spirit in my life? Will I come undone at the emergence of Thought?

Essays

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The Ultimate Desire of Le Misanthrope

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Jay Gold

Kelly Kwon

Gus Kraus

Cynthia Crane

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The Brothers Karamazov's Dimitri as Fallen Man

Johnathan Wright

In Dostoevsky's masterwork, *The Brothers Karamazov*, it quickly becomes clear to the imagination that the pious, innocent Alyosha is an "angel," and that the secretive, cold Ivan is a "grave," but the characterization of Dimitri, the eldest Karamazov brother, requires a subtler analysis. Dostoevsky himself names him a vile insect. Indeed, it is true that Dimitri has many dehumanizing vices; he is, in his own words, "just a brute of an officer who drinks cognac and goes whoring". Nonetheless, the author's label of "insect" is not meant to be a revocation of his humanity, but an emphatic affirmation of it. This becomes apparent over the course of several poems which Dimitri recites to Alyosha during their dialogue in Fyodor Pavlovich's neighbors' backyard. The first excerpt that Mitya recites is from Schiller's "Eleusinian Festival;" it narrates Ceres' coming to earth and finding the world hostile, barren, and desolate due to "man's universal fall" (pp. 106). With all of his unholy revelry and rampant womanizing, Mitka himself presents

the reader with the picture of a man who has been utterly enthralled by his base desires, a true product of the Fall. Nevertheless, he is still a man. By way of Aristotelian example, he is not so controlled by his base desires that he becomes a beast, who does not know and want the good; he is a torn human being who knows what is good, but simply lacks the self-control to bring that good about. Despite his brutishness, Mitenka preserves a strong sense of honor and propriety. Mitya's heart is tormented by this internal conflict between good and evil: "Let me be cursed, let me be base and vile, but let me also kiss the hem of that garment in which my God is clothed; let me be following the devil at the same time, but still I am also your son, Lord," (pp.107). Is this not the very struggle which we all, imperfect yet noble as we are, undergo in the silence of our own hearts? As Mitka's third excerpt, from Schiller's "To Joy," asserts, our tendency toward earthly pleasures renders us "insects"—but also makes us human. Dimitri, then, is indeed an insect, but according to Dostoevsky, so are we.

Dimitri's relationship with Katerina reflects such human complexity. It begins because of his ever-present pride and lust; he seeks to blackmail her into intercourse, simply because she spurns him. When the moment

comes, however, something about her character breaks his wicked resolve. Her defiance and strength penetrates past his base sensuality and touches something more noble, something even akin to reverence in his dark heart. It makes him uncomfortable, and for that he even hates her for a moment, with “the kind of hatred that is only a hair’s breadth from love” — it causes him to let her go free. This act of mercy in turn moves her, and for that she falls madly in love with him. Baffled by this unexpected reaction, Dimitri sinks into an acute self-consciousness that wavers between humility and pride. He is keenly aware of his faults, and feels as if he is not worthy to marry someone as noble and virtuous as Katerina. It would be easier to call his insecurity “humility” if he were willing to accept mercy and reform for the sake of love, but even in the face of Katya’s tender forgiveness of his faults and trespasses, he refuses to besmirch her reputation by wedding her, protesting that he cannot change. In this way, Dimitri is more self-destructive than humble; he is too unwilling, too cowardly to turn and face his vices, even if it means the loss not only of Katerina, but ultimately, of his soul. Katerina herself is not without some self-destructive tendencies of her own; her brazen confidence and proactiveness errs

on the side of excess, and leads to her allowance of the ruthless Grushenka into her home, a decision which ends in disaster.

Though Dimitri is considered “the insect,” his complex character and relationships teach more about the plight of fallen man than either his brother “the angel,” or his brother “the grave.”

Karña in the Round

Jay Gold

INTRODUCTION

E. M. Forster once distinguished between two different kinds of literary characters. Flat characters are simple and two-dimensional, frequently a single quality writ large. Round characters, on the other hand, are complex and harder to characterize briefly. Forster offers Dickens's Mrs. Micawber as an example of a flat character, and Thackeray's Becky Sharp as an example of a round one.

To this reader, there is no rounder character in the Mahābhārata than Karña. While he is portrayed as a coherent personality, it is difficult to assert anything about his character without qualifying that assertion in important respects. There is no need to demonstrate Karña's roundness; that will be obvious to every reader. My intention in this paper is to answer the question, What is it about Karña that makes him so obviously round?

KARÑA'S CASTE AND FAMILY STATUS ARE EXTREMELY COMPLICATED

Karña, while he admits that Kṛṣṇa has stated the law correctly, rejects this interpretation for himself. For Karña, Kuntī's having abandoned him destroyed any parental claim she

might have on him, and the love with which Râdhâ and Adhiratha raised him established such a claim in his eyes.

Thus Karña is by history and by inclination the son of a sūta, and by heredity and by law a kṣatriya. But there is another way in which he can be said to be a kṣatriya: in his physical capabilities, particularly his ability to withstand pain.

After he gives Indra his earrings and accepts from him the Never-failing Spear, Karña flays his entire body, "mov[ing] no muscle in spite of the pain." That such fortitude demonstrates his kṣatriya-ness may be seen in the following story:

Karña had asked to study with Drona, but Drona turned him down, saying he would teach only "[a] brahmin who has correctly performed the right vow" or "a kṣatriya who has performed asceticism." So Karña be-took himself to Râma Jâmadagnya and made the same request, this time purporting to be a brahmin. Some time later a fearsome insect bit Karña, who "stifled the intolerable pain with his fortitude,...not moving in the least." Râma, when he became aware of this, was angry enough to curse Karña: "No brahmin could endure this extreme pain. Your fortitude could only be a kṣatriya's." In other words, Karña's physical characteristics, as well as his heredity and the law, show him to be a kṣatriya.

I add that frequently in the Mahābhārata we see characters who are the sons of gods, but who also are considered the sons of their mother's husbands. This is true in particular of Karṇa's Pandava brothers. Karṇa is unique in that there are three male characters who could be said to be his father: the sun, Adhiratha, and Pandu.

KARṆA IS COMMITTED TO CARRYING OUT THE OBLIGATIONS TO OTHERS THAT HE HAS TAKEN ON

On the face of it, Karṇa looks utterly principled, committed to truth, to loyalty, and to generosity. Yet at different points he takes actions that arguably violate these commitments.

1. Truth

Karṇa says, speaking to Kṛṣṇa, "[N]either joy nor fear, nor all of earth nor piles of gold can make me a traitor to my word." This seems to be Karṇa's fundamental principle, as it includes his vows involving the loyalty and generosity that also characterize him.

This is the principal reason Karṇa gives Kṛṣṇa for rejecting Kṛṣṇa's directive to assume his position as the eldest Pandava. One would think Kṛṣṇa's charge would be compelling to Karṇa for several reasons. Karṇa would become king, in a ceremony at which Kṛṣṇa himself would officiate. By this act he would bring about peace between the Kauravas and the

Pandavas. His acknowledging his place in the Pandava family would be entirely consistent with the law, even more than the path he does take. (He tells his mother Kuntī, who urges him to follow Kṛṣṇa's directive, that he does not "deny that for me the gateway to the Law is to carry out your behest.") And he would be obeying the instructions of the supreme lord Kṛṣṇa. Yet, he says, his obligations to Râdhâ and Adhiratha and to Duryodhana keep him from doing so.

I do not see where Karṇa actually pronounces a vow of loyalty to Râdhâ and Adiratha; his obligations to them seem to come from love and felt loyalty. To Duryodhana, on the other hand, he does take a vow. Even before he has gotten to know Duryodhana, Karṇa tells him, "I choose to be friends with you." And again, when Duryodhana asks for his eternal friendship, Karṇa responds, "So it shall be." Afterwards, his felt loyalty plays a prominent if not a predominant part in his devotion to Duryodhana.

Another example of a vow that Karṇa refuses to break is his gifting to Indra the earrings with which he was born that make him invulnerable in battle. Both Karṇa and his father the sun say that "all the world knows" his vow to refuse nothing to the brahmins. So when Indra appears to him in the guise of a brahmin, Karṇa, even knowing it is a god and not a brahmin, grants his request for the earrings. (One might think he does so because

it is a god who asks, but Karṇa has no problem defying Kṛṣṇa and the sun god.) This despite his knowledge that giving up the earrings will make him vulnerable on the battlefield. He does receive in return the Never-failing Spear, but with the restriction that he can use it only once. So the spear's protection is rather less reliable than the earrings'. And, as discussed *infra*, as it turns out he uses the spear on somebody other than Arjuna, whom he had planned to be its target and whom he knew would otherwise kill him. Hence Karṇa's keeping of this vow leads directly to his death on the battlefield.

Sometimes Karṇa proclaims his absolute devotion to truth. "I do not fear death as I fear the lie," he tells Kṛṣṇa. Vaiśampāyana calls him "truthful," and at one point says, "Karṇa's mind did not falter, for he stood fast by the truth." But Karṇa is not above employing deception to obtain what he wants. We see this in the story of his apprenticeship to Râma. In order to study with Râma, he lies to him about his origin. In this willingness to deceive when he thinks the ends justify the deception, Karṇa is no different from Yudhiṣṭhira or Kṛṣṇa, who do the same despite their own reputations for honesty.

Furthermore, such devotion to truth as Karṇa possesses does not include a devotion to transparency. After Kṛṣṇa tells him of his true legal status, he asks that Kṛṣṇa "suppress word of our taking counsel here," as Yudhiṣṭhira

would not accept the kingdom if he knew Karṇa was his elder brother. While secrecy may not be as great a violation of commitment to truth as deception is, it is some distance from the total honesty that Karṇa claims to represent.

2. Loyalty

Apart from his vows of loyalty, Karṇa claims that his actions derive from feelings of loyalty based upon how other characters have and have not acted towards him.

The loyalty is pronounced in the case of Râdhâ and Adhiratha, Karṇa's foster parents. When we first meet Adhiratha, Karṇa had just "hung his head in shame" when asked about his lineage. But Karṇa treats Adhiratha with reverence, despite likely knowing that acknowledging this *sûta* as his father would elicit scorn from such as Bhîma. In explaining to Kṛṣṇa why he will not assume his position as a Pandava, Karṇa speaks of his adoptive parents' love for him – Râdhâ breastfeeding him and dealing with his body wastes, Adhiratha's having his birth rites performed, marrying him to wives with whom he has "sons and grandsons" with whom his heart has bonds of love. "How," Karṇa asks, "could a man like me deny [Râdhâ] the ancestral offering?"

The obverse of his loyalty to Râdhâ and Adhisthira is his antipathy to his biological mother, Kunti, who, he

tells Kṛṣṇa “cast me out as though I had been stillborn.” Karṇa speaks of “the irreparable wrong” she has done him, and goes on,

“Born a kṣatriya, I have not yet received the respect due a baron. What enemy could have done me greater harm than you have? When there was time to act you did not show me your present compassion. And now you have laid orders on me, the son to whom you denied the sacraments. You never acted in my interest like a mother, and now here you are, enlightening me solely in your own interest.”

It might be thought that the fact of parentage would be enough to garner a child’s loyalty. But this is not Karṇa’s way. His loyalty derives from how he has been treated.

This also is true of Karṇa’s loyalty to Duryodhana. The latter begins their relationship by giving Karṇa a kingdom so he can fight a duel with Arjuna, and defends him against Bhîma’s taunts. Karṇa tells Kṛṣṇa. “For thirteen years I have enjoyed unrivaled royal power in Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s lineage by relying on Duryodhana...[who] has raised arms and prepared for war with the Pandavas, because he relies on me,...Therefore he has confidently chosen me to be the main opponent of the Left-handed Archer in a chariot duel in the war.”¹ Karṇa gives all these as reasons not to break his vow to Duryodhana. And when Karṇa’s father, the sun, tells him to do as Kunti

says, Karṇa responds:

“The Dhṛtarāṣṭras have let me share in all their comforts and honored me much at all times: how could I, I betray them now? Now that they are embroiled in a feud with the others, they attend to me at all times and honor me as much as the Vasus honor Vāsava? How could I shatter their hopes now, if they think that with my prowess they can engage their enemies? How could I desert them now when they see in me the boat they need to cross over this impassable battle and find the farther shore of this shoreless ocean. Now the hour has struck for all the men who have lived off the Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and I have to discharge my duty heedless of my life. Those evil men who, after having been well supported to their heart’s content, pay no heed to what has been done for them and fecklessly undo past benefactions when the time of duty arrives, wicked despoiler of their kings and thieves of their masters’ riceball, gain neither this world nor the next.”

It might be countered that Duryodhana is a villain, unworthy of Karṇa’s loyalty.² And, indeed, Karṇa may be accused of being loyal to a fault in the way he treats Draupadi, calling her a whore and a slave wench. He tells Kṛṣṇa that he regrets insulting the Pandavas, a very “round” thing to do. The reason he gives for his behavior is that he wanted to please Duryodhana.

Finally, this section presents an opportunity to raise a question. When Kṛṣṇa issues his directive to Karṇa, the latter replies, “If I...were to obtain this large, prosperous kingdom, I would hand it over to Duryodhana.” Well, then, why doesn’t he do just that? There would be no war, and his friend would obtain the kingdom he desires. The text provides no explanation.

3. Generosity

As we have discussed, Karṇa gives up his earrings of invulnerability to Indra disguised as a brahmin. He claims he does so because of his vow never to refuse anything to a brahmin, a vow taken on the basis of reverence and generosity. A later incident is if anything an even stronger example of that generosity.

It will be recalled that in exchange for the earrings, Indra gave Karṇa a Never-failing Spear that would unerringly kill anybody, with the proviso that it could be used only once. Karṇa had planned to use it to kill Arjuna, the one warrior capable of killing him. But at one point during the war with the Pandavas, Bhîma’s demon son Ghaṭotkaca terrorized the Kaurava army:

“The Kaurava warriors pleaded with the Suta’s son, “O Karna, kill the Rakshasa soon before he destroys the whole army. Use your Shakti weapon given to you by Indra, the King of Heaven.... Karna decided to use his

Shakti weapon. ...[He] remembered how...he had exchanged it for his natural golden armor and earrings. It was meant to kill Arjuna. Not finding any other way to save the army from extermination, Karna picked up that dart and readied himself to release it. It could only be used once, and after being released, it would again return to Indra. Karna then released the mighty weapon....That dart soared through the sky, and...struck Ghaṭotkaca in the chest depriving him of his life... Lord Krishna was joyous on the occasion.... ‘I know that Karna can now be killed, because he no longer has possession of that celestial dart.’”

So Karṇa, out of his generosity and loyalty, and knowing of the consequences to himself, uses his weapon to save the Kaurava army. This exemplifies the reasons that both Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Vaiśampāyana call him “compassionate.” Karṇa’s use of the Never-failing Spear against Ghaṭotkaca has practical reasons as well: had he not used it, his side would have been defeated, and he never would have had the chance to use the spear against Arjuna.

WITH ALL THAT, KARNA’S OVER-RIDING MOTIVATION IS HIS DESIRE FOR FAME

Karṇa says on any number of occasions that he hungers for fame even more than for life.³ In turning down the sun’s directive to refuse Indra his earrings, he says, “I shall give him

my earrings..., and my superb armor, lest my fame vanish.” He goes on, “I choose fame on earth, sun, even at the cost of my life.. [T]he famous man attains to heaven, the inglorious man perishes. For in the world fame gives life to a man like a mother, while infamy kills life be the soul alive.” He then cites a verse from “the Placer himself”:

“In the world hereafter is fame
The highest estate of a man;
In this world fame if pure
Increases that man’s life.”

Karña then says that by giving away his earrings and armor, by offering up his body in war and vanquishing his foes, and by protecting others, he will “win supreme fame in the world....I have vowed to protect my fame with my very life.” Karña brushes off without comment the sun’s advice that “[o]nly the fame of a living man is good....what use is fame to a dead person who has been reduced to ashes?...The fame of a dead mortal is like a garland on a corpse.”

One of Karña’s reasons for not accepting Kṛṣṇa’s directive is that if he were to avoid combat with Arjuna it would bring disgrace to both of them, and he tells Kunti that he is concerned about “being called a coward” and “what...the baronage [will] call me.” He blames Kunti for having “destroyed the name and fame I

could have had.” He goes on, “In killing Arjuna on the battlefield I shall find my reward, or reap fame if the Left-handed Archer kills me.”

CONCLUSION

I began this paper with the following question: What is it about Karña that makes him such a round character? I have analyzed aspects of his character and his story in order to provide an answer to this question. A characteristic of round characters is that even after they have been discussed at length there is more to be said about them, and there are elements of Karña’s personality – like his self-confidence or his braggadocio – upon which I have not touched here. Like other round characters in literature, Karña combines two seemingly opposed characteristics: he has a complexity we would expect to find in those we encounter in real life, and there is no one else – in life or in literature – quite like him.

The Ultimate Desire of Le Misanthrope

Kelly Kwon

What does Alceste ultimately want? It is nothing but commitment that Alceste demands from his friend Philinte and his partner Célimène. He yells at Philinte: “Monbleu! Vous n’êtes pas pou être de mes gens. L’ami du genre humain n’est point du tout mon fait.”. He detests that his friend Philinte is everybody’s friend. Also, he shrieks at Célimène when she opens the door for Basque without hesitation: “Quoi! L’on ne peut jamais vous parler tête à tête? A recevoir le monde on vous voit toujours prête?” He is extremely unhappy about his partner welcoming other people. Célimène grumbles: “Mais de tout l’univers vous devenz jaloux.” Alceste counters: “C’est que tout l’univers est bien reçu de vous.” It is true. Alceste feels jealousy of the whole world. Why? He is both unwilling to and unable to fawn over other people, whereas Philinte and Célimène are capable of acting gregariously. They seem to have a lot of options to choose their friends, but Alceste cannot hang out with people other than these two, who he has carefully selected.

And, as such Alceste is such a misanthrope—what makes Philinte and Célimène exceptional enough to qualify for his circle? Are Philinte and Célimène as genuine as Alceste?

Definitely not. They do know how to be diplomatic: to flatter, to smile and to conceal. For instance, Philinte is far from being squeamish to butter up Oronte as “La chute en est jolie, amoureuse, admirable!” Célimène is kind to everybody; not only their potential ally, Basque, who will be helpful in the court, but also to her unwanted suitor, Oronte. Furthermore, to her enemy, Arsinoé, Célimène seems soft on her on the surface—even though these two women were delivering malicious messages in a passive-aggressive form. “Si l’on était sage, ces avis mutuels seraient mis en usage.”, Célimène fools her with a gentle tone—this adroitness is impossible for Alceste, who unintentionally provokes Oronte to file a lawsuit against him.

Philinte and Célimène are two of the handful of people capable of appreciating the beauty of Alceste’s candidness, and regardless of Alceste’s anti-social character, they adore and trust his straightforwardness. We can see Philinte holding his laughter while Alceste gives an acerbic critique of Oronte’s sonnets. Célimène introduces annoying Arsinoé to Alceste, because she trusts Alceste to be faithful to her. Perhaps she had figured out that Alceste would see Arsinoé’s hypocrisy, and Alceste does point out Arsinoé’s shady intentions, of course. He asks in askance: “Mais, en disant cela, songez-vous, je vous prie, que cette personne est, Madame, votre amie?” He also refuses her flatteries. He begins to disavow

his thoughts so that he can avoid any involvement with Arsinoé, by humbly saying: “Le ciel ne m’a point fait, en me donnant le jour, une âme compatible avec l’air de la Cour.”

Nevertheless, it is worth remarking that Alceste acquiesces to the possibility of Arsinoé’s false accusation: Célimène could be unfaithful to him. Alceste keeps petitioning Célimène not to hang out with other guys.—“Perdez votre proces, Madame, avec constance, et ne menagez point un rival qui m’offense.”, he says; but he begs to declare that Alceste is the one who she chooses: “Mais plus d’amusement, et plus d’incertitude: Il faut vous expliquer nettement la-dessus. (...) Je saurai, de ma part, expliquer ce silence, et me tiendrai pour dit tout le mal que j’en pense.” This distinguishes the simmering jealousy of Alceste. He merely scoffs at Philinte’s flattery—showing just an allergic reaction to Philinte’s false compliments. Although Alceste expresses his strong irritation at Philinte’s excessive philanthropy, he is not as anxious at seeing Célimène’s affection for other men. Perhaps Alceste is afraid of losing her. He asks for exclusivity as her romantic partner, while he does not, or cannot actively do so to his friend, because he is a friend.

And thankfully, according to her letter, it turns out that Célimène’s inclination has always been toward Alceste, while she put in a lot of effort to conceal her disgust toward Oronte.

She has been faithful, indeed. It is, therefore, shocking that Alceste announces that “Mon coeur a present vous detesté(,)” right after he confirms her faithfulness. He breaks up the relationship with the last word: “Allez, je vous refuse, et ce sensible outrage de vos indignes fers pour jamais me degagé.” How can his abandonment be juxtaposed with her affectionate confession? Isn’t this confirmation what he wanted? What does he want?

First of all, Alceste seems to make a dichotomy between those who value him and those who do not. He despises Oronte’s incapability of accepting his true judgment; He despises the world full of sycophants. Whereas he loves Célimène because she loves him, and we can infer from his contrapositive statement: “Je ne l’aimerais pas, si je ne croyais [être donc aimé d’elle].” Even if his love “ne ferme point mes yeux aux défauts qu’on lui trouve”, it does not hinder him from loving her. Even if he finds a piece of (false) evidence that Célimène loves Oronte, he cannot help loving her, and fails to avenge her by using Eliante. He deplores himself: “O ciel! De mes transports puis-je être ici le maître?” This insinuates that Alceste desperately needs her while Célimène seems to have a variety of options among her suitors.

Unfortunately, Célimène frustrates Alceste by being continuously ambiguous. She blames his jealousy and doubt, but she never explains or elu-

cidates. This can explain why Alceste becomes bizarrely credulous enough to believe Célimène's affectionate letter is for Oronte. He has been made ill by his doubts, and now he gets a tangible piece of evidence that can validate his cumulative jealousy. He takes an opportunity to vent his rancor. "Moi, je veux me facher."; He wants to be angry, and he becomes a little bit satisfied, just as we might become happy to figure out the nomenclature of illness long after suffering from its unknown symptoms. Before long, though, he realizes that "C'est [lui-même] qui [il] viens plaindre, et c'est [lui-même] qu'on querelle!"; (and?) Célimène turns out to be innocent. Instead of apologizing, now he pretends to be angry, labeling her reaction a brazen excuse. He tenaciously probes her as to how the expression of the problematic letter could be written without romantic connotations. All he wants is her assurance—to express how much she is devoted to him and how aloof she actually is from other men—but he receives no answer. She is not willing to enter his game.

Later on, he tenaciously asks if she will choose him or Oronte. She procrastinates in giving him an answer; instead, it is other people, Acaste and Clitandre, who confess her mind instead. She did not have to hesitate when deciding whom. She just had to speak up and say, 'I will choose Alceste, and Oronte is not even on my list,' but she does not—she does not want to hurt Oronte's feelings. However, to

what extent does she take care of Alceste?

The longer she weighs those two on the scale,—unnecessarily—the more Alceste turns weary and is made miserable. When he figures out he has won this love competition, instead of rapture, he feels a deep disappointment. He thinks it is meaningless for him to feel anxious due to Célimène's courtesy, and he is not willing to endure this anymore. "Et s'il faut qu'à mes feux votre flamme réponde, que vous doit importer tout le reste du monde? Vos désirs avec moi ne sont-ils pas contents?", he questions. Most of all, when Célimène hesitantly offers him marriage by saying "Si le don de ma main peut contenter vos vœux, je pourrai me résoudre à serre de tels nœuds; Et l'hymen...", Alceste finally explodes in anger, crying out that he detests her, and he therefore refuses her.

He then turns to Eliante, confessing that he finds that she is the only one who he finds sincere. However he acknowledges that he himself is too unworthy of her love, and that he does not fit with marriage by nature. This indicates he is now too traumatized to pursue his desire for commitment. Now he begins to seek freedom instead: "Je vais sortir d'un gouffre où triomphent les vices, et chercher sur la terre un endroit écarté où d'être homme d'honneur on ait la liberté." (1808) This is the very moment that he changes the orientation of his aspirations: from commitment to freedom.



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Intertextuality and The “Elixir” of Character

Gus Kraus

Through his counsel to Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa weaves together plentiful references to other Sanskrit texts. But in the tenth chapter of the Bhagavadgītā, he uses these allusions to teach yoga to Arjuna, providing him a litany of magnanimous characters - Gods, sages, heroes, astrological bodies, scriptures, syllables and more. Kṛṣṇa does not simply present Arjuna with an array of moral exemplars. He avoids giving a straightforward Plutarchian exposition of heroes that Arjuna ought to emulate in acting according to dharma; the ethical purport of “I am the a among syllables”¹ is not immediately apparent. Instead, Kṛṣṇa declares himself the seed (bijaṃ²) of the greatness of each character he lists. In tying the quality of each character to himself, Kṛṣṇa’s ‘who’s who’ of excellence in Sanskrit literature transforms reading - or, in this historical context, “listening” - into a meditative and devotional practice itself. The Gītā’s intertextual warp and weft of characters becomes a meditative focus for the yogic sādḥaka.

In the middle of their dialogue, after covering numerous philosophical topics and yogic practices, Arjuna asks of Kṛṣṇa,

“Pray tell me of all your divine ubiquities (vibhūti), by means of which

you permeate these worlds. How may I know you, yogin, in my constant meditations? In what various modes of being may I meditate on you, my lord? Tell me again fully of your yoga and your ubiquity, Janārdana, for I am not sated of listening to your Elixir (mṛtam)”

Arjuna seeks in these “ubiquities” to relish the amṛtam - the “Elixir” in context, but in the word’s literal meaning, that which is “immortal”⁴. Kṛṣṇa’s response affirms within each character an undying aspect, of which he is the source. He hears the unsated Arjuna, and graciously pours the sweetest mixture, made from the most resplendent characters of Sanskrit literature. The verses which follow use a formulaic structure, the genitive plural and either written or implied asmi in each metrical foot, ‘among the x, I am y’.

The earliest identifications among the vibhūti center on retinues of divine beings, their vehicles and weapons, and mythical beasts. Kṛṣṇa yokes together in himself figures from both Vedic and Purāṇic mythology:

“Of the Ādityas I am Viṣṇu, of the celestial lights the shining sun, of the Maruts I am Marīci, to the constellations I am the moon ... [o]f the Rudras I am Śaṃkara, the God of Riches I am to Yakṣas and Rākṣasas ... of marshals Skanda ... I am Vāsuki among the Snakes. I am Ananta among the Serpents (nāgānām), Varuṇa among sea creatures, Aryaman

among the Fathers, Yama among those who tame...Garuḍa among birds.”

Kṛṣṇa affirms in himself a diverse cast of divine characters. Many of these references are crucial to the historical development of Vaiṣṇavism, notably the theonym Viṣṇu, meaning “all-pervader”, among the children of Aditi. In the same vein, Ananta (also called Śeṣa) among the Nāgas and Garuḍa among the birds both serve as Vedic ‘vehicles’ (vāhana) of Viṣṇu. Equally noteworthy, however, is how references to Śiva are interwoven with them: Śaṃkara being one of the Rudras (a host of Vedic deities which, in later Śaiva reception, are identified as avatars of Śiva), Vāsuki being depicted as a snake around Śiva’s neck, and Skanda being the offspring of Śiva and Pārvati (the story on which Kālidāsa based his Kumārasaṃbhava). Others still have no direct connection to the post-Vedic bhakti movements. The Yakṣas and Yama do make important appearances in the Kena and Katha Upaniṣad, respectively, while a devatā like Aryaman is largely absent in post-Vedic religious developments. Each of these divine references functions metonymically: they connect Kṛṣṇa through with a larger text or body of texts, including a broad range of Vedic hymns, Purāṇic storylines and bhakti-cults outside of his own. Each of these identified characters then transform into a new, meditative focus for the bhakta.

The four sages (Nārada and Kapila, Vyāsa and Kavi Uśanas) Kṛṣṇa assumes are each significant characters in their own right, but in vibhūti tie together three important bodies of Sanskrit literature: the Vedas, the Sāṃkhya philosophical school and the Itihāsa (chiefly, Mahābhārata). The latter of these marks the beginning of increasing self-referential attitude to the Gītā by Kṛṣṇa. Uśanas was a Vedic sage, while Nārada features prominently in the Purāṇas. The founding of the Sāṃkhya school is traditionally attributed to Kapila; with this identification Kṛṣṇa retroactively deepens Arjuna’s choice to become his student by bringing him directly into the Sāṃkhya lineage (returning ad fontem). But most significantly, Kṛṣṇa takes on the traditional authorship of the entire Mahābhārata, within which the Gītā is embedded. Through the character of Vyāsa, Kṛṣṇa speaks obliquely to the audience of the Gītā, declaring himself the source even of this very text. Through the characters of these sages, Kṛṣṇa’s intertextual cosmos expands in a similar metonymic manner as was done with divine identifications. He stitches together Vedic metaphysical speculation, the heroic pursuit of dharma in the Mahābhārata, and the unity of metaphysical and practical discourse in Sāṃkhya-Yoga as having one source for their greatness and a single purport.

Kṛṣṇa lists three heroic characters (Prahlaḍa, Vāsudeva and Arjuna) which deepen the self-referential

commentary on the Gītā and further interlace it in an intertextual matrix. Naming Vāsudeva is the most directly self-reflexive moment in the vibhūti, as it is the specific character of Kṛṣṇa in the Mahābhārata. But by declaring himself to be Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa takes on both personae in this (self-)dialogue. But he displays an important contrast to Arjuna with a third character; Prahlāda's story, told in full by the sage Nārada in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa as well as the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, shows him to be a character marked by natural and authentic bhakti. Despite an onslaught by his asura father, Hiraṇyakaśipu, he always maintains his devotion to Viṣṇu:

“Prahlāda who was the worshiper of the Exalted Being was preeminent amongst [Hiraṇyakaśipu's sons] by his virtues. ... In dangers and calamities, his mind (always) remained unruffled. He cherished no desire for enjoyments, heard (as obtainable in the next world) or seen (in this world), as he regarded them to be unreal. He had controlled his senses, vital airs (the life-breath), body and intellect. He completely controlled his desires and kept his mind calm and serene. Though he was a demon by birth, he was devoid of demonic characteristics. [He] had a natural love and devotion to the glorious Lord Vāsudeva.”

After many attempts to kill his virtuous son, this episode concludes with Viṣṇu taking an incarnate form as Narasimha to vanquish the asura-king: “After his father had been

put to death by Viṣṇu in the form of the man-lion (Narasimha), Prahlāda became the sovereign of the Daityas”. By interweaving Prahlāda into the vibhūti, Kṛṣṇa allows this Purāṇic tale to foil the Gītā. Arjuna, a reluctant warrior who must turn back to his dharma, contrasts strongly from Prahlāda's status as an unwavering devotee both by nature and in spite of his nature. But between these juxtaposed heroes within the vibhūti, Kṛṣṇa reaffirms himself as cause. The contrast of Arjuna and Prahlāda highlights Kṛṣṇa's final conclusions in the chapter, that he is the universal essence behind the qualities which make each hero great.

Kṛṣṇa's vibhūti recount a cosmogonic act on two levels. Firstly, with respect to Arjuna's world, it equivocates in essence (their “transcending power, luster and might”) the Gods of the Vedas and Purāṇas, Sages of various lineages, heroic characters from the Mahābhārata and elsewhere, syllables, the Gayatri meter, and elements of the human person (mind, consciousness) by including among the vibhūti. He reminds Arjuna to “know that each and every one of [the vibhūti] has its source in a particle of my splendor”; ascribes to himself the causal role of their greatness as their “seed”. Everything which is great is an effect of Kṛṣṇa's own greatness: “I support this entire universe with but a single portion of mine”. Secondly, it creates an intertextual cosmos across diverse genres, by including within the vibhūti the Vedic Samhitas, the

Upaniṣads, the Purāṇas and Itihāsas, and more. Kṛṣṇa links each of these, through the “splendor” or “Elixir” of their respective metonymic characters, in his own person.

and as the support the entire literary universe as such.

In this textual universe, Kṛṣṇa details ‘characters’ which are not only literary persons, but also elements of the Sanskrit language. These reveal another layer at which Kṛṣṇa has planted the ‘seed’ of his greatness. He states that “I am the *a* among syllables”, referring to the Devanagari script, wherein each consonant character in fact represents a syllable with an implied *a* unless otherwise accented (to indicate other vowels). The ubiquitous *a* vowel links each character within a word, mirroring on the morphological level what occurs at the narrative level. Not only are the divine, sagely and heroic figures rooted in the Kṛṣṇa, but even the words by which their tales are told are composed of Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa teaches a meditative, practical approach to literature: recognizing and savoring the greatness of a character - literary, linguistic, or otherwise - as having their source in the supreme being. Each character within the infinite vibhūti becomes a new ‘mode of being’ on which the devotee may meditate. Further, these characters each represent a single point of intersection in a vast cosmos of Sanskrit literature. Kṛṣṇa stresses that through this meditation, the bhakta comes to know him as the seed of each characters’ particular greatness

Is Odette Odile?

Ambiguity and Inference in Proust's Names

Cynthia Crane

One of the blessings of being a St. Johns student, sticking to the text, is also one of the greatest frustrations. This semester, I read Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* (1913), which is the first volume of his magnum opus, *In Search of Lost Time*. While the average reader, or even the devoted reader on an average day, lacks the patience to get through Proust on their own, reading the book in preceptorial has been a joy thick with ambiguity, reflection, revelation, and more ambiguity, the "arbitrary joys" of imagination. Since I found myself languishing in free time at the end of the semester--in other words, frustrated with my preceptorial paper and cramped for time--I decided to distract myself / undertake the foolish, and take Proust to the internet. Following his lead in Part 3 of *Swann's Way*, "Place-Names: The Name," where he freestyles about the meanings of names of places, I started to dig into the names of the characters in the book and do a little freestyling of my own. I do not imagine I have made an exhaustive survey, but I can offer you a quick glance into the thick density of Proust's language. Many references to French history, particularly military history, appear in the names of characters, evoking an embattled and historical context for this story, so social and psycholog-

ical on the surface. In Part One, "Combray," we meet Leonie. The name Leonie refers to a lion, a diminutive one. The lion was the symbol of England during the One Hundred Years War between England and France (1337-1453). A gossip and hypochondriac, Leonie is waited on by her servant, the vigorous and small-minded Francoise. The two, named England and France, engage in increasingly petty unending and unresolvable battles. References to the history of England and France, as well as the class conflict embodied in the Leonie-Francoise relationship, continue as the book goes on. We can add Germany and Türkiye to the mix as well, and throw in some cultural references.

Charles Swann, the main character of Part 2, "Swann in Love," is richly named.

- Charles is a common name, but one with royalist connotations. From Charlemagne to Charles X to the Ultraroyalist Prince Charles, Count of Artois, the Charles's make up a substantial number of the kings of France. Through his friendship with the Prince of Wales, Swann is further associated with European royalty. I am put in mind of the idea that in many ways royalty is more loyal to the people than to the landed aristocracy, with whom it is in many ways in competition. The son of a successful financier, Swann is likewise both accepted and rejected by the aristocracy. Are we to believe he is of a new brand of royalty?

- Swann engages his friend, Charlus (same name), in his efforts to spy on his lover, Odette, while the reader broadly understands that Charlus is having an affair with her. Swann considers Charlus an honest man, perhaps the good doppelgänger to Swann's evil? Or the reverse?

- Swann is a bastardization of the German name Schwann, which means "swan." We can legitimately make the leap from Swann to swan. When I picture a swan I picture an elegant bird floating on the water, "paddling like hell underneath." This is the picture of Swann, the psychologically tortured urbane sophisticate, moving smoothly through Parisian social circles while worrying constantly about who Odette is sleeping with when they are apart and whether she is lying to him.
- Odette cheats on Swann with another woman while at a picnic in the Bois du Boulogne. Odette and the other woman kiss behind a rock at the Île des Cygnes, the Island of the Swans. There is an Île aux Cygnes in the Seine, but no Île des Cygnes in the Bois. Proust moved an island for his convenience to get the swans where he wanted them.

- Swann and Odette's first sexual encounter happens in his carriage as they kiss over the cattleya orchids she has tucked into the bodice of her dress. I don't want to carry this too far, but I guess I do . . . the cattleya orchid was first bred in Europe by an Englishman named Cattley. The original flowers were sent to him from Brazil by a

man named Swainson.

Odette de Crécy, Swann's lover and the subject of his obsession:

- In the German folk tale and the Tchaikovsky ballet *Swan Lake* (first produced in Moscow, 1877), the virginal white swan is named Odette while the conniving black swan is named Odile. I do not know that *Swan Lake* was performed in Paris during the decade Proust was active there around the turn of the century. I feel sure he knew the story, through the ballet or the folk tale. According to the tale, the royal Prince Siegfried loves Odette. Siegfried is a German name meaning peace-victory. We will see the name Odette is associated with its opposite, violence and loss in battle, implicating that she is innately bad for Swann. Also in the story Odette is enchanted by the evil sorcerer, Baron von Rothbart—Charles Swann's supposed friend Charlus is also a baron.

- Odette is the diminutive of Otto, a name which in two ways evokes the brutality of French wars in the late 19th century as breech-loaded guns replaced cavalry and muzzle-loaded guns.

- In the Crimean War (1853-56), France fought alongside Germany and England against Russia and the Ottoman Empire. France suffered terrible losses during the war. Modern Türkiye was the heart of the Ottoman Empire. It appears again as a place Odette cruises to when she leaves Swann to spend a year away from him with his

former friends, then it reappears in the final unhappy dream sequence which leads to the end of his love affair with Odette, embodied by a young man in a fez.

- Otto von Bismarck was the chancellor of Prussia then German emperor who defeated France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, ending the hegemony of France in Europe as well as ending monarchic rule in France. Proust was born three months after the war ended. Although the Prussians won and the war led to the unification of Germany, they suffered brutal losses at the hands of the superior contemporary French artillery.

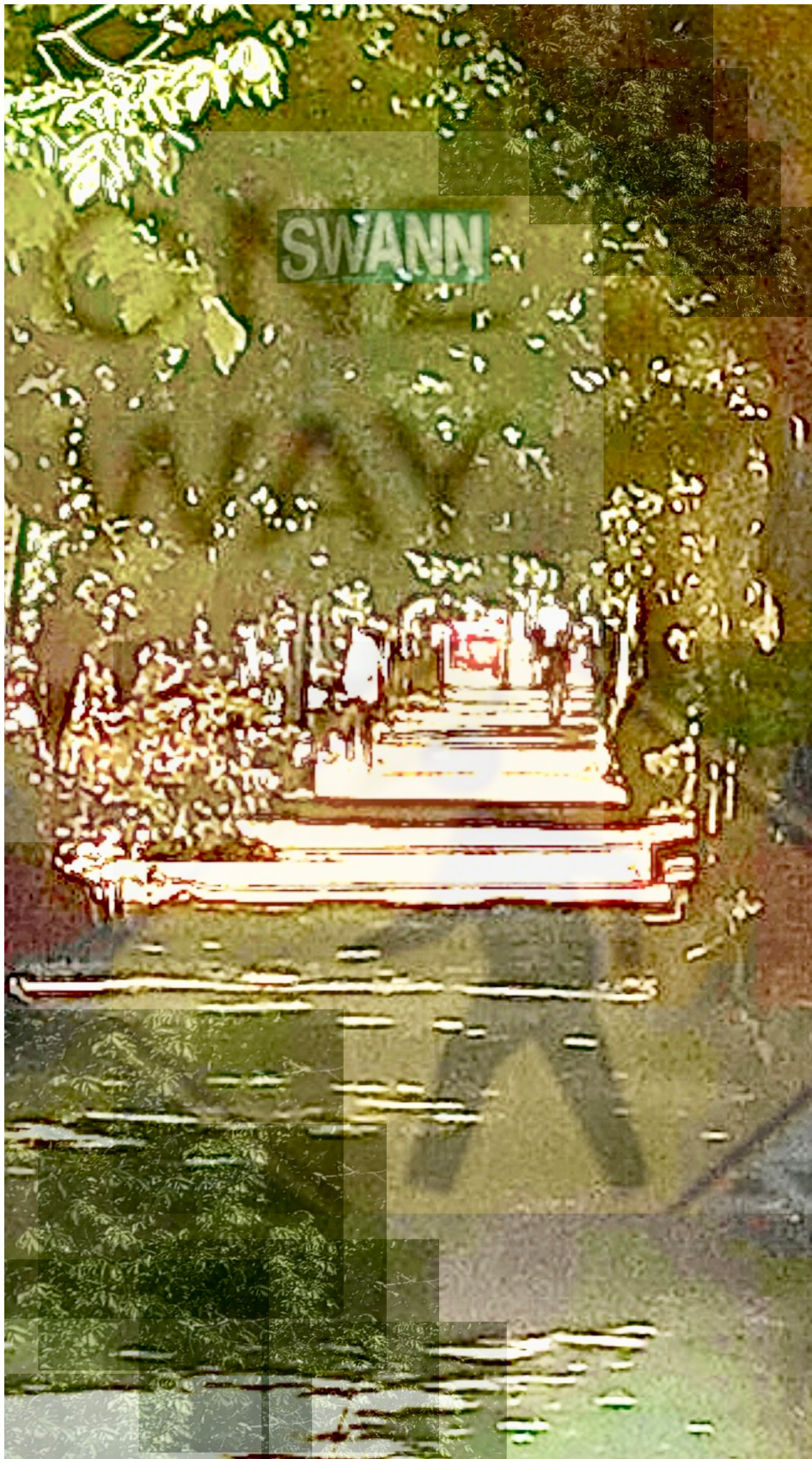
- Odette's last name, deCr cy, is derived from a decisive battle in the One Hundred Years War between England and France. At Cr cy, or Cressy in English, the English with their long bows soundly defeated the French (1346), who used the older crossbow. Like the battles above, it was a slaughter.

Finally:

- Forcheville, one of Odette's other lovers, bears a name invented by Proust. It appears to be Anglicized from the French, *fourche*, which means pitchfork, as in a tool of the common farmer, while *ville* means city. A fork is a *fourchette*. A snake's forked tongue is *la langue fourche*. The verb translated "to have a forked tongue," in English, means to lie, or to deceive, although the connotation of "having" rather than "speaking with" seems to me to be even more damning of the liar. Here's

a bit of trivia that could only have appeared in this day and age: a Google scan of published works shows the French phrase *avoir la langue fourchue* was basically unused between the middle of the 19th and the middle of the 20th centuries. It did have a small blip of usage between 1908 and 1917, when the book was being written. Forcheville and Odette both lie to Swann about their affair.

The connections among these words cannot be systematically rationalized. It is enough to know that Odette's name elicits historical battles based on technological defeats, and those on more than one front. It is enough to know that questions of France's place on the European stage concerned Proust, as did the morality of the various classes. I am not educated enough to completely decode the many ways Proust uses the names of the characters in Swann's Way to tell his story, but I get the gist. Sometimes with Proust that is the most you can hope for. After all, *le cygne*, swan, in French is pronounced the same as *le signe*, sign. Is Proust invoking the new study of semiotics? Maybe, maybe not. He is at least embracing the ambiguities of modernity.



Swann - Stuart Kenny & Cynthia Crane

Translation

The Steppenwolf - *Herman Hesse*

Contributor

Charles Chapin

The Steppenwolf

By Herman Hesse

Translation by Charles Chapin

I found myself again in a circular hallway, excited by the adventure of the hunt. And everywhere, on countless doors, lured inscriptions:

	“Mutabor”	
	Metamorphosis into Random Animals and Plants	

	Kamasutram	
	Instruction in the Indian Art of Love	
	Beginners’ Course: 42 Different Techniques	
	for Sexercise	

	Delightful Suicide!	
	You’ll Laugh Yourself to Death	

	Want to Sublimate?	
	Wisdom of the East	

	Oh, to Have a Thousand Tongues!	
	Only for Men	

an den Abstieg. Als ich Dora über die Brüstung klettern half, küßte ich ihre Knie. Sie lachte hell. Aber da gab das Gestänge nach, und wir stürzten beide ins Leere...

*

Wieder befand ich mich im runden Korridor, angeregt von dem Jagdabenteuer. Und überall, an allen unzähligen Türen, lockten die Inschriften:

Mutabor
Verwandlung in beliebige Tiere und Pflanzen

Kamasutram
Unterricht in der indischen Liebeskunst
Kurs für Anfänger: 42 verschiedene Methoden
der Liebesübung

Genußreicher Selbstmord!
Du lachst dich kaputt

Wollen Sie sich vergeistigen?
Weisheit des Ostens

O daß ich tausend Zungen hätte!
Nur für Herren

Untergang des Abendlandes
Ermäßigte Preise. Noch immer unübertroffen

Inbegriff der Kunst
Die Verwandlung von Zeit in Raum
durch die Musik

Die lachende Träne
Kabinett für Humor

Einsiedlerspiele
Vollwertiger Ersatz für jede Geselligkeit

Endlos lief die Reihe der Inschriften. Eine hieß:

Anleitung zum Aufbau der Persönlichkeit
Erfolg garantiert

Das schien mir beachtenswert, und ich trat in diese Tür.
Es empfing mich ein dämmriger, stiller Raum, darin
saß, ohne Stuhl nach morgenländischer Art, ein Mann
auf dem Boden, der hatte vor sich etwas wie ein großes
Schachbrett stehen. Im ersten Augenblick schien es mir
Freund Pablo zu sein, wenigstens trug der Mann eine

“Are you Pablo?” I asked.

“I am no one,” he said warmly. “Here we carry no names, here we are no persons. I am a chess player. Would you like a personality building lesson?”

“Yes, please.”

“Then please, kindly provide me with a few dozen of your figurines for teaching material.”

“My figurines...?”

“The personas, into which you’ve seen your so-called personality disintegrate. Without figurines, I simply cannot play.”

He held a mirror up to me, and I saw, again, the unity of my person disintegrated into many selves, many “Me”s, their number seeming to have grown even more than before. But the figures were now very small, about the size of handy chess pieces, and the player took, with silent, sure grips of his fingers, about a dozen of them and placed them next to the chessboard on the floor. Monotonously, he spoke on his subject, like a man repeating a frequently given talk or lecture:

“You’re familiar with the flawed and doomed notion that a human should be in permanent unity, a permanent unit. You’re also familiar with a human being made up of a host of souls, of many, many egos. To split the ostensible unity of the person into these many figures, separating them from one other, is regarded as mad, that’s why science invented the name schizophrenia for it. Science is, in this respect, correct, as naturally no multiplicity, no plurality, is tamed without leadership, without a certain order and grouping. Science is wrong, however, in believing that only one unique, binding, lifelong order of the sub-ego, the sub-Me, should be possible. This error of science has some unpleasant consequences, its worth lies merely therein, that the state-sanctioned teacher and educator see their work simplified, and that thinking and experimentation are put aside. Because of that mistake, many incurable nut-jobs are validated as “normal” and socially desirable, and conversely, many geniuses are viewed as a mad. We are supplementing science’s patchy doctrine of the soul with a concept we call ‘building’. To those who have experienced the disintegration of their ego, we show that, any time, they can put the pieces back together anew, in any given order, and in doing so, that they can achieve infinite variation in the game of life. Just as the poet, with a handful of figures, makes a drama, so do we build, unceasingly, from the figures of our fragmented ego, new groups, with new games and excitements, with ever newer situations. Behold!”

ähnliche buntseidene Jacke und hatte dieselben dunkel strahlenden Augen.

„Sind Sie Pablo?“ fragte ich.

„Ich bin niemand“, erklärte er freundlich. „Wir tragen hier keine Namen, wir sind hier keine Personen. Ich bin ein Schachspieler. Wünschen Sie Unterricht über den Aufbau der Persönlichkeit?“

„Ja, bitte.“

„Dann stellen Sie mir freundlichsten ein paar Duzend Ihrer Figuren zur Verfügung.“

„Meiner Figuren . . .?“

„Der Figuren, in welche Sie Ihre sogenannte Persönlichkeit haben zerfallen sehen. Ohne Figuren kann ich ja nicht spielen.“

Er hielt mir einen Spiegel vor, wieder sah ich darin die Einheit meiner Person in viele Ichs zerfallen, ihre Zahl schien noch gewachsen zu sein. Die Figuren waren aber jetzt sehr klein, so groß etwa wie handliche Schachfiguren, und der Spieler nahm mit stillen, sichern Fingern einige Duzend davon und stellte sie neben dem Schachbrett an den Boden. Eintönig sprach er dazu, wie ein Mann, der eine oft gehaltene Rede oder Lektion wiederholt:

„Die fehlerhafte und Unglück bringende Auffassung, als sei ein Mensch eine dauernde Einheit, ist Ihnen bekannt. Es ist Ihnen auch bekannt, daß der Mensch aus einer Menge von Seelen, aus sehr vielen Ichs besteht.

With quiet, clever fingers, he snatched my figurines, all the aged ones, the youths, the children, the women, all the cheerful and sad, strong and tender, nimble and clumsy figures, and arranged them swiftly on his board for a game, where at once they set themselves up into groups, families, for play and battle, for friendships and enmities, forming a small world. Before my enrapt eyes, he let the bustling yet well-ordered little world move a while, playing and fighting, closing alliances and fighting battles, courting one another, marrying, propagating; it was, in fact, a multi-character, moving and exciting drama.

Then he swept over the board with a carefree gesture, overturned all the figurines gently, thrust them into a pile and built, thoughtfully, a selective artist, a completely new game out of the same figurines, with completely different groupings, relationships and interdependencies. The second game was related to the first: it was the same world, the same material, from which he had built it, but the key had changed, the tempo altered, the motifs accented differently, the situations posed differently.

And so built the clever builder from forms, of which each was a piece of my self, one game after another, all of them distantly similar, all recognizable as belonging to the same world, obligated to the same origin, yet each completely new.

“This is the art of living,” he said didactically. “You yourself may, from now on, continue to set up and invigorate the game of your life at will, to entangle and enrich it, it is in your hands. Just as madness, in a higher sense, is the beginning of all wisdom, so is schizophrenia the beginning of all art, all fantasy. Even the erudite have already half-recognized this, as one may glean, for example, from the “Princes’ Magic Horn”, that enchanting book in which the courageous and industrious labor of a scholar is ennobled through the resourceful collaboration with a number of crazy and institutionalized artists. — Here, place your little figures close to you, the game will spark joy often. The figure who, today, has mushroomed into a forbidding bogeyman and spoils your game, tomorrow you will downgrade to a harmless supporting role. The poor little figure who, for a while, seemed condemned to terrible misfortune and bad luck, in the next game you’ll make a princess. I wish you much pleasure, sir.”

I bowed deeply and gratefully before this gifted chess player, placed the figurines in my pocket, and ducked back through the narrow doors.

I had actually thought that shortly I would sit on the floor in the corridor, and for hours, an eternity, play with the figurines, but I had barely stood back in the bright, round theater aisle when new currents, stronger than I, pulled me out...

Die scheinbare Einheit der Person in diese vielen Figuren auseinanderzuspalten gilt für verrückt, die Wissenschaft hat dafür den Namen Schizophrenie erfunden. Die Wissenschaft hat damit insofern recht, als natürlich keine Vielheit ohne Führung, ohne eine gewisse Ordnung und Gruppierung zu bändigen ist. Unrecht dagegen hat sie darin, daß sie glaubt, es sei nur eine einmalige, bindende, lebenslängliche Ordnung der vielen Unter-Ichs möglich. Dieser Irrtum der Wissenschaft hat manche unangenehme Folgen, sein Wert liegt lediglich darin, daß die staatlich angestellten Lehrer und Erzieher sich ihre Arbeit vereinfacht und das Denken und Experimentieren erspart sehen. Infolge jenes Irrtums gelten viele Menschen für „normal“, ja für sozial hochwertig, welche unheilbar verrückt sind, und umgekehrt werden manche für verrückt angesehen, welche Genies sind. Wir ergänzen daher die lückenhafte Seelenlehre der Wissenschaft durch den Begriff, den wir Aufbaukunst nennen. Wir zeigen demjenigen, der das Auseinanderfallen seines Ichs erlebt hat, daß er die Stücke jederzeit in beliebiger Ordnung neu zusammenstellen und daß er damit eine unendliche Mannigfaltigkeit des Lebensspieles erzielen kann. Wie der Dichter aus einer Handvoll Figuren ein Drama schafft, so bauen wir aus den Figuren unfres zerlegten Ichs immerzu neue Gruppen, mit neuen Spielen und Spannungen, mit ewig neuen Situationen. Sehen Sie!“



Queen Titania - Nadine Bucca

Toasts

To the Tutors (Spring 2024) - Michael Connors

To the Tutors (Spring 2024) - William Houston Taylor III

To the Tutors (Spring 2023)* - Siobhán Petersen

The Johnnie Conversation

Michael Connors - Toast to the Tutors (Spring 2024)

The Great Books are often described as containing ‘The Great Conversation’ of Western civilisation. Indeed, it has been said that there may be nothing more Western than the ongoing dialogue of ideas. And there is nothing more Johnnie than having that conversation anytime, anywhere, about anything, and in front of anyone. This is ‘the Johnnie Conversation’.

If you haven’t found yourself mid bench press discussing state of nature theories with a fellow Johnnie, or if you haven’t done a deep dive on the relationship between truth and beauty within 3 seconds of bumping into a friend at the shops, or if you have done anything other than talk about the Great Books while you have been at St. John’s, you have missed the point. If Johnnie, then existential analysis at the drop of a hat. This is the Johnnie Conversation. It is true that at St. John’s the conversation really does not stop. Over these past two years, I have had the distinct privilege of experiencing this with all the graduating students. Here are some highlights.

Sylvie Bernhardt and I recently carried out a thought experiment involving how a contentious argument between Plato and Aristotle might play out, and its philosophical repercussions. A regular in the GI office on school days, Nick Dacosta and I would discuss every topic we were reading each night, then Kashya would pop out and tell us what Nietzsche would say. At the Ramsay house, Dominic Escorpeso and I shared conversations about the impressive oratory style of Cicero. Before class, Stuart Kenny and I discussed the merits of the Kantian ‘moral imperative’ in the GI office. Living with my good friend Yonas Ketsela at the Ramsay house, meant early breakfast breakdowns in the kitchen about, let’s say, every possible aspect of philosophy. In the GI office Jordan Klein and I discussed Hume’s scepticism. Ben Morgan explained to me that everything is political... even the office MM’s. At the ASG, Luise Parales and I have discussed the ways in which the texts of the Western Canon are in dialogue, and what makes them great. Quinn Rifkin and I would chat at the pub, at the gym, or at social events like Sunday Supper Club, hosted by our good friend Sarah Ritchie. I would explain to Quinn what I was studying, then Quinn would sum up the entire history of that idea perfectly in 20 seconds. He would tell me about Straussianism... but it was over my head... After class Jack Ryan and I would continue to draw diagrams on the chalkboard, in an attempt to map out Aristotle’s virtue. At mealtimes fellow Aussie Luca Sudjovic and I would discuss every single topic we were studying. And lucky last, who could forget my main man, Houston Taylor? Houston and I achieved

something intellectually noteworthy. We discussed every topic imaginable, while at the same time, managing to relate every single idea to either Plato's Timaeus, or Chattanooga, Tennessee. In all seriousness, we do owe a debt to Houston for his work in the bookstore. Every time I went there to buy a book, I hoped Houston was there to help me get the right one...and to explain the whole book to me. I'm sure everyone in the GI has had similar Johnnie Conversations with these graduating students, and been enriched by them, as I have.

Since beginning my studies at St. John's, I have spent much time researching the benefits of a liberal education. And I think there is one main takeaway that should ring true for us all, an overarching purpose of a liberal education. This purpose was once articulated perfectly to me, by Mr. Petrich who said, 'Well Mr. Connors, I think it makes us more human'. I think this is true of my experience, I have certainly connected more with humanity by reading the Great Books. But when I graduate St. John's, I will also be a bit more human for having known you all, for sharing in the great Johnnie conversations, and from the enriching friendships created in the Graduate Institute.

To my fellow graduating Johnnies, it has been a highlight of my life to undertake this education with you. I wish you all the very best for the future, and I know that wherever life takes you, you will continue to enrich the lives of others, as you have done in this community. May your future conversations be as great as those we enjoyed together at St. John's.

Now to some thank-yous.

I'd like to take this opportunity to recognise the relationship between the Graduate Institute and The Ramsay Centre back in Australia. The Australians in the GI are all generously sponsored by the Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation, and without that support we would not be here. On behalf of the Ramsay Scholars, I'd like to acknowledge the Ramsay Centre and thank them for their support.

I'd also like to acknowledge our dean Mr. Brendan Boyle, and our former Dean Ms. Emily Langston, who have not only worked hard to strengthen the Ramsay-St. John's relationship, but who have assisted the whole graduating cohort in many ways over the course of our studies. Ms. Langston and Mr. Boyle, thank you for your ceaseless positivity and enthusiasm for the mission of liberal education at St. John's, the generosity and guidance you have given each of us individually, and your commitment to fostering a culture of collaboration and friendship in the Graduate Institute.

We must also acknowledge Ms. Kashya Boretsky, who works behind the scenes

to make sure the GI runs like clockwork. The level of energy and enthusiasm that Kashya brings to her work, and to discussing the Great Books, is infectious. She is also ninja-level at Johnnie Conversations. Kashya, all the graduating students have benefited from your administrative help throughout our education, and all been touched by your friendship. Thank you.

Finally, I'd like to recognise those great stewards of the seminar, our masterful tutors, who have led us through these great ideas, and who make our intellectual journey possible. Tutors, the enrichment, wonder, and joy we have experienced from the Great Books would not have been possible without your guidance and friendship. You have encouraged us to think deeply, to strive for understanding of the great ideas, and to clarify our opinions.

On behalf of the graduating students, a toast to the tutors: Thank you for your patience, your wisdom, your good humour, and for your friendship. Thank you for your guidance, for helping us to be more human, and for encouraging our Johnnie Conversations. To the Tutors.

Lead and I Will Follow

William Houston Taylor III - Toast to the Tutors (Spring 2024)

In Gretel Ehrlich's book *The Solace of Open Spaces*, she tells the story of a rancher friend living in Wyoming. He's an eccentric and recluse. He works as a farm hand while his labor is in season. When it's not, the man, she says, holes himself up in a little shack on a vast plot of land and plunges himself into total isolation. Ehrlich sentimentalizes this a bit. In one beautiful passage she compares the farm hand to the Zen monk Dōgen. Since she herself moved to Wyoming following the early, sudden, and cancerous death of her fiancé only a few years prior to writing, she is sympathetic to the man's existential despair because she feels it, too—as all human beings do, from time to time.

I love this story because I've also been known to be eccentric and reclusive, prone to nutty beliefs, and quick to anger. I once moved all the way not to Wyoming but to Japan—the home of Dōgen himself—looking for the kind of solace that Ehrlich describes as I too am a human being—and I sometimes act like it, from time to time.

I moved to St. John's College two years ago, not ever having been to Annapolis, curious about these great books, but expecting just a little bit of isolation and a little bit of solace. Instead, for two years now, time has stopped. Despite Annapolis' geography, I've found perhaps the most spiritually open and generous place left on the planet.

During my first tutorial, while reading *Hamlet*, Mr. Petrich instructed us to consider in the first scene why Bernardo, who has just entered the scene, should be concerned with identifying Francisco, who is already at the guard post. After all, it would make more sense for the guard on duty to be doing the guarding. But Bernardo is wary of the ghost. This, a perfect example of the power of close reading, opened up the text in a bright, new way for me. It showed that from the first, mundane lines, Shakespeare sets the dark tone of *Hamlet*. After all, the Danes are at war. The state of war requires constant, acute diligence. There's no guarantee that anyone will find what just he expects around the next corner.

As with the state of war, so with the text. From *Hamlet* to the Republic, from Chaucer to Rousseau, close reading has prompted text after text to bloom in its significance for me. The entire world of literature, philosophy, science, and politics has become much more open and thereby much more satisfy-

ing, exciting, and sometimes even consoling. But even more significantly, my experience at St. John's has taught me—and, in particular, Ms. Axelrod has been fond of reminding me—that philosophy need not be a solitary, nasty, brutish, or isolating endeavor. In fact, as I myself have been known to point out, Socratic philosophy seems very much to be about hanging out and killing time with one's friends.

So, we thank you all, our tutors, for modelling this behavior in the noblest way one can. I'd like to thank the tutors I have not yet mentioned. Ms. Benson and Mr. Goldberg, for showing me—like Mr. Petrich—that when one cedes pride of place to the text, that close reading—reading between the lines, so to speak—pays back dividends. I want to thank some others, in particular, for simply putting up with me—especially Mr. Goldsmith, Ms. Paalman, Ms. Silver, and Mr. Crockett—because they've taught me that the greatest intellectual rewards are not necessarily to be found waging dubious intellectual battles—being eristic as Socrates calls it in the *Meno*—but are much more often found when showing up to seminar ready to hang out with one's friends—to be a bit more dialectic.

Even though this is a toast to our tutors, I'd like also to thank my peers—each and everyone of you—for being those very friends, as well as Kashya Boretzky, Ms. Langston, and Mr. Boyle for their work in helping to build a place like the St. John's College Graduate Institute, where philosophic that very friendship is so carefully fostered.

So, without further ado, I propose a toast to our St. John's tutors; as Glaucon says to Socrates: "Lead, and I will follow."

In the Doing

Siobhán Petersen - Toast to the Tutors (Spring 2023)

**Ms. Petersen's toast was unfortunately omitted from the Spring 2023 issue of Colloquy, our sincerest apologies.*

One thing I've realized is I can only say something of real importance when I speak personally, so if you'll please indulge me, I'll just speak for myself here.

Insofar as there's a meaning to life, it seems I'm only going to find it in the doing.

Being the sort of kid I was – that is to say, someone who would fall in with the Johnnie crowd – I very early found myself lost in an existential haze. Who am I, what are we doing here? You know, normal kid stuff. I could never shake this feeling that we're just here. Meaningful answers did not seem forthcoming.

I remember this moment last semester, as I'm doing my little pre-class ritual – refilling my water, getting coffee and the like – when I suddenly stop, and I realize I'd found it; this all felt meaningful to me. Getting a glimpse of Capital-M “Meaning” is kinda blink-and-you-miss-it – you go to seminar, you get wrapped up in the next reading; the day to day, moment to moment; constantly bouncing around new and exciting conversations.

Yet, that moment; it's like the clouds breaking, and realizing you're standing in the sun. Suddenly you realize it's been a beautiful day for a while now; perhaps it was the whole time. And even if the clouds close back in as you rejoin the hustle, maybe we can keep in mind we know the sun is back there, because we've felt its warmth.

Meaning, then, isn't an articulable experience because it's not an intellectual experience. If that's indeed the case, it's a peculiar thing to note, given what it is we do here all day every day. Rather it seems meaning comes from a pattern of fulfilling actions. You can't guarantee it'll be “for anything,” you don't know if it really “means anything;” but if feels good now, it feels right now; it's important, now.

And that's probably easier said than done. But, I've found that set of actions through exploring important things with interested people. Sharing in our own canon, but then more importantly our collective library of reflections on them; knowing that I am among like minds who are looking for something,

and who are willing to collaborate to find it.

I don't think a life can't just be meaningful, but perhaps it can continually become meaningful. Perhaps it must.

I can't promise we'll arrive at that fulfillment, because there is nowhere to arrive. The spirit, if you like the term, perhaps always wants a project; I can think of no project grander than ardently, bravely trying on every available lens to attempt to glimpse something true. Even when you're not sure it's there. Especially when you're not sure it's there. In dialogue we all get to try each other's lenses too; and for that I'm thankful to our learning community.

Over time you collect a lot of lenses, and I am certainly not quite ready to let that go. How could you be? But this brings us to the tutors...

I have to imagine our tutors are just like us; earnestly searching for something when they join us in seminar. I also have to imagine these kinds of questions only get harder to resolve over time, not easier. Honestly engaging with an idea requires a special kind of uncertainty, accepting that no matter what's in front of you, you might still have something you need to learn from it.

For me, the problem has only compounded the more things I've had in front of me - I've never felt more uncertain in my life than I do right now. If that's so, it must take incredible patience to sit at the table and let us struggle through it, to master uncertainty so it doesn't rob anyone else of theirs.

I must then - I'd like to say "conclude," but I'll instead say speculate - that the fulfillment I've glimpsed must be the source of some repose, and hope for each of them that they've found enough of it here, in the doing, with us. That they too have found genuine meaning in this project. Our tutors perpetually display a flexibility of mind, a patience of contribution, and an attentiveness to the unstated, all in service of profound enthusiasm for seeing us perform that pattern of action. I've never felt more intellectually lost than right now. But I've never felt better equipped than now to wander, either.

And so for that, I'll ask us all to raise a glass to the tutors of St. John's. Thank you all so sincerely for becoming at the table with us. And, I'd like to particularly thank our outgoing Associate Dean, Ms. Langston, who's meant so much to the GI and who's been unfailingly generous with her time, her thoughts, and her mentorship; and to whom I never managed to turn in a tutorial paper that wasn't the length of a precept.

Cheers, to the tutors of St. John's!



Path Through Reeds - Nadine Bucca

Year in Review

By Stephen Borsum

Year in Review: Growing & Flourishing

It is with a gentle look back that we all prepare for a bold step forward. And in turning back to see this academic year as a whole, rather than living and experiencing its multitude of parts, we could perhaps venture to pinpoint some small number of the various exceptional moments that have made up this year for the St. John's College Graduate Institute.

First, in recognizing a banner year for the GI's growth, it's worth giving thanks to the faculty and staff who work so hard to make the experience enriching for the students, and to build it up to be a sustainable and effective agent of change in the lives of students yet to come. In particular, we pause now to give thanks both to Associate Dean Brendan Boyle, for his tireless efforts of advancing the GI within the community and beyond, and his daily work to ensure the wellbeing of the students and GI community in general—always seen to be of paramount importance; and also Kashya Boretsky, whose behind-the-scenes efforts, to the perception of the student body, keep the GI operating seamlessly—not to mention she is always ready to engage anyone, literally anyone, in a conversation about language or Nietzsche. And now we come to a question about the Graduate Institute, one I think Colloquy can help answer in small part: What are we here for, beyond simply trying to seek, with some clarity, the higher things? Furthermore, if we've all digested the proper amount of Aristotelian nutrition: If we are forming bonds of fellowship with others attuned to the same search, are the various friends we make nothing less than true friends?

This year we saw the flourishing of community, with Sarah Ritchie's Sunday Supper Clubs becoming a regular event beloved by many in Annapolis. We immersed ourselves in music, either through trips to the National Symphony in DC, or Mr. Crockett's music preceptorial. There were the highs of seeing our dear friends graduate, preparing to take yet another momentous step in their lives, and the lows of seeing those same friends leave us to take such a step. We engaged with the question of the soul's salvation and eternal love with Dante, the beauty of verse with Proust, the structure of the Universe with Galileo, and questioned how best to structure society with Hobbes, Aristotle, and Rousseau. There were also bonds formed by pursuing the Johnnie Project with texts outside the program: like the works of Mishima, or the catalog of Mr. Boyle's reading group texts.

I recognize I have missed many, many moments, big and small, in this note. In a way, that's the point. As we are consistently becoming more whole as people, truly capturing every moment of growth in our character is impossible. But the end result, who we have become and are today, is evident.

Stephen Borsum - Editor





Thank you to all our contributors

Austin Suggs	Oblivion
Stacey Rains	Sorrow
Martha Franks	Reading
Nadine Bucca	Enkidu's Dwelling
Cynthia Crane	Lady Sagredo
Stephen Borsum	The Mode of Pi
Melissa Hicinbothem	I Am. Working?
Johnathan Wright	A Bug's Life
Jay Gold	Karña in the Round
Kelly Kwon	The Ultimate Desire of Le Misentrophe
Gus Kraus	Intertextuality and the Elixer of Character
Cynthia Crane	Is Odette Odile?
Charles Chapin	The Steppenwolf (Herman Hesse)
Michael Connors	The Johnnie Conversation
William Taylor	Lead and I Will Follow
Siobhán Petersen	In the Doing
Nadine Bucca	Visual Art
Paul Harland-White	Visual Art
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With thanks to: Kashya Boretsky, Associate Dean Brendan
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And welcome to the new Editor-in-Chief of Colloquy for the
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