ENERGEIA

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ENERGEIA: The activity in which anything is fully itself.

ἡ . . . νοῦ ενέργεια ζωή . . . (Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* 1072b)

Energeia is a non-profit, student magazine which is published three times a year and distributed among the students, faculty, alumni and staff of St. John's College, Annapolis and Santa Fe. The Fall issue contains a sampling of the student work from the previous school year which the prize committees of both campuses have selected for public recognition. For the Winter and Spring issues, the *Energeia* staff welcomes submissions from all members of the community—essays, poems, stories, original math proofs, lab projects, drawings, and the like.

Note: A brief description of the author accompanies all work not by current St. John's students. Please include some such statement along with your submission. Thank you.

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The Character of a Meter

David Amirthanayagam

A friend of mine who helps young children learn to read and write told me recently about a special class of children: these children read very well, in that they can follow words on a page with their eyes and sound them out. If, however, they are asked about the meaning of a passage they have just read, they make no connection. The words themselves and the act of reading seem to bear no relation in their understanding to anything the words might mean. For this reason, schools single them out as "problem" children; the young learners grow greatly distressed and discouraged by their confusion and its effect of singling them out.

Yet I wonder whether the problem lies not with the children, but with the words, and whether, taken another way, this "problem" can be seen as the root and mainspring of our poetry. For clearly, words have a dual nature, which confuses children, and ought more often to arrest us. First, they are signs, which have a relationship with what they signify, or simply with what is outside them, by which we express their "meaning". (This relationship of "meaning" is clearly very subtle and complex, and might hurl us into philosophy.) Second, they are things in themselves, half-created, sensible measures of space and time. In this second nature, words are elements of poetry. We can see that the connection between meaning and the words themselves might not be obvious for children. I suggest that, if we are willing to accept that words have two natures, neither of which is necessarily problematic, the tension (or harmony) between the two might be the richest source of our best poetry.

I reflect on these things because I have been asked, for my edification, to do what problem children do, that is, to sever the connection between measure, or form, and meaning. In examining the iambic pentameter as used by five English poets, I see that this can be done fruitfully, both for its own sake, because the meter itself is a changing thing of beauty and character, and for the sake of reharmonizing the duality. I mean that one can see a kind of meaning in meter. Even with my limited knowledge of metrics, the simplest awareness of metrical, or more generally, formal purposiveness on the part of the poet sent my study into realms of significance deeper than this paper can practically follow--waters I fear to tread safely for long, though I might, in what follows, rush in on impulse.

Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, and Wordsworth all employ the iambic pentameter line. I will look, as agreed, at the opening of the Canterbury Tales, Sonnet 29, the opening of Paradise Lost, An Essay On Criticism, and "Tintern Abbey". The line is recognizable in each poem as the material and vehicle of the art; yet in each it takes on a characteristic signature dress. Calling the line of each poet a signature might allow me to conceal my critical, formal duty behind a claim for the uniqueness and individuality of each poet. Yet I find I can get a good way into the individuality of the poets by treating their lines formally, arranging their dress into its parts. Three "parts," or elements, of the pentameter line single themselves out, as signature strokes: rhyme, enjambment, and metrical substitution. Each is conspicuous through its presence or absence.

From hearsay I gather that the Old English poetic line had four strong Germanic stresses, with a great variety of syllable counts and sometimes a dropping of the fourth stress. The effect of these was vigor and variety, without rhyme. My crude

sense of such things is that the Norman conquest brought French grace and syllabic verse into our language, producing at last the harmonious synthesis of Chaucer's five-stress, ten-syllable, Middle English line.

There is nothing composite or artificial, however, about Chaucer's line, despite its genealogy; there can be no more natural a line than Chaucer's in English. Dryden later characterized the verse as having "the rude Sweetness of a Scotch Tune...which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect". The last remark was based, I think, on an incomplete appreciation of final "e" and the phenomenon of elision. Following my text's editor's instructions, I find Chaucer's lines to be true pentameters. Consider lines 13-14 of the General Prologue:

> And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes
> To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes

If palmeres scans as a dactyl, the second foot of the first line is an anapestic substitution; final -e in kowthe elides with the following vowel. These are two pentameters with feminine endings. I think Dryden's Scottish prejudice stems from the Middle English vowel sounds, and so I partly hear his "rude Sweetness"; yet at the same time, the most remarkable thing I observe about the lines is their elegance and stately grace of movement, unmatched in the later poets. The cause of this grace is the gentle lilt of the French "e" and of the long vowels. The latter essentially introduce the quantitative element into a stress meter; the combined effect of quantity, stress, and final "e" seems impossible now to reproduce. Consider line 5:

> When Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth

In the iambic scansion, it seems to run spondee, pyrrhic, trochee, iamb, iamb. This peculiarity comes to light, however: the initial spondee is a stress spondee, while the other feet are stressed and quantitative. Note the breathtaking way the line prepares for "sweete breeth"; I would prefer to measure only four feet, naming stress spondee, quantitative anapest, anticipatory pyrrhic, gorgeous quantitative cretic. Rude sweetness indeed!

In terms of our three signatures, we call this verse rhyming, closed, and metrically variant, though all five poets employ metrical variance, and so the question becomes one of degree. Here the amount of metrical substitution is relatively small, though we have seen its artful use. I think Chaucer's regular iambic line, with stress, quantity, and romance "e", is too musical to become monotonous, even in lengthy service. The romance "e" also waters the significance of the rhyme; in Middle English, rhyme seems more nature than art. Not so with Modern English: compare Dorothy Sayers' translation of Dante's Italian, which does nothing but mock the terza rima with forced rhymes.

Shakespeare's Sonnet 29 reveals the modern iambic pentameter as an element of an overarching form. The sonnet itself is larger than any particular language: it is a form of "thought poetry," shaped by end rhyme into three quatrains and a couplet, or two quatrains and a sestet. The form is logical, and yet the poem's meaning is rarely the implied syllogism. The question of poetry's dual nature, and ours, becomes ripe and mysterious in the sonnet. The sonnet's thought is a thought that needs measure and time, and spaced rhyme. And not just any measure: in English the pentameter is no arbitrary brick, but the only measure to suit and space the rhymes, the only context that gives the thought its life. English hexameters fall apart at the seam; tetrameters are too short (see Shakespeare's unimitated sonnet number 145).

Here follows the poem. Note the structural significance of end rhyme, the occasional tasteful trochaic or spondaic substitution, and the stunning use of enjambment in line 12, made most poignant and meaningful by its avoidance elsewhere.

When in disgrace with Fortune and mens eyes,
I all alone beweepe my out-cast state,
And trouble deafe heaven with my bootlesse cries,
And looke upon my selfe and curse my fate.
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possest,
Desiring this mans art, and that mans skope,
With what I most injoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts my selfe almost despising,
Haplye I thinke on thee, and then my state,
Like to the Larke at breake of daye arising
From sullen earth sings himns at Heavens gate,
For thy sweet love remembred such welth brings,
That then I skorne to change my state with Kings.

A peculiarity of this sonnet is that it "turns" twice, once at line 9, and again in the closing couplet. This is to say, it exhibits a tension between the Petrarchan (octet-sestet) and Shakespearian forms. I noticed this also in two of Charles Baudelaire's sonnets, "La Beaute" and "La Musique". The tension there pulls the other way: both are Petrarchan sonnets, but with closing couplets in the sestet. In "La Beaute" the couplet stares at us with "de purs miroirs qui font toutes choses plus belles:/Mes yeux, mes larges yeux, aux clartes eternelles!" In "La Musique", it introduces elements of the dark and dreadful with a sinister enjambment ("Me bercent"), then turns the poem on its head with despairing swiftness: "D'autres fois, calme plat, grand miroir/De mon desespoir!"

In Shakespeare's sonnet, enjambment and substitution are used sparingly, as counterpoint, and so with great effect. In Milton, they become the rule, producing a line of awesome power and vigor. His iambic pentameter is unrhymed, open, and full of substitution.

Milton's case against rhyme (or Rime) is powerfully made, "as a thing of itself...trivial and of no true musical delight; which consists onely in apt Numbers, fit quantity of Syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one Verse into another, not in the jingling sound of like endings." He was wrong, however, to call rhyme "the Invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame Meeter," for Chaucer defies any such criticism. But English had changed. I am no linguist, but Milton's language seems less French than Chaucer's, but more Anglo-Saxon and more Latin. Under these conditions, the pentameter unleased the power of stress.

Heroic verse, except in Old English, had known no such stress. Homer's and Virgil's lines were also open and unrhymed, but Homer's Greek hadn't stress (and didn't need it!) while Latin stress was more or less strait-jacketed by the adoption of Greek quantitative standards. In Milton, open lines and substitution bring the stressed feet into their own.

Milton's freedom in substitution was no license: his line was strictly decasyllabic, so only trochees, spondees and pyrrhics could be used. Consider the effects these three have in sharpening the image and making the line itself brood:

And chiefly Thou O Spirit...
...with mighty wings outspred

Dove like satst brooding on the vast Abyss

And mad'st it pregnant...

Clearly, such a technique of metrical substitution can be used with great subtlety.

I confess I am better at feeling than pointing out such usages, unless they are both obvious and effective, as above. That we feel the effects of such substitutions without always needing to account for them, was made apparent to me when I looked again at Blake's The Sick Rose; for our class's discussion, and the poem's interest, surely stemmed from the black and consummating spondaic substitution in the phrase, "dark secret love".

One characteristic of the open line is that it can begin with a verb. A whole range of effects can be transmitted this way; here we see an active, Middle English verb opening the line with a stressed spondee, supporting sense with number:

Him the Almighty Power
Hurld headlong flaming from th'Ethereal Skie
With hideous run and combustion down
To bottomless perdition.

I find it remarkable and ironic that in looking back to classical poetry, the English iambic pentameter rebels against the norms of its upbringing, and yet discovers not something classical, but something completely new about itself. A rebellious line for a rebellious angel!

Pope, on the other hand, as a translator and critic, is a follower and no rebel, though he makes an impassioned eulogy and justification of the critical life in his Essay On Criticism. I find his iambic pentameter the most troubling of all.

By our classification, the lines are closed rhyming couplets with a fair amount of substitution. This sounds like Chaucer's line (!), but the two are even further apart than their separation in time would indicate. Rhyming here is premeditated bravado. In modern English it can be a powerful tool, and surely Pope can thank rhyme for immortalizing some of these lines; used at length, however, end rhyme in couplets tires the reader, even if the rhymes themselves are full of wit, as Pope's are.

A further distinction must be made between his and Chaucer's lines because Pope follows Dryden; Pope's must, therefore, according to convention, be called "heroic" couplets. The use of heroic couplets in something called An Essay On Criticism, as opposed to The Aeneid, might imply broad irony on the poet's part (in particular if one considers the respective heroes of the two poems). Irony is perhaps the critic's strong suit. The title itself seems ironic: This is an essay on criticism that is itself a poem.

The metrical variations attempt to compensate for the regularity of the rhyme; coming from a critic, they are very self-conscious. Consider these examples; first lines 150-51 on poetic license:

Thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take
May boldly deviate from the common Track.

The word "deviate", being hard to say in two syllables, is itself the deviation. Here is line 356:

A needless alexandrine ends the Song,

That like a wounded Snake, drags its slow length along.

The wounded alexandrine is needlessly lengthened by trochaic and spondaic substitution. More metrical wit follows a few lines later:

When Ajax strives, some Rocks' vast Weight to throw,

The Line too labours, and the Words move slow;

Not so, when swift Camilla scours the Plain,

Flies o'er th' unbending Corn, and skims along the Main.

The first couplet suggests weight and slow labor with spondaic substitution, while the last line, though an alexandrine, runs fastest of all because of a pyrrhic.

My quarrel with Pope is that he has turned the iambic pentameter into a society man, with too much wit and too little real art. An irony that might be lost on Pope, since he translated Homer into couplets, lies in his emulating ancient poets and critics, and yet using a poetic line that, unlike Milton's, has nothing in common with them. Closed rhyming lines better suit the Grinch than Pope's nobler sentiments.

With Wordsworth's poem of loss and reconciliation, let us conclude. The lines of "Tintern Abbey" are open and unrhymed, and employ much artful substitution. We might expect a line with Milton's vigor and cadence, but again, the English pentameter discovers a new character and motion. "Tintern Abbey" is sweetly elegiac, longing in mood, above all reflective in its use of rhythm. The sensibility of the poem cannot be separated from our familiar yet newly flowing meter.

I believe the open lines permit Wordsworth this elegiac mood, by freeing him to let his lines overflow and commingle, repeating words in different stress positions, and so heightening the sense of reflectiveness and of passing things over in memory. Consider how the fives in the opening lines set the tone:

> Five years have passed, five summers, with the length
> Of five long winters, and again I hear
> These waters rolling from their mountain-springs
> With a sweet inland murmur.

Notice then the quiet repetitions in these lines near the end, as the poet addresses his sister seeing the country for the first time:

> For thou art with me, here upon the banks
> Of this fair river, thou, my dearest friend,
> My dear, dear friend, and in thy voice I catch
> The language of my former heart, and read
> My former pleasures in the shooting lights
> Of thy wild eyes. Oh, yet a little while
> May I behold in thee what I was once,
> My dear, dear sister!
>
> (115-22)

Sometimes the verse has the quality of measured prose, breathing and moving in natural rhythm; yet the meter is always there, spacing and nudging the lines, a pervasive force that anchors and shapes the whole meditation. At the heart of the poem the poet reconciles himself to his loss:

> For I have learned
> To look on Nature not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
> The still, sad music of humanity,
> Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power
> To chasten and subdue.

He has learned an art of poetry, to hear, in an iambic line, "the still, sad music of humanity." In what follows, the number and meaning of the verse are completely interfused, and we leave our study of Wordsworth's line, our numbered English line, awake to all its possibilities:

> And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man--
> A motion and a spirit that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
> A lover of the meadows and the woods
> And mountains, and of all that we behold
> From this green earth--of all the mighty world
> Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,
> And what perceive--well pleased to recognize
> In Nature and the language of the sense
> The anchor of my purest thought, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being.

In a shifting and unmusical world, at least we still speak English. Where so many read, and where so many words and symbols re-echo in commercial profusion, still there breeds in our world a deeper illiteracy. But the rhythms and meters of English spring from the language itself, and thankfully, for as long as English lives, their numbers await the rediscovery of new poets, who will learn to keep proportion and mend our broken time. I do not believe that these five poets, or their many imitators and occasional equals, have come near to exhausting the rhythms of the iambic pentameter. Perhaps we won't see the Shakespearian sonnet again, or the heroic couplet; but new poets will discover new movements, ascending in iambs, moving with thought, with power, with wit, with longing--a sweeter breath, perhaps, stressing always from within, like a wind through a mighty English oak.

Poem

James Brown

Because I cannot forget,
Because every day flickers sickly empty...
waits for action-
I watch the deserts in a smile
or breath, my soul,
I breathe.
(Which man is meditating on the mountain, he of skin, of desire, of soul)
Reason exceeds all bounds, resting in a meshland crushed.
The little bits we held tightly vanish.
Beauty
     is on the table
Love
     in the wineglass
                in the countryside
                                in the emotion.
as I saw a lone sparrow creeping across my wet sky of dreams
poets and ghosts invited me to a celebration
(fame in the sense show,
the hostile cracks of contact, of lambs and dry blood...)
blood in the doorway,
blood in your mouth.
The ground is disguised as a cracked smile,
the cymbal ceases after the throat swallows,
preparing to laugh.
Too many torn, ripped, wounded words.
Blow on a feather bursting in repose,
now is a moment I give you forever.

Spliced awareness
The replication can be divided
(the quartering cleavage in pregnant hips,
new sorrow,
shivering at dusk,
my disheartening years)
I once believed the colors I see
came from within,
seasons of delight.
But in the crowd of people I forgot myself:
and so I disappeared.
Now the quitters return (so then)
abashed and speechless with dumb shame.
Sometimes I (look the other way)
In the game show I was the victor: look!

So I'm bound, you stuck seer,
so I'm free, you roaming eyeless face.
Calamity beckons me,
nestled in wooly womb of letters I thrust meaning in your face.
Somewhere I lose, I have lost.
Intimate memories surround, hemorrhaging.
My blood is soft, flowing through screens of dying sanity,
screams unquenchable and unfulfilled.
Does this anger have a home?
Can I come home?
(a mirror speaks in shades of light,
darkness in absence thereof.
And thus the silence)

The Gorgon and the Bride of Lebanon

Catherine Irvine

In The Divine Comedy, the images of the Gorgon and of Beatrice are intimately connected by the notion of love. The connection is based upon the idea that when the human being loves, he may be led either to salvation or into the depths of Hell.

What will be shown in the following pages is that both the Gorgon and Beatrice represent the two faces of Dante's own loves. In appearance and in effect they are opposites. The Gorgon is ugly and destructive, while Beatrice is beautiful and redeeming.

Their opposition, however, will be seen to stem from the human element. For the soul immersed in sin, to look upon love is to look upon the Gorgon and be doomed. For the soul in grace who follows the true path, to look upon love is to look upon Beatrice and find the doors of Paradise swung wide open.

These two images stand out amongst the hordes of others which fill The Divine Comedy. The atmosphere at the Gates of Dis is full of tension caused by a combination of doubt, fear and danger. This makes it a dramatic moment in the story. There is a feeling that the whole of the journey is in jeopardy and that its success is at stake.

The same kind of feeling accompanies the reading of Cantos XXX through XXXII of the Purgatorio in which the unveiling of Beatrice occurs. This time, however, the tension is not born of danger and suspense. It is a result of climax. There is an exaltation, a culmination of emotion, present that makes the scene sparkle in the memory.

The life that both images take on is so real and persuasive that in remembering them they become strongly bound to one another. They have an interdependence that is a determining factor with regard to the existence of the story. The prevention of the first instance, Dante's looking upon the Gorgon, allows the possibility of the second, Dante's looking upon Beatrice. Likewise, the allowing of the first would result in the prevention of the second. In the first case there is a story to tell of Dante's journey. In the second case The Divine Comedy would have ended at the Gates of Dis.

Looking closely at this interdependence, one sees that the key to both situations is the act of beholding. The effectiveness and potency of the images lies in Dante's looking at them. There are no other elements involved. If Dante looks upon the Gorgon he will become stone. If he does not look upon her he will remain untouched.

Beatrice has an influence upon Dante that extends beyond his looking at her, for instance, in his memory of her. But the actuality of the good she promises him is only accomplished through his beholding. Although Dante undergoes change up to the point where he encounters her, his full purification does not take place until he looks fully at her.

It is also the case that when Dante is involved in this act, he must be involved alone. It is a private experience. Virgil has no influence upon what Dante sees. With the Gorgon, Virgil encounters the possibility of a situation in which he will not be able to help his charge. Virgil can exert no control over what happens to

Dante if Dante looks. The only thing he has control over is whether or not Dante looks, and that is a control that does not involve reason, but command and force. If Virgil fails to prevent Dante from looking at the Medusa, he can do no more.

Similarly, Virgil has much influence over Dante in the period of time before Dante meets Beatrice, but precisely at the moment when Dante sees Beatrice, Virgil is gone. He is completely absent during the unveiling.

It might be looked at in this way. Virgil's function is to bring Dante to the point where Dante will be able to look at Beatrice. This being so, his function in the journey is also to prevent Dante from looking at the Medusa. Virgil has a definite relation and function with regard to the two, but the act of beholding in itself and the consequences of it are beyond his realm. This act Dante must do without the aid of his mentor and guide.

* * * * *

At the Gates of the City of Hell the situation is menacing. Virgil's capabilities are inadequate. He cannot use reason or art upon these souls who do not even respond to the truth that all of Hell, in addition to all of Heaven, is under divine will. Virgil must wait for divine aid. Meanwhile, he has no idea what the inhabitants of the dread city might do. They are rebellious and unreasonable. If they show aggressiveness they have the power to harm Dante.

Dante is doubtful and insecure, for the most part because he sees Virgil, who is his only safety, in a position of weakness. The appearance of the mad and self-destructive Furies who attack intensifies Dante's fear and Virgil's anxiety. Hence, even though the act of beholding the Medusa is only a potential one, it is clear that Dante is in danger. If the potentiality of that act were to become a reality - and there is a possibility of that happening - Dante would be lost.

Virgil, accordingly, reacts immediately to the threat alone. He does not wait, not even for a moment, to see if it will be carried out. The Medusa is a force he cannot reckon with if Dante is to be her victim. The only way that Virgil can protect his charge is by forcing Dante not to look.

> 'Turn your back and keep your eyes shut tight;
> For should the Gorgon come and you look at her,
> Never again would you return to the light.'
> This was my Guide's command. And he turned me about
> Himself, and would not trust my hands alone,
> But with his placed on mine, held my eyes shut.
>
> (Inferno IX, 52-57)

The Medusa is a formidable enemy. Firstly, the temptation to look upon her is so great that Virgil does not trust Dante to resist alone. Secondly, should Dante submit to the temptation, he will be transformed into stone. His being will be drastically altered: animate to inanimate, rational to unthinking.

This inanimate characteristic of stone would alone doom Dante to remain in Hell. In addition, when Virgil tells Dante that he would never return to the light he is referring to man's need to have light, both physically and mentally, in order to be the creature that he is. Physically, as stone, Dante would remain stationary in the darkness. But the implication is also that mentally Dante's capabilities of distinguishing right from wrong, good from evil, and beautiful from ugly will be destroyed.

On this level, Dante will become in life what the souls of Dis are in death: eternally sinful and rebellious, with no hope of ever leaving Death's kingdom and with no hope of ever being able to see his own miserable condition. This is the threat that the Medusa poses. She would alter him so greatly that his nature would

become essentially 'other'. In doing so she would doom him to a world of blindness and immobility - a world without God, a world without hope, a world that for a man become stone is a world of eternal death.

* * * * *

In Cantos XXX through XXXII of the Purgatorio, the beholding is not potential but actual. Beatrice's unveiling takes place gradually, since it is a process rather than a mere possibility which can only be looked at in terms of result, as in the case with the Gorgon. Dante's beholding takes place in three stages. Each stage has more power over him.

The first time that Dante sees Beatrice he undergoes a kind of fixation which he describes as a stupefaction. He recognizes his emotional reaction as that of his old love for the mortal woman. Yet Dante is not completely riveted. Recognizing this emotion, he is able to turn to Virgil. He is free to move his attention elsewhere. He is able to be distracted away from Beatrice when he discovers that his guide has left his side. He is not quite overcome by Beatrice yet.

Dante feels the pain of Virgil's disappearance acutely. He is fully involved with grieving until Beatrice begins to reprimand him as a woman would reproach a lover who has strayed. She demands that he confess his infidelity to her. Dante is so overwhelmed by her reprimand and the harshness with which it is delivered that he says he became frozen in place. He confesses that he has sinned. This confession is essential to the process of unveiling, for if he does not confess, Beatrice will not unveil.

The second time Dante looks upon Beatrice is when she prods him to feel the full weight of his sin. Dante says:

> With my tear-blurred and uncertain vision
> I saw Her turned to face that beast which is
> One person in two natures without division.
> Even veiled and across the river from me
> Her face outshone its first-self by as much
> As she outshone all mortals formerly.
> And the thorns of my repentance pricked me so
> That all the use and substance of the world
> I had most loved, now appeared my foe.
> Such guilty recognition gnawed my heart
> I swooned for pain.
>
> (Purgatorio XXXI, 79-89)

This time Dante sees Beatrice as more than the mortal woman he had loved. She has a great control over him, a power that she never had while she lived. As he looks upon her when she faces the Griffon, he comes to know his sin and to fear it - so much so that he cannot bear even to look upon her anymore. He is rendered unconscious in a faint.

When Dante wakes from this swoon he finds that he had been immersed in the waters of the Lethe, the river of forgetfulness. From that immersion he rises in a new purity that will enable him to look fully upon the face of his beloved. Previously, the weight of his sin caused him so much agony that he could not stand the sight of Beatrice's face even still covered. Now, the memory of that sin and that grief washed away, he may look upon her naked face fully conscious and gain from what he sees.

The four nymphs who are Beatrice's ordained handmaids come and lead Dante to this final beholding. Dante looks into Beatrice's eyes. There he finds the changing

image of the Griffon reflected. Dante describes how a thousand burning passions held his eyes fixed upon hers and how his soul "in wonder and delight/ was savoring the food which in itself/ both satisfies and quickens appetite" (Purgatorio XXXI, 127-129). While he is still in this state of bliss, he is led to her mouth. Beatrice's face is now completely uncovered.

The vision that Dante sees when he looks upon her smile is indescribable. It leaves him even more helpless than he had been before.

> My eyes were fixed with such intensity
> On quenching, at long last, their ten years' thirst
> That every sense but sight abandoned me.
> Tranced by the holy smile that drew me there
> Into the old nets, I forgot all else -
> My eyes wore blinders, and I could not care.
>
> (Purgatorio XXXII, 1-6)

Beatrice has now completely taken off the cloak of mortality that she wore in Dante's mind when he first glimpsed her in the pageant. She has a god-like potency for him. Here when he is finally able to look upon her with no obstruction between his sight and her face, he is made incapable of doing anything but stare. Every other bodily sense has ceased. He is transfixed. Dante gazes with such intensity that he is forced to look away, and when he does look away he discovers that the brightness of his vision has blinded him.

In addition to being aware of the effect that the unveiling has upon Dante, it should be noted that when Beatrice begins to explain her purpose to Dante, she says:

> I see your mind
> Turned into stone, and like a stone, so darkened
> That the light of what I tell you strikes it blind.
>
> (Purgatorio XXXIII, 73-75)

It is important that Beatrice says this about Dante's mind. What it implies is that during the process of unveiling Dante's mind has become like a stone, so that it does not respond to what he is being told.

When the unveiling is completed, Dante drinks from the Eunoe and is made "...new,...perfect, pure and ready for the Stars." (Purgatorio XXXIII, 142-146). What Beatrice has worked in Dante, through his beholding, is a final purification that will allow him entry into Paradise.

* * * * *

Having looked at both situations in detail, it becomes evident that Beatrice has essentially done to Dante what the Gorgon threatened to do. She has frozen him still, immobilized him, blinded him, and caused his mind to be turned to stone. The things she does to him, however, have been done for his redemption rather than for his destruction.

When he is initially frozen cold by her, what results is his confession. The swooning leads to his immersion in the Lethe, which then enables him to look upon Beatrice fully. The blinding is the result of being forced to look away from the most beautiful being he has ever seen. The gazing and the forcing away are both good things. What Dante experiences when he looks at her smile is a heavenly rapture, but Dante himself says that while he gazed he forgot all else - and did not care that he had. Since he may now go with Beatrice to Paradise, he cannot be allowed to stare forever at the smile of his beloved. His condition then would be stationary. No

growth would take place within him.

So although he suffers from temporary loss of physical sight, ultimately he gains from that loss. As for his mind being turned to stone, Beatrice tells Dante that this has been done for good purpose. It is meant to demonstrate, in a potent way, how far his attempts to know the truth are from the truth itself. Furthermore, Dante must have a completely clean slate, one unconfused by many previous thoughts, so that he can go on and learn in the Paradiso.

> [My words] 'fly so high', she said, 'that you may know
> What school you followed, and how far behind
> That truth I speak its feeble doctrines go;
> And see that man's ways, even at his best,
> Are far from God's as earth is from the heaven
> Whose swiftest wheel turns above all the rest.'
>
> (Purgatorio XXXIII, 85-90)

Nevertheless, though the content of what Beatrice does to Dante differs from the content of what the Gorgon would have done, it is still the case that both have the same power over Dante. If these two entities exercise the same power, then why would the Medusa's power be destructive while Beatrice's power is constructive?

* * * * *

To begin searching for an answer, let us look at what we know about Beatrice. We know much more about her than we know of the Medusa. Beatrice is connected with love in two important ways. The first is that it is she who set the journey in motion by going to Virgil and sending him to Dante. Beatrice claims to be spurred on to this by love.

> It is I, Beatrice, who send you to him.
> I come from the blessed height for which I yearn.
> Love called me here.
>
> (Inferno II, 70-72)

The second is that Beatrice was Dante's greatest mortal love while she lived. It is because of her that Dante finds enough courage and confidence to make the journey. When Dante sees her again in the Earthly Paradise, he describes what this mortal love had done to him.

> My soul - such years had passed since last it saw
> That lady and stood trembling in her presence
> ... - now...felt the full mastery of enduring love...
> ...I was smitten by the force,
> Which had already once transfixed my soul
> Before my boyhood years had run their course.
> ...I recognize(d)
> The tokens of the ancient flame.
>
> (Purgatorio XXX, 34-48)

Beatrice indicates that Dante's love for her was desirable. He had had such potential for fulfillment that as long as she lived and he could keep his gaze upon her countenance he was not in danger of straying from the true path. She says, however, that as soon as she left him "He turned his steps aside from the True Way, pursuing the false images of good that promise what they never wholly pay." (Purgatorio

XXX, 130-132). In reproach she tells Dante that after she had died he should not "have been weighed down by any joy below/ - love of a maid, or any other fleeting/ and useless thing..." (Purgatorio XXXI, 58-60).

Since Dante's love for Beatrice kept him on the true path and his love for other things led him astray, it seems that the answer to the question about Beatrice and the Gorgon lies in what love means to the human soul.

* * * * *

Virgil tells Dante "that Love alone/ is the true seed of every merit in you,/ and of all the acts for which you must atone." (Purgatorio XVII, 102-105). Thus it may be concluded that if love led Dante to Beatrice and from thence to the highest good, then love must also have led Dante to his confrontation with the Medusa.

Accepting this conclusion, what is it about love and the human soul that causes this two-faced image of love to appear? To answer this we must begin by looking at where the source of man's love is in the scheme that Dante provides. Marc the Lombard informs Dante that:

> From the hand of God, whose love
> Shines like a ray upon it, even before birth,
> Comes forth the simple soul which,
> Like a child at play, cries, laughs,
> And ignorant of every measure
> But the glad impulse of its joyous Maker,
> Turns eagerly to all that gives it pleasure.
>
> (Purgatorio XVI, 85-90)

Virgil similarly says:

> The soul, being created prone to Love,
> Is drawn at once to all that pleases it,
> As soon as pleasure summons it to move.
> From that which really is, your apprehension
> Extracts a form which it unfolds within you;
> That form thereby attracts the mind's attention,
> Then if the mind, so drawn, is drawn to it,
> That summoning force is Love; and thus within you,
> Through pleasure, a new natural bond is knit.
>
> (Purgatorio XVIII, 19-27)

Virgil further comments that this inclination towards what is pleasurable is an "innate primordial appetite/...as within the bee/ the instinct to make honey; and such instincts/ are, in themselves, not blameable nor worthy." (Purgatorio XVIII, 57-60).

However, man is attracted to what is pleasurable with his mind: "Neither Creator nor his creatures move.../...but in the action/ of animal or of mind-directed love." (Purgatorio XVII, 91-93). The pitfall in this is that after Adam disobeyed God's command and fell from grace, man's reason was no longer sustained by the clear light of the truth. St. Thomas Aquinas tells us:

> The human reason cannot have a full participation of the dictate of the divine reason, but according to its own mode, and imperfectly. Consequently, just as on the part of the speculative reason, by a natural participation of divine wisdom, there is in us the knowledge of certain com-

mon principles, but not a proper knowledge of each single truth, such as that contained in the divine wisdom, so, too, on the part of the practical reason, man has a natural participation of the eternal law, according to certain common principles, but not as regards the particular determinations of individual cases.

(Summa Theologica, Prima Secundae. Q. 91, Art. 3)

Man does not always perceive the truth and he cannot always correctly distinguish between what is good and what is bad. He is given a natural light which helps him to determine what is true and what is false, but being instinctively drawn to pleasure, he does not always discern correctly which pleasures are good and which are bad.

In The Divine Comedy, St.Thomas gives Dante the following advice:

Move slowly, like a weary man,
To the 'yes' and 'no' of what you do not see.
For he is a fool, and low among his kind,
Who answers yea or nay without reflection,
Nor does it matter on which road he runs blind.
Opinions too soon formed often deflect
Man's thinking from the truth into gross error,
In which his pride then binds his intellect.

(Paradiso XIII, 113-120)

The hastiness that Aquinas warns against is precisely what is dangerous about pleasure. The mind deems that something is pleasurable and it is prone to rush after it without careful consideration. Marc the Lombard describes how men are caught up in sin because of this. The simple soul "tastes small pleasures first. To these it clings,/ deceived, and seeks no others" (Purgatorio XVI, 91-92). Things appear worthy of love, but "though love's substance always will appear to be a good, not every impress made,/ even in the finest wax, is good and clear." (Virgil - Purgatorio XVIII, 37-39).

Being in the dark, so to speak, and with this natural handicap, man does not always realize that the love and pursuit of God would give him the greatest pleasure. Man has the insightful knowledge, however, that there is a good in which he will find what he most seeks: a fulfillment in loving.

All men, though in a vague way, apprehend
A good their souls may rest in, and desire it;
Each, therefore, strives to reach his chosen end.

(Purgatorio XVII, 127-129)

This desire spurs man on and encourages him to love.

Man is endowed with a free will, and hence is able to choose, through the use of his intellect, the good that will give him salvation rather than damnation. He can escape the trap that loving sets for him. Virgil says:

Natural love may never fall to error.
The other [mind-directed love] may...
While it desires the Eternal Good and measures
Its wish for secondary goods in reason,
This love cannot give rise to sinful pleasures.
But when it turns to evil...
The creature turns on its creator.

(Purgatorio XVII, 94-102)

and he continues:

Now, that all later wills [after the natural impulse] and this first bent
May thrive, the innate counsel of your Reason
Must surely guard the threshold of consent.
This is the principle from which accrue
Your just deserts, according as it reaps
And winnows good or evil love in you.
...all love, let us say,
That burns in you, springs from necessity;
But you still have the power to check its sway.

(Purgatorio XVIII, 61-72)

St. Thomas describes how this rational aspect of man leads him into sin:

Everything, by its own natural appetite and love, loves its own proper good because of the common good of the whole universe, which is God...Hence in the state of integral nature man referred the love of himself and of all other things to the love of God as to its end... But in the state of corrupted nature man falls short of this in the appetite of his rational will, which...follows its own private Good.

(Summa Theologica, Prima Secundae. Q. 109, Art.3)

It is this rationally chosen love of the lesser things that dooms man by bringing him into sin. Because man does not find satisfaction in the false pleasures that he loves, if he is not somehow checked, he begins to travel down a pathway littered with one love after another. Eventually, in his greed for satisfaction, his ability to distinguish what is good and what is bad is undermined by his growing desire. He does not look closely at what appears to be good in order to judge whether or not he has found the true provider of this satisfaction. As he is continually tempted by false promises and is continually deprived, he begins to care less and less about the things he pursues. He thereby falls into error with increasing frequency.

The influence and good of his reason is submerged beneath his passion, and finally, if he never turns away from the path he has taken, it will die. He will not be able to use his power of judgement any longer. As Virgil says of the souls in Hell, they have lost the good of intellect. They were led to that state by perverted love.

Augustine says in The Confessions:

We are carried away by custom to our own undoing and it is hard to struggle against the stream. Will this torrent never dry up? How much longer will it sweep the sons of Adam down to that vast and terrible sea which cannot easily be passed... (Book I, 16)

* * * * *

The next question is why the weakening of the intellect is the greatest cause for punishment. On the most obvious level, what results from weakened reason is sin. But this extends further beyond punishment for doing wrong. It delves into the soul of man and claims that his very being finds its greatest fulfillment in the perfection of the intellect, and its damnation in the loss of that intellect.

St. Thomas says:

Each thing is inclined naturally to an operation that is suitable to it

according to its form: e.g., fire is inclined to give heat. Therefore, since the rational soul is the proper form of man, there is in every man a natural inclination to act according to reason; and this is to act according to virtue.

(Summa Theologica, Prima Secundae. Q. 94, Art. 3)

He also says:

The law of man which...is allotted to him according to his proper natural condition, is that he should act in accordance with reason; and this law was so effective in man's first state, nothing either outside or against reason could take man unawares. But when man turned his back on God, he fell under the influence of his sensual impulses. In fact, this happens to each one individually, according as he has the more departed from the path of reason.

(Summa Theologica, Prima Secundae. Q. 91, Art. 6)

Since man is given intellect, if he utilizes the ability to distinguish right from wrong he will be able to see that the highest good and the highest pleasure is found in God. Or, to put it another way, he will see that the false pleasures he loves do not give him the rest he seeks, and so, whether he has full knowledge of God or not, he will use his rationality and willingly choose the other alternative: God and the truth. If he does not come to this conclusion, then he is being unreasonable. Thus the souls who are in Hell have chosen to be unreasonable because they have travelled along the path of perverted love. As a result, they are unable to perceive and acknowledge the truth. Being unreasonable, they have become 'other' than what they were created to be: reasonable creatures.

Therein lies the cause of man's greatest sin. He is fallen, but he is given the opportunity to rise. If he does not take this opportunity then he falls again, only this time he falls to a condition that is beyond redemption. It is true that man requires guidance from the law and from grace in order to avoid this. But even if a man is caught unawares in the trap that his own loving sets for him, he is doomed unless he finds his power of judgement and realizes that the path he is on will lead him to damnation. Treading on this path will turn him to stone: the image of which conveys the impression of being stuck in one place, unable to move and not knowing enough to realize that one should move.

Virgil tells Dante that:

Within the habit of mankind
You set your whole intent on earthly things,
The true light falls as darkness on your mind.
(Purgatorio XV, 64-66),

and Beatrice says:

Tranced in blind greed, your ever deepening curse,
You have become as mindless as an infant
Who screams with hunger, yet pushes away his nurse.
(Paradiso XXX, 139-140).

* * * * *

Plotinus describes the soul immersed in the surge of its passions in this manner:

The ugly soul ...is dissolute, unjust, teeming with lusts, torn by inner discord, beset by craven fears and petty envies...friend to filthy pleasure, it lives a life abandoned to bodily sensation and enjoys its depravity...The life it leads is dark with evil, sunk in manifold death. It sees no longer what the soul should see.

(The Essential Plotinus, Beauty, p. 38-39)

Although Plotinus' idea of how the soul comes to be in this condition may not be completely in accord with Dante's, his description is surely in agreement. It is when a man is in this condition that to look upon his love fully is to look upon the Medusa and be turned to stone. Prior to Dante's waking in the Dark Wood, his soul was in this condition, and as he stands at the Gates of Dis his condition is not much changed. He realizes that he is lost, but he is still full of sin.

Dante is hesitant. He has confidence in Virgil, but he lacks confidence in himself. He lacks this confidence because his mind is clouded over with false impressions and his reason is weak from long disuse. His weakened reason rebels at the decision that he has made to follow Virgil into the underworld. He rebels because he fears, and he fears because he does not see the truth.

This state of wavering from his resolve is very much present at the Gates of Dis. Virgil has had to constantly support Dante. At Dis Dante is so awe-struck and frightened by the resistance that they meet that he is more willing to turn around and put an end to the journey than he is to face the difficulty before him.

Oh my beloved Master, my guide in peril,
Who time and time again have seen me safely
Along this way, and turned the power of evil,
Stand by me now...in my heart's fright.
And if the dead forbid our journey to them,
Let us go back together toward the light.

(Inferno VIII, 94-99)

Even though he is on the way toward salvation, before these Gates he is dangerously close to being stone. He is teetering upon the edge. He has not climbed up far enough to be safely out of danger. Dante is unprepared to look upon love while in this premature and sinful condition. It would destroy him. It would make him truly stone.

Dante is making this journey in order to gain back his good judgement and be rid of the things that are false within him. He is on his way to seeing "what the soul should see." What is seen in his encounter with Beatrice is a much more mature Dante. He had undergone a gradual process of elimination. Virgil has taken him through Hell where he had seen the damned. Dante has been through Purgatory, and the seven deadly sins, in the form of P's, have been removed from his forehead. He has not yet seen the full truth, but he has seen the false. By the time he reaches the Earthly Paradise he has been able to witness the false loves that made up the crooked path upon which he had been walking. Dante has been able to see the sin within himself. He has been purged.

Dante's soul is so greatly changed that Virgil relieves himself of his role as guide:

I have led you here by grace of mind and art;
Now let your own good pleasure be your guide;
You are past the steep ways, past the narrow part...
Expect no more of me in word or deed:
Here your will is upright, free and whole,

And you would be in error not to heed
Whatever your own impulse prompts you to:
Lord of yourself I crown and mitre you.
(Purgatorio XXVII, 130-132, 139-143)

False pleasures have no allure for Dante now because he is capable of seeing that they are false. He is ready to rush joyfully after all that pleases him. He is no longer in danger of rushing after the wrong thing. Dante is prepared to look upon his love. This time it will not bring him death and destruction, but eternal life. Beatrice will make him ready to go on and stand upright before the bright glory of what is true and can never be false. In this cleansed state love will infuse him completely, leaving him whole, perfect and fulfilled. This means the rising of the intellect, within the mortal body, to the utmost height:

The truth I wished for came
Cleaving my mind in a great flash of light...
...I could feel my being turned -
Instinct and intellect balanced equally.
(Paradiso XXXIII, 140-144)

* * * * *

At this point it would be well to remember that Dante is still living when he makes this journey. For the soul that is dead there is no Gorgon and no Beatrice. The life of that soul has already come to the conclusion of its earthly travels and is already in its chosen place.

What Dante faces when he encounters the Medusa and Beatrice is the culmination of the two paths upon which love may take him. It is as though, for Dante, love with all its power contained in the two faces of the Medusa and Beatrice exists simultaneously in its end result in Dis and in the Earthly Paradise. To look upon his love naked and powerful when he is in sin or when he has been purified is to choose the pathway that he will take in the life he still must lead.

Thus it is appropriate that Beatrice was a mortal woman whom Dante loved and who is now, in Paradise, filled with divine love. It is also appropriate that the Medusa was the only one of the three Gorgons who was mortal and is now, in Hell, filled with perverted love. Could not the Medusa, once a beautiful woman, represent the false pleasures which Dante had loved after Beatrice left him? The potency which the two hold then stems from the fact that Dante loved both.

That the opposition between the Medusa and Beatrice should find its source in the human beholder is not surprising when one recalls that they both have their birth from out of the human element. Hell exists precisely for the punishment of human sin. The Gorgon dwells within the walls of the City of Hell. Grace exists solely for the redemption of man. Beatrice is the being through which Dante receives divine aid, and she resides in Paradise.

Both Beatrice and the Medusa stem from that force, that necessary instinct in man, of love. Love is what spans the distance between Heaven and Hell. It is the force that has the greatest power over the human heart. Love has driven men to the greatest heights and it has caused men to fall into total ruin. Because man's heart is schizophrenic when it comes to loving, love often works its two-faced might in the mind of one and the same man. Sometimes it causes him to do the noblest of deeds, sometimes the most foul. Man's heart is deep and mazed. Love enters into it and in that natural bond between man and the things he loves the contradiction, and perhaps the tragedy, that is present in all facets of his behavior is born.

Love prompts men to do all that they do, whether it be love of glory, or wealth, or another human being.....the list could go on and on. Even if he does not love what he does in a specific instance, he is acting for the love of something else. Consequently, the two faces of love, either that of the Medusa or that of Beatrice, await him around each corner as he walks upon the paths of life.

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Dearest children,

I still remember you as children, small and afraid, on the day of your father's execution, although by now you must be young men just beginning to set out to make lives of your own. It is to help guide you in this endeavor that I am writing now. I only met your father once - on the day of his death. I had come into Athens to trade some oriental fabrics, and by a stroke of luck happened to accompany Phaedo to the prison where your father was being held. I am no philosopher, but the will and intellect of your father was so strong that they seized my attention, and I listened intently to all that was said. Some of the things that your father said seemed so inconsistent with the man himself and what he said and did, that I have been thinking about them ever since, and, in thinking about these contradictions, I have come to some small understanding of what your father believed.

I have imagined you growing up as orphans. Crito promised that he would make sure that you were well cared for, but he is such a practical man that I fear he has not told you anything real about your father. It is perhaps presumptuous of me to believe that I could tell you anything about Socrates, after only meeting him once. And yet, because of all of the thinking that I have done about the things that he said, I hope that I might be able to explain him to you, and help you to come to love the man as I have. By now your memories of your father must have become so jumbled with all of the things that you have heard about him that you can hardly know what to think.

On the day of his death, your father spent most of his time discussing what might happen to the soul after the death of the body. We considered whether it was immortal or not, and what type of other world it might inhabit if it were. This might seem to you to be a topic most worthy of discussion, particularly in the hours just before death, and so it seemed to all of us listening. But the further we got into the discussion, the more each of us began to realize that we were not going to find any concrete answers to the questions which we were asking. We all came to feel that the immortality of the soul could not be proven beyond a doubt. I have since learned that your father must have known this from the very beginning. On the day of his trial he had said that anyone who thought that he knew anything about death was a fool, for it was simply unknowable. This was the first contradiction that I became aware of between what your father said and what he did, and it set my mind buzzing, trying to figure out what the man was up to. I think that I have finally come to understand something of this.

I believe that your father was not particularly interested in finding answers, in knowing the knowable things, because answers can not really explain anything. This is certainly the impression I got from listening to him talk about his experience with natural science. He said that he became interested in natural science because it promised him the knowledge of the cause of everything. What he found instead was a description of the materials of which things were made and the shapes which these materials took. He found these sorts of descriptions to be confusing and misleading, for they did not approach an explanation of the kinds of causes he was

concerned with. Yet it was easy for men to get caught up in them and forget about their real concerns. I had always believed that natural science was an important study of why things happened, but I think that your father was looking for a different type of 'why', one that would explain things and actions in human terms rather than describe strange substances and proclaim them to be the reasons for everything. Your father was trying to find answers to human concerns--answers that need to be couched in human terms. What is interesting about a thing is its relation to mankind in general and the individual in particular, not to some other thing.

Once he realized that natural science was not going to provide the answers he was seeking, your father devised a system of his own that explained absolutely everything. He explained that a beautiful thing is beautiful because it partakes in absolute beauty. To all of us listening this seemed to be a most elegant and understandable explanation of things, one which could faultlessly answer any questions we might possibly ask. But as I thought more about this formulation of things, I came to realize that it, too, does not begin to deal with any of our real, our human, concerns. It does not help us to understand anything which we do not already know. I think that your father also realized this, and that after his encounter with natural science he had come to realize that answers were not really what humans are after. In order to help us to come to feel this way too, he concocted this incredibly simple system which could answer all of our questions and none of our concerns. Your father used many such inherent contradictions and paradoxes--such as "the answer is not really The Answer"--to get us all to think. What becomes evident to all who do think about this is that we are not really looking for simple answers to the questions which perplex us.

Well then, what are we looking for and how do we come to have some human understanding of things which are not thus "knowable", like the soul or virtue or knowledge itself? Although we may not really wish for God, or Socrates, to drop down out of the heavens and just give us some answer--this would not truly help us to understand anything which we did not already know--we do care about these things and need to have some understanding of them which can serve as a basis for our actions in the world. I think that your father was using this discussion of the soul as a paradigm to show us how best to approach all of our human concerns with the unknowable.

Since I knew nothing of philosophy, there were many things about the way your father spoke--with such keen intelligence and lively imagination--that struck me as strange that day, but one of the words your father used seemed particularly unusual. Early in the morning he said that it would be fitting for him μυθολογεῖν about the soul. This word, a combination of λόγος , rational speech, and μῦθος , story, seemed a particularly striking one, since the two terms are often thought to be opposites. But throughout the rest of the day, your father employed both of these means in his discussion of the soul.

The young men in your father's company were very ready to accept λόγοι , rational arguments, as a means of proving the immortality of the soul. This type of discussion was apparently customary for your father. Indeed, he proved the immortality of the soul twice, once beginning with the notion that learning is recollection and then, when we were not satisfied by that, in a very involved argument using the relationship between opposites and some third accompanying factor. But Simmias and Cebes - I suppose you know the men I mean - seemed able to come up with objections to even the finest of arguments, until finally we all despaired of even understanding anything through λόγος .

Your father was very careful to make sure that we never let ourselves come to mistrust λόγος completely. He seemed to believe that our trust in arguments and use of them was a very essential thing. I have been thinking about why he felt so strongly about this, and I think that I have the answer. These arguments of your father's began with some belief that one of us had, such as the idea that learning

was recollection, the soul is a harmony, etc., and examined it. By means of a discussion, we were able to see if this concept had any self-contradictions and if it contradicted any of the other things which we believed. The idea of contradiction was very important to your father. He believed that a man could not hold two contradicting beliefs at the same time, once he had been made aware of these contradictions. I think that on his last day, he was using theses arguments which disclosed contradictions in part to force us into really thinking about the things that he was talking about. For if he is right, and a man cannot hold two contradicting views, then that man must try to reconcile them within himself. In the process of this reconciliation he comes to understand the topic at hand more thoroughly.

Arguments also proved to be a marvelous way for a man to come to understand himself and discover the things which were important to him. When two of Simmias' beliefs were shown to contradict one another, that learning is recollection and the soul is a harmony, he had then to choose the one more important to him and stick by that. Argument could not tell him which one was true, but it could force him to realize which things he wanted to stand for. The importance of comparing two ideas did not lie in their contradicting each other absolutely, but rather in how they related back to the person who was believing them, and how he was to reconcile himself to them.

Once our beliefs were found not to involve us in contradiction, your father was able to lead us in a discussion of what the logical consequences of these beliefs were. As in his proofs of the immortality of the soul, he could help us build an almost mathematical system, beginning with our conceptions and deducing necessary consequences from them.

The young men surrounding your father were frustrated because his λόγος could not give them beliefs which they did not already have; but they did not realize how much more confident it could leave them about beliefs which they did have. For they had weeded through many things they had heard and thought, until they arrived at a few beliefs which were important to them, and these beliefs had been tested against themselves and others and found to be sound. They were therefore as likely to be true as it is humanly possible to insure.

In addition to arguing, your father also told us many stories. He used two distinct types of μῦθος. The first was the simple example. Throughout the discussion, both your father and the young men, used examples in order to make their meanings clear. I was very surprised to find lovers, coats, and lyres, to be the stuff of philosophy. The second was the full-fledged myth. After we all had become frustrated with argument and sure that it could not give us the answers we believed we wanted, your father replied to a question by telling us some of his life story. He ended with a myth about the real configuration of the world and the after-world. Crito, always the practical one, seemed to believe that all this story-telling amounted to nothing. Though your father said that only a fool would believe that everything was exactly as his story made it out to be, he defended stories against Crito's disbelief.

Again it took me some time to understand what your father could have meant by insisting that myths were important. One of the very first things he did as we went in to him that morning was to tell a myth about one of the gods having joined pleasure and pain at the head because the two could never stop quarrelling. Then, only five minutes later, he said that he was not a maker of myths. Here was another of his blatant contradictions which was, I believe, designed to set our minds racing. What could this man who obviously could make up tales, mean by insisting that he was not a maker of myths? These stories shared with examples that ability to make things exceedingly clear. They had a very soothing effect, calming us all where arguments had left us heated and emotionally disturbed. But your father seemed to want us to think of them as more than mere emotional outlets.

Then I remembered that your father, by using the word μυθολογεῖν, had given equal importance to μῦθος and λόγος , and that Simmias had warned that arguments based upon probability, in philosophic λόγος as well as mathematics, were unreliable. From these facts, I deduced the importance of story-telling. In addition to making ideas seem much more vivid to those trying to understand, stories actually help us to understand our principles. In a story we can examine the questions, "What would it be like to live that way?" and, "What are the possible and probable consequences of our system of beliefs?" Story-telling can succeed in a region where logical argument fails to have any real sway: stories are able to look at the probable ends of abiding by your beliefs. This examination by μῦθος is just as important as a logical one, for it is possible that all of a man's principles are logically sound, and yet once he looks beyond their logic to the consequences of believing such things he discovers that they lead him or others to evil. By imagining what things your beliefs will probably lead to, you then have another means besides contradiction to judge whether they are truly the things which you want to believe in or not.

One of the necessary parts of an approach through λόγος is the breaking down of an idea, and the examination of its component parts. Μῦθος , on the other had, serves as a means of seeing the entire system of your beliefs. In this sense, μῦθος can come much closer to relating those beliefs to the real, whole world.

Logical arguments and μῦθος thus compliment each other. Λόγος serves the essential function of sorting through beliefs to find those which are the truest (least contradictory) ones possible, and then deducing the absolutely logical consequences of these beliefs. Μῦθος can take over from there and make sense of the possible and probable consequences of these beliefs. Λόγος without μῦθος does not fully relate ideas to the human realm, and μῦθος must have a firm beginning of noncontradictory beliefs from which to operate or it becomes meaningless.

Perhaps you are surprised to hear that such human things were your father's concerns. Most people imagine philosophers to be men who take leave of their senses, removing themselves from their own bodies and all things tainted with humanity, and concentrate their attention upon understanding those things which are not seen by the rest of mankind. Indeed I have heard of a play by Aristophanes which protrays your father as such a man. During the course of your father's last day, Socrates himself gave just such a definition of a philosopher, elaborating upon it several times. I, like the rest of the company, swallowed it whole at the time; it sounded so usual. But because your father is renowned for convincing people who believe they know something that they do not, I believe that he said such things just to make us all think about the differences between his own philosophical life and the stereotype which we carry around inside us and sometimes try to emulate.

Your father was certainly not a man who had drawn away from himself and his fellow humans. He always seemed supremely present in the room and in the conversation. I have rarely met a man who observed so carefully, cocking his head to listen and piercing us with his gaze. And he certainly understood our moods. Although he was about to die, he seemed much less afraid than we, because he understood the fear of death, both his and our own. He was quick to respond to our feelings of distrust in λόγος which followed the loss of our hope for an answer. Whatever his philosophy did involve, it clearly was not a withdrawal from this real world.

I believe that philosophy for him did not involve avoiding people, but rather involved examining their principles by means of his beautiful and ordered stories and arguments. He sang the people's own beliefs and deeds to them as Homer sang those of the heroes. Your father was concerned with matters which could not be called mundane, such as the existence of absolutes and the meanings of opposites, but I think that he understood that both this world of absolutes and the world of mere bodily sensations meet and join harmoniously in the man who thinks and acts. Your father's concern seemed to be how these absolute things, envisioned by the human mind, related

to our human affairs, rather than study of them as unrelated to human thought. He certainly did not attempt to discuss matters which were not heart-felt by us all.

I think I may have a clue to what your father thought was important above all. He spent much of his time talking about invisible things or worlds, and the way to approach these. He said that we must do this through λόγοι, speeches, for the task was beyond our other means. What kind of a realm can be approached through speech with others? From what happened on the day he died, I can only suggest this much: while I was listening to your father, I felt and thought about myself and others, more perhaps than I ever had up until then. By means of a discussion, he managed to expose our thoughts, beliefs, hopes and fears. I think that it is these human ideas, suggested by the world around us, yet existing separately from it, which are the things which people your father's invisible world. Thus he was a man concerned not with some kind of distant ultimate world as we tend to believe all philosophers must be, but rather with the much more human world of our intellectual beliefs and hopes which can be entered whenever we think and converse. I think this was what he meant when he envisioned a world above this one, clearer and more pure. I believe that he thought of this world as better, not because it was full of bodiless souls, for he spoke of its inhabitants as having senses, but because they had lost the basest concerns of the body, such as illness and decay, and had realized that thinking about their beliefs was essential. They were therefore able to live together and approach a perfect society where justice and virtue were realized in action and thought and men were able to think and love and hope much more exquisitely.

The things which I heard from your father on that day have changed my life, not all at once, but gradually as I have come to understand them better. I have not given up my lifestyle to become a philosopher; however I have come to understand that it is essential for a man to examine all his beliefs to discover what exactly they are, in order for him to be able to live a truly full life. A man who neglects the search of the soul for an understanding of the absolutes and unknowables is not fully living as a human being. This wonder about the absolutes combines in man with an understanding of the visible world and makes all of his actions much more certain. He understands why his beliefs are important to him and acts upon them. By knowing the values that he holds, he can become a better person, aspiring to that ethereal world while living in this one.

I shall not recount the noble manner in which your father died, for you have only to ask anyone about it. Rather I shall end here and hope that these few words have made some difference to you, that somehow they will help you to know that above all a man must examine his beliefs closely and, if he is convinced they are the best he can find, he must stand by them and mold all of his actions after them. This, I think, is what your father believed.

The Jacobsen Cut: A Geometrical Proposition

Henry Higuera

I would like to share a solution I discovered to a question about conic sections proposed by Bryce Jacobsen--largely because his conjecture, which I proved to be correct, is so pretty. I hope the reader feels as I do, and that his interest in the question helps get him through my proofs. In addition, I managed to prove it by purely Apollonian means, which increased my admiration for the power of his approach; and for this reason too my proof is worth sharing.

This is the situation which made Bryce and me wonder:

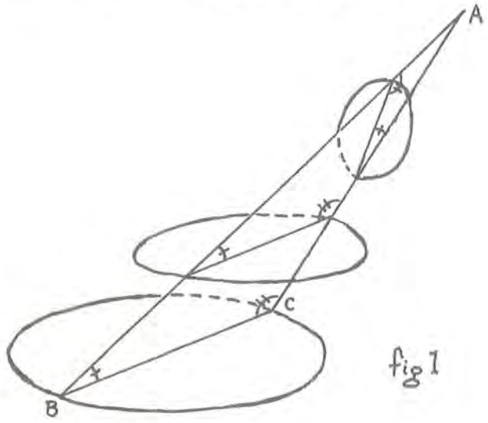

fig 1

You are given an oblique cone with axial triangle ABC perpendicular to the base of the cone. (Upperclassmen will recall that with this kind of cone and axial triangle there are two kinds of cuts which will produce a circle - a fact which will become important in a moment). Now, if you take this cone and start making cuts producing ellipses, a couple of facts are obvious:

A steep cut, like the one in Figure 2, will give you a highly-elongated ellipse: i.e., DE will be the major axis and will be much bigger than the minor axis; and the ellipse will get more highly-elongated the closer D gets to A.

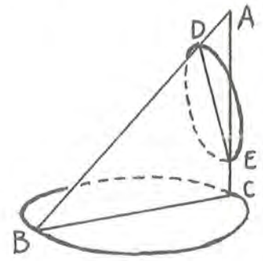

fig 2

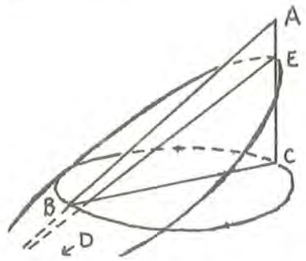

fig 3

This is clearly true as well for a cut down the other side of the axial triangle, as in Figure 3. Again DE is the major axis and will be much bigger than the minor axis; and again the ellipse gets more elongated the farther down D is.

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But what if your cuts get less steep, so that the ellipses become less highly elongated? Does the effect ever get reversed? Specifically, what if (so Mr. J. mused) you make a cut at an angle in between a cut parallel to the base and a "subcontrariwise" cut? These two cuts [Apol. I 4,5] give you circles, i.e., "non-elongated" ellipses; so, do cuts in between give you ellipses elongated the other way, with DE as the minor axis? And if so, is there one specific cut for any oblique cone that gives you the "fattest" ellipse? The answer is "yes" to all these questions, as I hope to show.

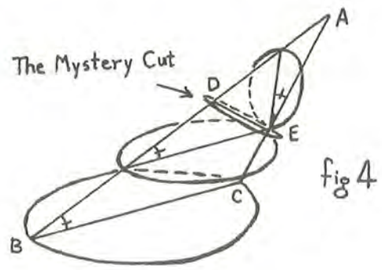

fig 4

I. To prove that the elongation becomes reversed--the so-called "Jacobsen Effect."

(This proof uses an easily-proven LEMMA: Given three lines A, B and C, if A:B>B:C, then sp.A:sq.B>A:C. I'll sketch an argument for this in a note when I use it.)

OK, here we go: Given a cone with axial triangle ABC perpendicular to the base. Make three cuts, all intersecting side AC at the same point E: one parallel cut, producing a circle with diameter DE [Apol. 1.4]; one subcontrariwise cut, producing a circle with diameter FE [Apol. 1.5]; and a random cut in between, producing an ellipse with axis HE [Apol. 1.13, 7]. Of course the common sections of the cutting planes and the plane of the base, LG and MK, have to be perpendicular to BC produced [Apol. I 5, 13]; thus they are parallel to one another.

Bisect the diameters FE, HE, DE at N, O, P respectively; and draw NQ, OR, and PS out to the conic surface parallel to LG (and MK). These are all ordinates [Apol. I 13] and therefore conjugate axes of their respective diameters [Apol. I 15]; and QN=NE and SP=PE, since those cuts produced circles.

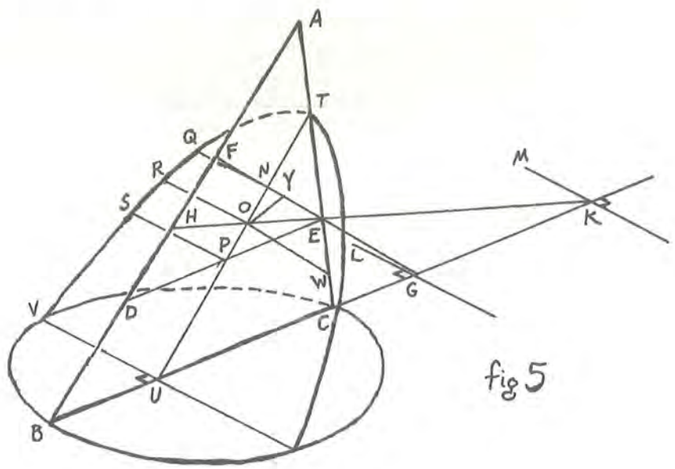

fig 5

I say that RO>OE, so that HE is the minor axis.

For, DP:PE::HO:OE and HO:OE::FN:NE; therefore OP and NO when joined are parallel to HD and FH, respectively [Eucl. VI 2]. But F, H and D are all on AB, so N, O and P are all on a straight line parallel to AB, one side of the axial triangle.

Produce line NOP to meet AC at T and BC at U, and from U draw UV out to the conic surface perpendicular to BC. Then UV is parallel to LG and MK, and thus to QN, RO, and SP as well. And QN, RO, SP and UV are all in one plane, having a common transversal TU[1]. Therefore, by Apollonius I 11 that plane produces a PARABOLA when it cuts the cone--with vertex T, diameter TU, and ordinates QN, RO, SP, &c. The proof basically rests on this fact.

Now from O draw OW parallel to FE and meeting AC or AC produced. Now, DE || BC, UT||AB, OW||FE and ∠ABC=∠AEF from the subcontrariwise cut; so,

∠CBA=∠CUT=∠EPN

while ∠CBA=∠AEF=∠EWO;

so EPN= EWO.

Now, EON> EPN [Euc. I 17][2], so ∠EON >EWO. Construct a new angle,∠EOY, equal to ∠EWO; then ∠EOY<∠EON and

EN>EY.[3]

Now you've constructed EOY equal to OWE, while YEO= EOW [alt. int. angles]. Therefore:

△YEO is similar to △EOW[4]

and EY:EO::EO:OW.

BUT EN>EY, so EN:EO>EO:OW [Euc. V 8,13];

therefore sq. EN: sq. EO>EN:OW [LEMMA][5].

Now, EN:OW::NO:OT [Euc. VI 4]

so sq. EN: sq. EO>NT:OT [Euc. V 13];

but sq. QN: sq. RO::NT:OT [Apol. I 20],

since QN and RO are ordinates, and NT and OT abscissas of a parabola; furthermore QN=EN, since they're radii of the subcontrariwise circle, so sq. QN=sq. EN.

Therefore sq. EN: sq. RO::NT:OT [Euc. V 7, 11]

and sq. EN: sq. EO>sq. EN: sq. RO [Euc. V 13].

Therefore sq. RO>sq. EO [Euc. V 10]

and RO>EO. Q.E.D.

II. To prove that the cut bisecting the angle between the parallel and the subcontrariwise cuts -- the so-called "Jacobsen Cut" -- produces the maximum degree of elongation the other way.

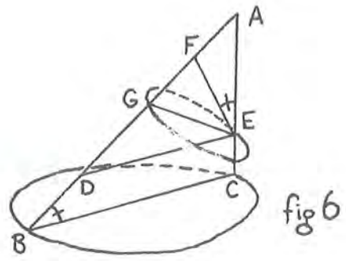

fig 6

Proving this involves a preliminary fact that I'll establish separately: a Jacobsen cut cuts off an isosceles triangle on the axial triangle.

Let GE bisect the angle between DE and FE, so that:

∠GEG=∠FED.

Then, since in addition ∠ABC=∠ADE∠AEF, because of parallels and the subcontrariwise cut, ∠GED+∠ADE=∠FEG+∠AEF [C.N. 2];

but ∠GED+∠ADE=∠AGE [Euc. I 32]

while ∠FEG+∠AEF=∠AEG,

so ∠AGE=∠AEG and △AGE is isosceles.

Now to prove that the Jacobsen cut delivers the maximum Jacobsen Effect. Given a Jacobsen Cut, so that ∠ADE= ∠AED, producing an ellipse with DE as minor axis and KG as major axis; given also a random cut producing an ellipse with FE as axis and LH as the conjugate axis[6] (G and H are the midpoints).

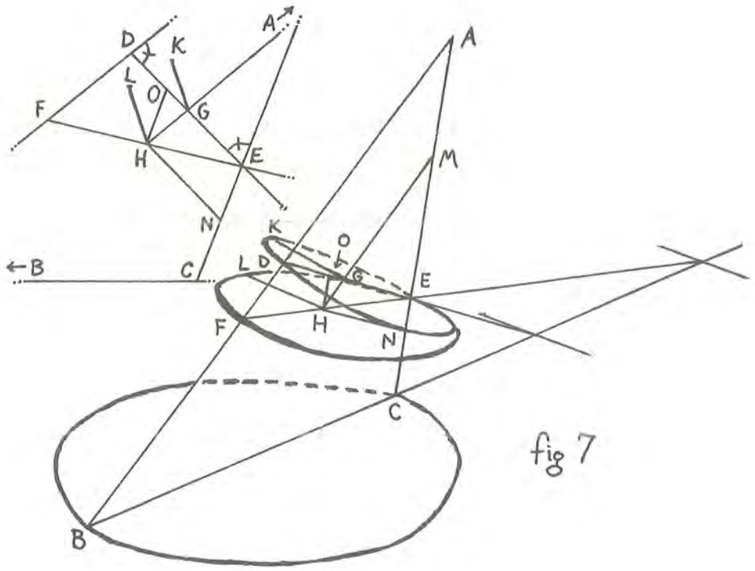

fig 7

I say that KG:GE>LH:HE--i.e., the Jacobsen ellipse is more elongated out towards the reader than an ellipse resulting from any other cut.

For, extend HG to meet AC at M, and from H draw HN parallel to DE meeting AC or AC produced.

Then, first, KG and LH are ordinates of a parabola with vertex M, so

sq. KG: sq. LH::GM:HM [Apol. I 20];

but, second, GE: HN::GM:HM [Euc. VI 4],

so sq. KG: sq. LH::GE:HN [Euc. V 11].

Now, with GE as a common height, GE:HN:: sq. GE: r.GE, HN,

so sq. KG: sq. LH:: sq. GE: r. GE, HN,

or sq. KG: sq. GE:: sq. LH: r. GE, HN, alternating.

Now, it was given that ∠ADE=∠AED, so because of parallels, ∠NHM=∠HNM. But EHG NHM. Therefore:

∠EHN<∠ENH.

Construct a new angle,∠EHO, equal to ∠ENH, with O on DE.

Then, ∠EHO>∠EHG and EG<EO.

Meanwhile, ∠OEH=∠EHN too [alt. int. angles], so

△OEH is similar to △EHN and

EO:EH::EH:HN.

But EG<EO, so EG:EH<EH:HN

or EH:EG>HN:EH, inverting;

therefore sq. EH rect.>GE,HN. [Apol. I 34, n. 1]

But it was shown above that:

sq. KG: sq. GE:: sq. LH: rect.GE,HN,

sq. KG: sq. EG>sq. LH: sq. EH [Euc. V 8, 13]

and KG:GE>LH:EH.

A similar procedure would deal with cases where F is above D.

Q.E.D.

NOTES

1. Euclid never bothers to prove that three parallel lines with a common transversal must be in the same plane, which is too bad. I won't try to do it here, but I'm sure it's true.

2. Here you can see one reason why the Jacobsen Effect only exists in between the parallel and subcontrariwise cuts: if O were below P, EON would be less than EPN and the proof wouldn't hold.

3. Is this self-evident? At any rate, if you look at all the angles in the triangles involved, EYO> ENO, so EYO has to be the exterior angle of NYO, or Euc. I 17 is violated.

4. Here's another reason why the Jacobsen Cut has to be in between. If O is above N, then even if (as is perfectly possible) EON> EPN, as in the earlier part of the proof, the angle EWO will here be the exterior angle of EOW, and it won't be similar to YEO.

5. Given three lines A, B, and C, if A:B>B:C, then sq.A:SQ.B A:C; basically because the first ratio if compounded of A:B and A:B, while the second is compounded of A:B and A:C.

6. Note that the cut FE doesn't have to be above the parallel cut for this proof to hold--the ratio just keeps decreasing.

Purgation of the Human Spirit

William O'Grady

(In memory of my mother, Isabel Geddes O'Grady)

I would like to present some quite fragmentary thoughts about Dante's Purgatory and about what the purgation of the human spirit might mean, why human beings might hope for it and why they might fear it. I am very eager to know whether these thoughts make sense to you.

I

Let me begin with a passage from Augustine's Confessions, occurring just before he recounts the moment in the garden when he hears a voice "as of a child" inviting him to "take up and read" a passage from St. Paul that seems addressed specially to him. He reads and "as if before a peaceful light streaming into my heart, all the dark shadows of doubt fled away". But this is how Augustine describes his condition before receiving and responding to the invitation:

> What was there that I did not say against myself? With what scourges of self-condemnation did I not lash my soul, so that it would follow me as I strove to follow you? [All of these words are spoken of course to God] Yet it drew back; it refused to go on, and it offered no excuses for itself. All arguments [against being a Christian] were used up, and all had been refuted. There remained only speechless dread and my soul was fearful, as of death itself, of being kept back from that flow of habit by which it was wasting away unto death.

In order to understand something of Augustine's paralyzing dread, which only the most definite invitation (as Augustine understood it) from God Himself could overcome, we must understand something of what he means by "the force of habit", which is his remarkable and bold paraphrase of what St. Paul calls "the law of sin". I think he means by habit something very radical, something that is perhaps suggested in some words spoken by the adulteress--heroine in Grahame Greene's novel The End of the Affair. Sarah is resisting the renunciations--above all the renunciation of her lover--which she is coming to believe God requires of her in fulfillment of a bargain into which she entered out of desperation and love. She writes in her diary:

> Nothing to do till seven when Henry (her husband) would be back. Had a couple of drinks by myself. It was a mistake. Have I got to give up drinking too? If I eliminate everything, how will I exist? I was somebody who loved Maurice (her lover) and went with men and

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> enjoyed my drinks. What happens if you drop all the things that make you I?

She means, I think, and Augustine means, that what arouses dread is not so much the prospect of giving up the reliable pleasures for the sake of something less well known, nor even the anticipated pain of the straightening of what has been crooked in one's life and one's self; but rather the possibility that there will be nothing left to mean when I say "I"-- the very word will no longer have content. What am I, am I anything at all, when stripped of the ways of being I have chosen to make my own and have somehow placed myself into and taken responsibility for in laboring through my life?

When the human spirit, my very own spirit, has been purged of all that is displeasing to God, will there by anything left of me?-- this most disquieting of questions is felt by Dante the pilgrim as well as by ourselves.

II

I think it is impossible to understand Dante without holding fast to the realization that he insists with equal passion on the legitimacy of two fundamental human desires: the desire to enjoy the highest good, to be in the loving presence of God, to be as full of His grace and light as one may be; and the desire to be one's very self. Neither of these desires must be sacrificed to the other--this is the source of many of the great tensions of the Comedy (as well as being the reason, I think, why there is no regret, let alone resentment, in a hierarchical paradise: Cunizza, for example, within the sphere of Venus, knows that she could be a more perfect vessel for God's light only by ceasing to be Cunizza--and this she cannot want).

Because of the properly irreducible duality which Dante recognizes as fundamental to humankind's deepest desire, the purgation of the human spirit is a complicated matter. But it is also of the greatest importance that the journey of Dante the pilgrim does not begin at the base of the mount of purgation. If that were so, some calculation of cost and benefit might be imaginable: how much is one willing to sacrifice for how great a good. The fact is, however, that Dante arrives at Purgatory having emerged from Hell, having seen with the greatest clarity--a clarity none of us, I take it, possesses--what the alternative to purgation is. That alternative is unbearable. Therefore purgation is necessary: Dante cannot impose conditions or otherwise negotiate; he can only hope that at the end of the purgation of his spirit, his "I myself" will still have some content, and indeed will have its most proper content, whose properness is recognizable not only by God but also by Dante himself.

III

The alternative to purgation (whether in this life or afterwards) is Hell. Allow me to digress briefly upon what I take to be the principle of the choice for Hell. I think that according to Dante's presentation the principle of that choice is, above all, the unwillingness to be moved by another, to have the source of one's motion outside of oneself. That is why the extreme of Hell is sheer frigid immobility: those who were unwilling to be moved by another are ultimately unable themselves to move; at the furthest point from the unmoved mover Who draws all beings to Himself, we encounter the unmoved movers whose only power--an irresistible power, it seems--is to repel.

It is important to be aware that the unwillingness to have the source of one's motion outside of oneself can, and often does, assume subtle guises. It is possible to seem to be moved by another, by a being outside of oneself, while in fact using

that other as a mere substratum upon which to project one's own fantasies, so that in fact one is being moved by one's own fantasies, and the source of one's motion is exclusively and securely within oneself. This appears to be part of the meaning of the dream of the siren, the ancient witch, which Dante experiences upon the terrace of sloth.

IV

I said earlier that Dante as a character in the poem possesses perfect clarity concerning the alternative to purgation, and that we do not. But we seem to have some clarity about that alternative, and in any case neither Dante's submission to purgation nor our own seems comprehensible as nothing but flight from; there is surely also an element of the motion toward. After all, what overcomes Dante's final dread of the flames through which he must pass is the promise of Beatrice awaiting him on the far side. But the elements of flight from and motion toward seem to me intimately connected, as I shall try to indicate by distinguishing between two aspects of purgation of the spirit as presented by Dante.

The first has to do with the so-called seven deadly sins. Of three of these--pride, anger and lust--Dante knows himself to be more guilty than he is of the others. These sins, or perhaps roots of sin, are surely serious and dangerous matters; but one can, after all, do something about them. At least within certain limits, willing avails to mortify pride, for example, and to restrain at least the outward eruptions of anger--one can undertake to practice gentleness of speech.

But to be lost in the dark wood, to come to oneself again in the dark wood, seems to involve more than recognition of one's entanglement in particular sinful ways. Dante's own heart is not fully healed until at the top of the mount of purgation, "the ice that was bound about my heart turned to breath and water and with anguish came forth from my breast by mouth and eyes". What had happened to Dante, above and beyond his particular violations of the conduct proper for human beings, is that his heart had grown hard and cold; and he knew that; and he knew that he could not, by howsoever heroic an act of will-power, undo that hardness and coldness. The most he could do--and that was difficult enough--was to sustain his sorrow that it was so, his sadness that his heart was no longer capable, as the heart of the young boy had been capable, of opening in awe and gratitude in the presence of the beauty presented to him in the figure of a little girl, and of resolving to be as good as he could be so as to be worthy, not indeed to possess her, but to be in the world that contained her. Had Dante been unable to sustain his sorrow over the growing coldness of his heart, had he self-distractingly or cynically accommodated himself to it, he would have been truly dead, and neither the grace of God, nor the graciousness of Mary, Lucy and Beatrice, would have availed him anything.

V

Let us now finally enter Purgatory with the pilgrim Dante. In the first Canto he is perfectly silent. What does this silence contain? There must be in it great relief, and wonder, and some bewilderment. Above all, there is the certain knowledge that Hell must be rejected, and hence the way of purgation must be chosen, must be submitted to. What will this submission require? Dante first of all hears the severe Cato say that although Marcia was, in the old mode, the surpassing love in his life, in the new mode he is wholly unmoved by her. Whatever Cato means by these words, they must be heart-rending for Dante to hear.

When Dante does finally speak, in the second Canto, it is to ask Casella, the friend of his young manhood, to sing for him "one of the songs of love which used to

quiet all my longings, so as to refresh my soul with them for a while, which is so spent coming here with my body." But Dante prefaces his request in this way: "If a new law does not take from you the memory and use of these songs." It seems to Dante entirely possible that a new law does forbid lovely and, as it seemed, innocent things which once brought him consolation and refreshment--and if it is so, the new law must nevertheless be submitted to. But what then will be left, not merely of consolation and refreshment, but of Dante himself? I think these worries are very much on Dante's mind, as they may be on ours, and they are hardly alleviated by Cato's sharp rebuke, castigating delight in song as blamable negligence.

Well, it requires the presentation of Paradise itself before Dante and we can even glimpse the aliveness, the richness and fullness of personality, the being more myself than I have ever been before, enjoyed by the spirits whose purgation has been completed. But there are two moments within Purgatory itself that I should like to indicate briefly as bearing upon our hopes and fears in this matter.

The first occurs in the second Canto. As the thousand souls disembark from the angel-piloted ship, they sing, all together with one voice, In exitu Israel de Aegypto, "when Israel went out of Egypt", a hymn of liberation and deliverance. And, Dante expressly tells us, they sing "all that is written after of that psalm". Let us listen to a few more words from this hymn (Psalm 114) which Dante heard:

> The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like young sheep -- Why, mountains, do you skip like rams, and you, hills, like young sheep? Dance, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool of water, the granite cliff into a fountain.

There is in these words heard by Dante the promise that in the delivering, liberating, purging action of God there comes to pass the greatest and most joyous enlivening of all his creatures--submission, still less renunciation and loss, are very far from being the final moment.

VI

And yet as we read the end of the Purgatory--the second moment to which I wished to call attention--we cannot help but feel a heart-rending sense of loss: "But Virgil had left us bereft of him, Virgil sweetest father, Virgil to whom I gave myself for my salvation"; and Dante, in Eden, weeps.

I cannot say anything adequate about this moment. But I would like to say something about Virgil's words, Virgil's poetry, of which Dante has not been left bereft; and then, very shyly, about Virgil himself.

In the thirtieth Canto, in which is told the re-union of Dante and Beatrice and the loss of Virgil, we encounter two lines from the Aeneid, the first spoken as it were by Dante the poet, the second by Dante the pilgrim.

The poet in describing the pageant in honor of Beatrice tells us that as she approaches "there rose up a hundred ministers and messengers of eternal life, who all cried, Benedictus qui venis ("blessed are you who come", which must be referred to Beatrice despite the masculine grammar) and, throwing flowers up and around, Manibus o date lilia plenis ("with full hands give lilies")". The second of these utterances occurs originally in book six of the Aeneid, as Anchises speaks sorrowfully of the early death of the beautiful young man Marcellus, his life cut short before its full flowering, bringing a sorrow which is not overwhelmed by the splendor of Rome's accomplishments.

At first glance it appears that by transferring to an occasion of rejoicing words originally belonging to an occasion of mourning, the Christian poet is correct-

ing the pagan poet who knew so well of the tears of things and the affairs of mortals that touch the heart: mourning has been transformed into joy. But upon reflection we find that it is not so simple. For the words "Blessed are you who come", that is, "Blessed are you who come in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 21-9) are spoken to Christ on Palm Sunday as he enters Jerusalem acclaimed by a great crowd. That is, they are spoken at the beginning of the week of the Passion of Christ, the agony that revealed most fully the depth of the tears of things. The Christian poet cannot simply transform or reverse Virgil's words--mourning into rejoicing; he must first of all deepen them or at the very least--which is not so little--remember them.

Now let us turn to the words from the Aeneid which Dante the pilgrim utters at his moment of greatest need, of greatest awe, bewilderment, and overfullness. As he sees Beatrice and once again, for the first time in ten years, feels "ancient love's great power", he can find no words of his very own, no words originating with him. But he needs words, and words are available, from Virgil: "Not a drop of blood is left in me that does not tremble; I know the marks of the ancient flame."

"I know the marks of the ancient flame"--the words are Dido's as she comes to realize that the part of her that died with the death of Sychaeus is coming to life again in the presence of Aeneus. That the story which comes out of this experience turns out painfully is immaterial here; what matters is the experience itself, an experience which has befallen men and women in all times and places, and which once upon a time was tenderly and truly understood and put into unforgettably beautiful words. That true and unforgettable words had once been found for such an experience, and that, through the loyalty and devotion of Dante they were not forgotten, had the result that in the most overwhelming moment of his life, Dante did not have to live wholly out of his own resources. It is true of course that the pilgrim Dante must make Virgil's words his own: Virgil's Latin becomes Dante's Italian.

VII

I cannot close without trying to say something about the loss of Virgil himself at the peak of the mount of purgation, whatever may be the consoling power of the knowledge that we do not lose his words. Of the distressing question of the destiny of the "virtuous pagans" much could be said, and the least that should be said is that their apparent exclusion from the presence of God seems to have been as distressing for Dante as for many of us--he returns to it again and again, finally in the heaven of Jupiter, the sphere of justice, where his question about the possible salvation of those who know not Christ receives a negative answer theologically but an affirmative answer empirically: the pagan Ripheus, an obscure figure in the Aeneid who is said in that poem to be the most righteous of the Trojans, is encountered by Dante in Paradise.

The only suggestion I have to make about this matter is the following. I think Dante would have been very grateful for, and would have made good use of, a certain speculation of the astronomer Johann Kepler. Traditionally, of course, Christ is thought of as the mediator between man and God, as occupying a sort of in-between position. Kepler suggests an image complementary to this one in his discussion of the regions of the world. There are three of these, he says, corresponding to the three Persons of the Trinity by way of a "divine symbolizing." In the center is the sun, symbolizing the Father. The sphere of the fixed stars symbolizes the second Person, Christ; and the region in between, which of course includes the earth and its denizens, is pervaded by the Holy Spirit. Thus it is we human beings who occupy the in-between position, our lives centered in the Father and contained by Christ; or as

Kepler puts it more fully, "formed, contained and terminated" by Christ. Or, as St. Augustine says near the beginning of the Confessions, quoting the 139th Psalm which speaks to God: "If I descend into hell, you are present."

A Way to Think about Dark Times

William O'Grady

I have been asked to talk about dark times, about the darkness of the times in which we live. I shall try to do that, but it seems to me that, being who I am, for better and for worse, I can only indirectly carry out what has been asked. A sign of that indirectness, which I hope will not dismay you, is that I shall present what I have to say in the form of reflections on brief passages from four books, the most recent of which was written about seven centuries ago. But I shall try very hard to make myself understand and I hope that some good may come from our being together.

From the Iliad of Homer, composed more than 2500 years ago, I wish to talk about what it means for one human being to offer another as much time as he needs; from the Confessions of St. Augustine about what it means to be faithful to that original care for one's own well-being which seems to be a part of each of us; from Dante's Purgatory about the sort of weeping that might be redemptive and about how one can keep intact one's capacity for that sort of weeping; and finally from the Gospel of St. John about why it might be that if all the deeds done by Christ were to be written down, the world itself could not contain the books that would be required.

I would like to begin with a moment in the Iliad because that book seems to me to be very much about time. In pondering the assignment to speak of living in dark times, I had to ask myself what it would be like to live in bright times. And it occurred to me that the difference between dark times and bright times might not be the most important difference, just as Achilles, the beautiful young warrior who is the hero of Homer's poem, comes to his proper wisdom when the choice which had always seemed so important to him--a long life versus a short life, much time versus little time--comes to be replaced by the difference which depends not upon choice, but rather upon a sort of grace. I shall try to explain what I mean. Because of a certain prophecy, Achilles believes he has a choice between a brief life of unforgettable glory or a long, undistinguished--though not unhappy--life. He broods much over this choice and is greatly confused. Then his dearest friend is slain in war and he is impelled into action of a despairing and merciless sort. He slays scores of men and even does battle against a mighty river. He finally slays Hector, the slayer of his friend. In his rage he drags the body of Hector on the ground behind his chariot, around and around the camp, every day for twelve days. But the gods Apollo and Aphrodite protect Hector's body, and the natural outcome does not ensue-- Hector's body is preserved rather than being mutilated beyond recognition. Finally on the twelfth day Priam, who is very old, the father of Hector, comes to Achilles to ask for his son's body so that a proper funeral might be celebrated, with ritual lamentation and the feasting of a great feast. Achilles and Priam weep together, Achilles now for his own father, now for his dead friend, Priam for his dead son. Their tears somehow form one stream and are indistinguishable.

Achilles, moved by the beauty of Priam, grants his request--he is willing to restore the body of Hector. And--this is the one act of divine grace which takes place within the Iliad--there is a body to restore not a formless mutilated obscenity which would break Priam's heart to see, but the body of Hector, young and handsome. Reconciliation takes place within the Iliad because Achilles has been given enough time, as much time as he needs. At no earlier moment would he have been capable of

transcending his rage and despair. Had Priam come earlier his petition would have been futile. But if the gods had not, contrary to all rational expectation, preserved the body of Hector while Achilles was enduring and laboring through his rage, if divine grace had not secured harmony between the requirements of Achilles's inner time and the requirements of the world-time which men share, Achilles would have had nothing to offer Priam except regret, and the most beautiful moment within the Iliad, from which light streams upon all of the darkness and bitternesses of the poem, would never have occurred. Homer writes:

> But when they had put aside their desire for eating and drinking,
> Priam, son of Dardanos, gazed upon Achilleus, wondering
> at his size and beauty, for he seemed like an outright vision
> of gods. Achilleus in turn gazed on Dardanian Priam
> and wondered, as he saw his brave looks and listened to him talking.

Achilles has been given--graciously, independently of any claims he might have --enough time, and he knows it. Anyone who has experienced being given enough time-- and part of that experience seems to be a powerful sense of how easily things might have gone otherwise, how likely it is for one to be given not quite enough time--the question of much time versus little time, of a long life versus a short life, cannot seem very important.

Thus Achilles asks Priam how long he will need to mourn and bury his son. Priam says twelve days and explains why. Achilles grants him twelve days - he will hold back the war for that long. Achilles, having himself been given time, gives Priam enough time. This is Achilles' imitation of the gods, his truly god-like act within the Iliad. And it seems to me that for us too, it is utterly important to give people as much time as they need, to let them tell us just how much time that is, and to understand that clear reasons cannot always be given for needing just that amount of time. But I do not think that many of us - I leave out of account a few great souls among us - are capable of giving another time unless we ourselves have, in one form or another, had the experience of being given, beyond any fair claims we can make, and contrary to all rational expectation, enough time. However dark our times may be, I do not think that such experiences are altogether impossible for us. And when they do befall us, surely gratitude requires that we make available to another, as graciously as may be, what has been made available to us.

Let me now turn to the Confessions of St. Augustine, a book written about 1500 years ago. The title Confessions means something different from what we might suppose. For Augustine, the proper subject of confession is the goodness of God. But God's goodness is shown not only in the deep-down, always-present goodness of His creation, but also in the mercy He shows to sinful man. Hence to acknowledge and praise God's goodness includes acknowledging and praising His mercy, and that requires that the occasions of that mercy, the sins and sinfulness of our lives, be set forth. That in turn requires a travelling through memory. This is what Augustine does in his Confessions: he presents himself in his neediness in order to present God in His graciousness and to give Him praise for His graciousness. According to Augustine, this praise is not so much our duty as it is our deepest delight, the delight for which we were made.

I would like to consider with you something Augustine says about himself as a young child. He finds something wonderful in that child, something altogether worthy of praise. That something is no achievement of the child, nor any potential for achievement, but rather something wholly God-given: it is, Augustine says, "a care for my own well-being" which shows itself, among other ways, by the fact that " I shunned sadness and dejection."

This may seem strange to us. We are accustomed to saying and perhaps thinking

that it is a matter of course for each of us to care for himself--"to take care of number one," as we sometimes say--the only surprising thing--perhaps even a miracle--being that occasionally we also care for other people. But for Augustine the most difficult thing in the world is to care for our own well-being, or more precisely, to be faithful to that original care for our own well-being with which God endowed us in the beginning, to go on caring for our own well-being, to go on shunning sadness and dejection. The reason is that we grow weary, feel worn-out, are bewildered and embarrassed as we attempt to sustain the care for our own well-being. We long for rest. Not that Augustine thinks we ought not to long for rest. He says to God: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." But until that most proper rest comes to be, the human task is to be faithful to the original restlessness and to the original care for our own well-being from which it springs.

Augustine does not praise himself in the Confessions, one reason being that he knows the great power of what he calls "the passion for self-vindication", that is, not merely pride in the sense of having too high an opinion of ourselves, but rather the awesome passion to vindicate ourselves when accused, whether by others or by ourselves. Augustine does not suppose that this passion within him needs any help from him. But if he were to praise himself, to find something praiseworthy in his life--achieved with the help of God of course but still achieved by Augustine--it would be for being faithful through many years to his own restlessness, for sustaining, in the face of so many temptations to come to some false settlement, to some false peace, that restlessness which so wearied him.

From the point of view of Confessions, written when he was about forty-five, he writes of himself in his thirty-first year, fully the thirteenth year of his most earnest searchings for a truth in which his heart and mind could find genuine rest--that is, the 13th year of what we so easily refer to as an "adolescent religious crisis." He writes of how weary he was, and how embarrassed--how embarrassed, since he had been making such a fuss about his own well-being for so long a time, instead of getting on with the practical business of life (he was, after all, a Roman). But he held out in his weariness and his embarrassment until, as he recounts it, he received a true invitation from the true God. And then he said yes.

Now let me turn to a passage in the Divine Comedy. There is a certain story told to Dante by a soul in Purgatory which I would like to tell you. But first I must say a few words about how Dante thinks of Purgatory. The souls in Purgatory--every one of them--will one day be in Heaven with God and each will be filled--in the measure possible for each without his ceasing to be himself--with light and joy. But first--and this is what Purgatory is for, according to Dante--a kind of patience is necessary, and a coming to understand the ways in which our lives have been perverse, and an attempt--for once, happily, an attempt which is bound to succeed--to straighten out what has been crooked in them, not because otherwise God could not stand the sight of us, but because otherwise we would be simply ashamed and bewildered and miserable in the presence of God. The straightening out of what has been crooked in our lives--in us--is painful, but it is pain which the souls in Purgatory do not wish to avoid.

Now let me recount to you the story which one of the souls in Purgatory tells Dante. His whole life, he says, or almost his whole life, had been full of violence and hatred, of hating and being hated. He met his death hunted down by his enemies, who wounded him and drove him into a swamp, where as he lay dying he saw pools of his blood form alongside him in the stinking water. He was alone and there was no one, even far away, who loved him. The moment before his death he shed a tear: " I ended on the name of Mary and there fell and only my flesh remained" (Purgatory V. 101-2). The devils came to take him away to Hell. But angels came who would not permit them. The devils were furious at the unfairness of it: "On account of one little tear (una lacrimetta in Dante's Italian) we are deprived of what is rightfully ours," they

shriek, "What is one little tear against a whole life-time of violence and hatred?" But the angels are firm, and the soul goes to Purgatory, to prepare itself for the presence of God.

I want to reflect with you upon that one little tear, so strangely powerful. First, I think it must be not merely a tear of self-pity, of feeling sorry for oneself--I think some wider sorrow must be in it, some sorrow for having offended God or having offended against the beauty of His creation or some sadness at having betrayed things one shouldn't have betrayed. But I am not so sure that there may be nothing of self-pity in it. It would be strange, after all, and perhaps perversely prideful, to see and sorrow over the deep sadness of the world--the "tears of things", as Virgil says--and to exempt oneself, to stand above that sorrowful world and look down upon it. No, I do not think that self-pity--of which we so often speak harshly--must be excluded from that tear, although of course much more must also be included.

Second, we must be aware that to shed such a tear, to shed the right kind of tear, is not an act of will. We cannot heroically, at that final moment, make ourselves do it through strenuous exertion. Such a tear comes forth or it does not. It comes forth from a heart in which there is still some goodness. Here, I think, is where the will comes in, where trying hard and struggling come in. Not indeed the kind of struggle to be as good as good can be, the struggle to be very good. Rather I am thinking of human beings in whose lives it is much too late in the day to make of their lives a beautiful thing which might gladden those who behold them, but for whom the question is: after so many betrayals of the things I ought least to have betrayed, after so many acts of violence against what I ought most to have cherished, what difference could one more betrayal, one more act of violence, possibly make? What difference could there possibly be between a thousand betrayals and a thousand and one? Perhaps I could resist this present temptation to betrayal--it would be painful, but perhaps I could do it--but what's the use? What difference could it possibly make? And surely tomorrow I shall be guilty of some new betrayal.

What Dante means to say, I think, is that it does make a difference: that one moment of fidelity in the midst of a thousand betrayals does not indeed make a life into a beautiful thing in which men and angels may rejoice, but it may be enough to keep somehow intact a heart capable of shedding the right kind of tear when it matters most.

Let me conclude by saying a few words about the final sentence of the Gospel of St. John. That sentence says: "But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." This makes sense, I think, only if we suppose that John does not have in mind only the deeds of Jesus during his thirty-three years in Palestine, where of course he encountered only a not very great number of souls. Rather, John must mean that every soul that has ever been in the world or ever will be encounters Jesus in one guise or another, knows him by one name or another, responds, however obscurely, to his invitation. And I think it is not blasphemous to speak of these deeds of Jesus as being not only for our rescue--although surely it is right for us to think of them in this way most of the time--but also for this own fullness and therewith for the fullness of the creation. For we must take seriously his being a person. And of myself as a person I know that there are some things in me which are brought out--and in some mysterious way even called into being--only by a certain friend, other things brought out only by another friend. The loss of a friend is the loss of a part of me. As Jesus issues his invitation in as many ways as there are souls in the world, the creation comes fully into its own.

These words may sound to you outrageously serene coming from one who was asked to speak about the darkness of our dark times. Surely an urgent and bewildered sense of our need for rescue, and painful doubts about the very possibility of rescue, its

availability in any comprehensible way, are among the deepest parts of our experience here and now. But I wonder whether there are not moments in the experience of each of us in which we can somehow sense the truth of these words spoken by Wisdom, that is, somehow, by Christ: "I am from eternity, and before the earth was made I was with Him forming all things, and was delighted every day, playing at His feet at all times; playing in the world. And my delights were to be with the children of men."

How such moments--moments in which the world seems a deeply innocent place--are to be put together with the dark moments is very hard to say--it is surely beyond my power to say--but not to give voice to them at all seems to be a lie.

#3

I lay on my back in a field
Beneath the moon
I close my eyes, open them
And the moon is no longer above but before,
Earth no longer beneath but behind,
Like a wall where prisoners are sent to die.

#8

Now you've left,
My bed is flat -
Hot
I'm falling asleep
A drop of spit
    on a just-hot griddle
Skittering,
Diminishing.

Stuart Sobczynski

Final Cause and the Problem of Existence

Jim Guszca

Though separated by nearly 2000 years, Aristotle and Erwin Straus asked some of the same questions about the causes of human existence in their respective works, Parts of Animals and "The Upright Posture". Both philosophers questioned the validity of scientific theories that only gave "material" causes for "the products of nature." Both believed that a Final Cause must be given to explain why animals, particularly the human, exist as they do.

Aristotle was refuting one of the physiologers when he said that "it must be explained how it comes to pass that each of these [non-uniform parts] is characterized as it is and by what force this is effected" (640b-20). In other words, it is not enough to say that the stomach, for example, is formed by water flowing through the body; a reason must be given for the specific form of the stomach, a complicated non-uniform part of the body. To do this, one must consider the precise purpose for which the stomach exists. This purpose is observed as the function the stomach performs in its environment.

Straus had a similar argument against the paleontologists. He said, in effect, that it is not enough to say that man developed from the primates through an evolutionary process. "Paleontology tells us what man or what his ancestors once were, but not what man actually is... it has little to say about how the change to modern man came about and what its final result was" (pg. 140). In other words the prehistoric forms of our ancestors do not explain how or why humans exist as they do in the present.

Both philosophers advocated similar scientific methods: that we accept as given whatever is and go on to state its cause. Mere observation isn't enough. The reason why something came to be as it is is necessary in order to understand its place in the world. Aristotle gave the example of the house. The house is formed by a certain process. Each step of the process, however, is determined by the house's Final Cause. That is, we first consider the function, and therefore the nature, of the house in relation to its environment and then go on the build it in such a way that it will serve its function. So the process of formation itself isn't the cause of the final form of the house, or similarly the animal, since the process is ultimately dependent on the house's (animal's) function in its environment. In describing the automobile, Straus gave a similar example. One cannot "explain its present form and shape by mere reference to its forerunner" for "it is the automobile's own function and dynamic structure that determines its shape". The development of the automobile didn't occur spontaneously. Certain problems with its functioning lead us to draw up new plans for design.

Let us note that both men dealt with the hand as an "organ" because they both considered its Final Cause. The important fact about the hand is not that it is made up of certain uniform parts in a certain way. The hand exists as a part of us and has a special function. That function explains why the human body has the hand that it has. It also explains why it is an organ, as opposed to the finger, whose functioning is incomplete out of the context of the whole hand.

What each of the philosophers gave as their Final Causes differed, however. To illustrate this difference, we will consider the authors' respective treatments of the human hand.

Both authors allowed that the upright posture is a necessary prerequisite for the human hand (Aristotle, 687a 10; Straus, pg. 149). Aristotle, however, went on to say that the human being "has his hands because he is the most intelligent animal". That is, he has his hands because of the nature of his soul; his soul is not determined by the nature of his hands. In On the Soul, Aristotle called the soul the Final Cause of the living body: "Just as the mind acts with some purpose in view, so too does nature, and this purpose is its end. In living creatures, the soul supplies such a purpose ('function'), and this is in accordance with nature, for all natural bodies are instruments of the soul" (415b 15). Aristotle also compared the living being to a wax figure. The body is the "wax" in the raw state, and the soul is the "impression" made on the wax to give it shape. The impression is what must contain the Final Cause of the figure if its final form is to agree with its function. Neither can exist without the other, but it is clear that the wax (body) exists for, and is moulded to conform to the needs of the impression (the soul). Thus, the soul is the Final Cause of the body. It determines the form and the function of each of the parts of the body.

Straus wasn't quite so definite in giving the Final Cause of the body or of its parts. Like Aristotle (687a10), Straus said that "In upright posture, the frontal extremities are no longer asked to support and carry the body... they are free for new tasks" (pg. 149). So the anterior limb of the primates develops into the human arm, and the hand develops into an "organ of gnostic toughing". Note the implication that the hand is formed the way it is to perform certain functions: "The hand is a tool in relation to the living, experiencing being". For the development of the hand, "upright posture is not only the genetic condition, but also continues to dominate the function of the hand" (my underline).

In this last quote, upright posture seems to be to Straus the same type of Final Cause as the soul is to Aristotle. But although Straus listed a number of body parts denoting intelligence: "While upright posture permits the formation of the human skull, and, thereby, of the human brain, the maintenance of upright posture demands the development of the human nervous system", he was unclear about the role that human intelligence plays in causality: "Who can say what comes first and what comes last--what is the cause and what is the effect (pg. 164)".

So could we say that the Final Cause of the human form is an evolutionary interaction between the sensory organs and the central nervous system? "The sensory organs cannot change without a corresponding change in the central nervous system. No part could be altered alone. With upright posture, there is a transformation of sensorium and motorium, of periphery and center, of form and function." The implication is that the development of one, either mind or body, creates a function that the other must develop in such a way as to serve. So we could say that Aristotle and Straus disagreed as to whether the body adapts for the soul or whether the "soul", or mind, adapts along with the body.

But I don't want to end with this comparison, either. Using this evolutionary interaction to explain our present state of existence seems like the physiologers' use of purely material causes to explain the stomach. Why does this development take place and why does this development produce the changes it does?

Both believed that body and soul are interdependent. But where Aristotle believed that the body exists for the sake of the soul, Straus believed that the two cannot be separated in this way. He did say that all of the evolutionary "alterations (in nervous and sensory parts) are related to upright posture as their basic theme". Thus the upright posture is the Final Cause of the human mind/body complex. Going back to the house analogy, upright posture is the basic structure, while evolution works out the details as development proceeds. There are, then, two levels of final cause here.

The reason Erwin Straus, a phenomenologist, wrote about the upright posture is

that it has had an important role in determining our present form and therefore our present existence. But specific causes are needed to explain specific evolutionary changes. These come from problems with our being-in-the-world on a biological level. The existence of the creatures we once were was threatened by various cases of incompatability with their environment. As nature's trial-and-error process of development stepped in to change our form, the factors of upright posture and intelligence began to have more major parts to play in the development. Presently, they play the most important parts in the makeup of our being-in-the-world.

Aristotle, it seems, would agree with Straus. Like Straus, he knew that a reason must be given for everything that happens in nature. Not being an evolutionist, he personified Nature and give her the ability to make rational, and very economical, decisions that directly determine the order of things. Straus believed that nature makes her decisions by the trial-and-error process of evolution.

Both men made it a point to explore human existence through biology. They did this by trying to determine the way in which man arose out of nature, that is, what his final cause is. As one man put it, this isn't the type of science you smash atoms with, but it does deal effectively with the key problem of our existence: how we live our lives.

Antigone

Hugh Brantner

At the time of the first paper on Antigone it seemed to me that the character of Antigone was unambiguous; so much so that she was difficult to write about. Indeed, it seemed she was so intent upon her actions and so unremitting of them that she was a long distance from audience sympathy. "Her unwavering intent upon her goals distances us from her such that our ability to live with her through her role is diminished." Perhaps it was a reluctance on my part to see Antigone's faith in her own actions as anything but the negative sense of the the Greek word - an untold presumption or arrogance. Perhaps it was also because Sophocles presented her character to us in such a way that access to her heart is not allowed until late in the play, and then not simply by watching her.

There is little doubt that Antigone's intentions in the play are of a righteous nature. Long before they are uncovered by the plot, the audience knows her actions to be well done. Yet from the first lines of the play it is much easier to be sympathetic with Ismene's fears for her sister and her subsequent unwillingness to cross the state decree. Perhaps this is the result of an inability to see the human usefulness of such an action, which makes it difficult for us to find the reserve of strength necessary to fly into the face of death. Of course we don't want Antigone to die; we have the belief that she is right. Yet we are not one with her. Indeed, what she does seems beautiful, but its apparent cost causes us to shrink into ourselves, away from her.

Antigone, though, is not all strength and purpose. She is human. As a human she too must recognize death and know its meaning. It is in acknowledging this that Antigone seems to become accessible to the audience. It is through her last lines in the play that we can come to affirm her judgement and perhaps come to love her. It is here that the superhuman effort needed to overcome the all too human fears falls away leaving an heroic but very human being.

To accept this interpretation of Antigone's character is to step into some apparent controversy over a series of lines in the play. Sir Richard Jebb along with some other translators find these lines, vv 904-920, to be spurious. Perhaps these lines are not authentic as Jebb argues. If this is the case it would seem that the audience is robbed by the playwright of a view into another mortal's soul--the soul of the namesake of the play. If one reads this play without these lines he is denied the realization that the actions of the play are all human actions. Instead the veil that surrounds the driven Antigone remains drawn. Creon dashes his ship upon her, an unmoving, unyielding rock. If, however, the lines stand, then Antigone is not the foil of Creon. Certainly they cross one another, but it is in going to different destinations. It is as if Creon has set his sights upon the monsters lurking at the edge of the sea thinking them to be beauties. He sails by his own navigation over the edge. Antigone runs afoul of Creon enroute to her own destination. She is purposeful, like a river flowing where it must until the very end.

Jebb's arguments against these lines are fairly concise. It seems that he objects to them primarily on grounds of logic and grammar. He states three objections to these lines.

The first objection is: "The general validity of the divine law, as asserted in vv. 450-460, cannot be intelligibly reconciled with the limitation in vv. 905-907."[1]

In lines 450-460 Antigone asserts in her confession of the rites of burial for Polyneices that the immortality of the gods is to be respected above all. A law of the gods must be obeyed prior to any law of man who is mortal. It is not possible for any of man's laws to "over-run" one of the gods'. Since the rites of death have long been held as an act of piety towards the gods, Creon's order to withhold burial rites cannot be obeyed. She acknowledges that death is necessary, for she must cross a man's law. She obviously does not perceive any hope of Creon rescinding his edict. But what kind of ill could death at the hands of man be when held in relation to the ill of being impious to the immortal gods? These lines do seem clear in affirming a belief in that law.

Jebb apparently feels that lines 905-907 contradict the priorities Antigone states in lines 450-460. After having uttered these lines, why would Antigone say that the actions would not have been done had she been a mother or wife with a child or husband mouldering away? He seems to feel that if one is ready and willing to die to honor divine law above mortal law, then it would make no difference what the mortal-world conditions were. The divine law must take precedence. Therefore, it is illogical to babble in the later lines about a child and husband.

Jebb's second objection is an extension of the first: "A still further limitation is involved in 911 ff. She has buried her brother, not simply as such, but because, while he lived, he was an irreplaceable relative. Could she have hoped for the birth of another brother, she would not then, have felt the duty so binding."[1]

Jebb seems to feel that this statement by Antigone further eclipses her from lines 450-460. Again it is illogical that any mortal condition, even human love, should stand in the way of the priority of divine law. How could the loss of a "replaceable" brother possibly alter the law? It would still stand, and the lack of burial rites would of course be impious.

The third objection Jebb cites is simply that: "The composition of vv. 909 - 912 is unworthy of Sophocles."[1]

Further down in his line-notes, Jebb elaborates with three points. The first is about a word which is not believed to have been in Attic use at the time of Sophocles. The second is about the jumbled hypotheses in the lines. The arguments are not kept grammatically clear and distinct, but instead fall over one another. His third is again a point over awkward grammar.

An overview of Jebb's statements seems only to turn up the two categories of objection: logic and grammar. These seem odd grounds in some ways upon which to base a decision about the authenticity of these lines. Antigone is about to die. Would anyone ask of a person facing death by any form of execution that he be consistently logical and grammatically correct? Perhaps. If the person was of high moral character, strong, confident in the righteousness of his actions, then one might come to expect coherency from him even in the worst of conditions. Antigone is all of these, but it seems that Sophocles shows us more of her character than just this side. What Sophocles shows us is important in order to fully understand Antigone as a human character, to sympathize with, and possibly to love her.

Sir Richard Jebb was a Greek scholar impossibly far beyond my own abilities as a student of the Greek language. If he says that a point of grammar is so or that usage in a particular fashion is unusual, I must believe him. However, I see no reason to hold fast to his conclusion that lines 905-912 are not Sophocles'; and that lines 904 and 913-920 must fall also because of unity within lines 905-912. Jebb may be right and the play should be read without these lines. If so, then an image of a strong character until the end prevails. Sure in the righteousness of her actions, Antigone sails straight to her destination, slipping off the edge of the mythical sea, but into immortal fame. If, however, one grants that the lines were penned by Sophocles, then the picture, it seems, is different. The rough grammar and the twisted logic portray another depth of character. The superhuman effort breaks up, dashed upon the reality of Antigone being human. Then these lines would be a mark of

a skilled playwright rather than the crude insertions of a lesser mind.

One problem for those who call these lines spurious is their appearance in Aristotle's, The Art of Rhetoric. Jebb answers this by saying that the lines must have been interpolated shortly after the poet's death, perhaps by the poet's son. This chronological approach is far less interesting than the points Aristotle makes in the section in which he quotes Sophocles.

In the Nichomachean Ethics Aristotle writes that it is by a man's actions along with his intentions that man should be judged. Outlining the nature of Tragedy, he writes in the Poetics that action must occur within the narration for there to be a good story. Action takes precedence over character; then character fleshes out that action for the listeners. In the Rhetoric he draws a distinction for how an audience will perceive an action, given the type of motivation for that action.

> Do not let your words seem inspired so much by intelligence, in the manner now current, as by moral purpose: e.g. 'I willed this; aye, it was my moral purpose; true, I gained nothing by it, still it is better thus.' For the other way shows good sense, but this shows good character; good sense making us go after what is useful, and good character after what is noble.[2]

Aristotle has drawn a dichotomy in the reasons for which a person may be perceived to accomplish an act. On the one hand, he could be doing something because it is useful. This usefulness could admit of several species, such as profit, need, desire, etc. On the other hand, he could be doing something out of "moral purpose". Motives springing from usefulness are perceived as less honorable than those of moral purpose. The primary difference seems to come with the lack of visible gain in the latter. One does something out of moral purpose with no end in mind, perhaps even at a great cost to himself.

The point that Aristotle is taking up is that it is desirable to show character in a play. Moral interest and moral purpose show character in a way that purely sensible actions springing from reason cannot. When we see a character on the stage move through actions motivated by reason alone we judge him by that reason. Our sympathies and energies focus on the action in terms of the steps leading to the end. Perhaps the end is not clear to an audience right away, but his actions nonetheless move in quantifiable, logical steps. He is acting upon a common ground we all can tread and so can look backwards and forwards, coming to know what he has done, what he might do, and why. Of course reason is not always consistent between men. When a character makes an unexpected move we search for the reason in the new action that might indicate the new end sought. We see action that might indicate the new end sought. We see action in terms of a motivation towards that end.

However, if a character is acting from moral purpose, the linear quality of reason breaks up. It is no longer clearly motivation with an end in mind → action toward that end → end. Instead the action and the end can become one. No longer is there a more-or-less objective grid available to trace an action upon. The act must be perceived in a more subjective manner. This places two individuals in a realm where emotional responses must be elicited. The first person is of course the character who will display qualities of some emotional and moral depth. The second is the individual member of the audience who will see this side of the character and must respond in kind. He will not be able to appeal to some more neutral contrivance as a reason to judge the character's actions and intentions. Instead he must respond emotionally from inside of himself. The more morally deep the action, the more depth the audience member must plumb in himself if he is to understand what is going on before his senses. It is this type of character who can move an audience and give meaning to a play.

A playwright must have some moral purpose motivating a character received with some emotional attachment by the audience, and that character must display the purpose through his action, his words, or through other characters around him. In some way or another the intention behind the actions must be made manifest for the audience.

Aristotle continues beyond these points in the Rhetoric to the actual quote of Sophocles. He cites lines 911 and 912 as an example that gives cause to Antigone's behavior:

> Where any detail may appear incredible, then add the cause
> of it; of this Sophocles provides an example in the Antigone,
> where Antigone says she had cared more for her brother than
> for husband or children, since if the latter perished they
> might be replaced,
>
> 'But since my father and mother in their graves
> Lie dead, no brother can be born to me.'[3]

This cause is an irreplaceable love. This, however, does not seem to convey the whole picture to me. These lines are important for showing Antigone's character and purpose. It does not seem, however, that Antigone feels love for Polyneices because he is irreplaceable. Neither does it seem that she would act any differently if the dead was a replaceable loved one. Aristotle seems right in his understanding the underlying cause for Antigone's action as love. Yet he wants to put a qualifier on the depth of the love which seems to delimit some of the character that may have been put into the play by Sophocles.

If Antigone is not elucidating a reason for her actions, and not contradicting herself, then what do these lines say? Simply that Antigone is shuddering under the mantle of her own actions. It is not a shuddering of regret, but rather a giving out of the extreme reserve of strength necessary to "go to the fullest verge of daring",[4] to find "the high foundation of justice".[4] She is now alone. The act has been done, the confrontation is past. Her momentum is all but spent. She seems like a rough stone ball which rolls when it has force and momentum, but which totters, wobbles, and shudders in its motion as that force is spent.

Her speech of lines 891 - 928 is not spoken to Creon or the chorus. It is spoken to the dead, and as an inward reflection thrown outward. The words she speaks seem to be ones of some doubt. They seem to be casting about for a reason. Yet the anguish which rises up through the lines indicates that there is no doubt. Antigone has not changed. Her self is no longer full of her singular will. Instead she is giving herself over to emotions which have only been undercurrents through the earlier portion of the play.

Antigone's action of performing burial rites for Polyneices is of course the center of the play. When she talks early in the play, the reasons she gives for her action are those of piety. Yet they are not purely of piety. In lines 27 - 29 she speaks of the burial rites not in terms of piety, but rather in reference to mortals:

> they say he has proclaimed to the whole town
> that none may bury him and none bewail,
> but leave him unwept, untombed... [5]

She seems to see the burial rites in terms of the human needs to which they attend. Here she is not thinking of piety as much as expressions of love for one who has died. Lines 48 and 73 reflect not primarily pious thoughts, but ones of love:

> But there is not for him a right to shut me
> out from those of mine.

> I will lie together with him, a beloved together
> with a beloved

It is, however, the piety of lines 74-77, and 89:

> having dared a righteous crime; since the time
> is greater
> for those below, who it is necessary for me to please,
> than for those here.
> There I will lie forever. But it may seem right to you
> to hold in dishonor the things the gods hold in honor.
>
> But I know that I am making good to whom it is necessary
> to most have pleased.

which gets carried forward from this scene and reaches its climax in lines 450-460. Somehow Antigone's love drops beneath the surface of the play. Ismene's expression of love in line 99 seems to heighten the obscurity of Antigone's feelings:

> 'Go, if it seems so to you; but know this, that foolish
> you go, but by those who love you, rightly loved.'

Ismene, while running short of the strength necessary to act as Antigone asks, nonetheless has the ability to reach beyond those limits with an expression of love.

Antigone's interest in piety is a real one. It is neither a cover for her actions, nor the prime motivation for them. If her actions were guided purely by an interest in piety, then the lines Jebb questions would indeed sound out of place. She would be denying herself the very reason for her action. In this light Jebb's arguments would be a little bit more persuasive.

As it turns out, Antigone's lines of 909-920 do sound odd. Falling on our ears as they do, they seem in contrast to the hardened Antigone who leaves Ismene in the first scene, and who corrosively responds to Creon's vehemence against her. They do not make sense with the other things we have heard from Antigone. Because they seem in contrast, they do not pass by smoothly. Instead they stick and jam and must be internalized. Their meanings do not indicate why they are spoken. Only in their disorder do they convey their meaning. The unities we expect of logic and grammar become broken. Mortal conventions fall before an immortal passion of the soul.

The Antigone who leaves Ismene in the opening scene is hardened, annealed for what she wills. The task she asks Ismene to share must now be done alone. Arguing piety, she leaves for her task with Ismene's words of love falling like petals on frozen ground. When we see her next she must confront the attacks of Creon. Defiant and firm she remains hardened. She cites the divine law as her defense. She answers law with higher law as they exchange barbed statements over the justice of the situation. Finally in lines 522 - 523 they come to the issue at hand:

> Creon: Never the enemy, even in death,
> a friend.
>
> Antigone: I cannot share in hatred but
> in love. [6]

Antigone's response falls upon our ears in an odd way much like line 909-920, though this line (523) is prior. Antigone uses the verb φυω , which here means that

it is by nature that she is disposed not to join Creon in hating Polyneices, but rather love him. It is a strange statement falling after the rapid-fire, heated words over justice. It is hard to reconcile this vision she has of herself with her character on stage. She has been scathing in her treatment of Ismene and of course Creon. The words seem somehow misplaced. However, there is not time to reflect on them as the force of Creon's reply, along with the momentum of the preceding lines, carry us quickly beyond them. His reply itself in lines 524-525 only helps bury her words, for he cannot connect with her sense of love:

> And now he leads me, taking me by force
> unbedding, without a wedding song, obtaining
> not a share of a wedding feast nor in the nurture
> of a child,
> but an ill-fated one, alone from friends. [7]

The lines preceding line 905 from line 897 also speak of her idea of love in reference to the burial rites she has attended for her father, mother and brother, Eteocles. Couched between her expressions of love for others in the past, and those once hoped for in the future, these lines lead us to see that her actions sprang not from a need to be right, to honor the gods, but rather to express her love for her brother.

Thus we are led deeper into the soul of Antigone and for a moment can be sure of her actions and humanity. Indeed what we once shrank from may seems less fearful for a moment. In finding her motivation we have to open ourselves up to the love we have known. And for that moment our hearts are open in an attempt to understand, death seems to be remote while it is Antigone who is near.

Sir Richard Jebb has his reasons for eliminating these lines which seem to open Antigone up. Somehow though, I find his Antigone colder and more removed. I have come to like the closeness that this perhaps less scholarly interpretation allows of her character. There is meaning and depth in her which are born of love. Yet when all is said and done, I think that it is the sense of promise that I most respond to; the promise that the love I experience in this human existence can be powerful enough to extend me beyond the self which delimits my existence in terms of fear and death. This is a promise one cannot be reminded of too often.

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1 - Jebb, Sir Richard, The Antigone of Sophocles abr. version, E.S. Shuckburgh, editor; Cambridge Univ. Press.

2 - Aristotle, The Art of Rhetoric, W. Rhys Roberts, trans., III, 16, lines 24 - 27.

3 - Ibid, III, 16, lines 28 - 33.

4 - Antigone, Elizabeth Wyckoff, trans, lines 852 - 853.

5 - Ibid, lines 27 - 29.

6 - Ibid, lines 522 - 523.

7 - Ibid, lines 524 - 525.

Sonnet for a Slavic Miner

A.J. Krivak

In this town, along this river, down these shafts
Darkness reigns under the earth.
In America, a still struggling re-birth
Carries you along, men in and endless rafts
Of coal out in a stream of blood-smeared dust.
From Prague peasants rode the civilian trains
To steamships waiting in Hamburg. The rains
Come for days to thaw, the leeching cars leave rust

On your hard blue hands; the tortuous sound
Of ceiling drops, muffled ground-thunder below.
Memories of the old kawntree fade,
Your children soon are breaker boys who pound
Piles of stone with hammers for pay. Shenandoah
fires burn, your Anna collapses in tears she made.

The Dead

Renée Bergland

Let us roll all our strength, and all
our sweetness, up into one ball:
and tear our pleasures with rough strife,
through the Iron gates of life.
Thus though we cannot make our sun
stand still, yet we will make him run.

-Andrew Marvel

"To His Coy Mistress"

Gabriel Conroy is falling asleep. His wife is beside him, dreaming dreams which have no room for him. He muses, "Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age". Then he falls asleep peacefully. His soul swoons slowly into sleep, and the snow falls faintly upon the living and the dead. We close the book peacefully and fall asleep ourselves, lulled and comforted by the warmth of human hospitality and kind humor which Gabriel has told us about. We are certain somehow that Michael Furey, beautiful, passionate, blazing boy that he was, was somehow wrong. We do have world enough and time. Eternity is not a pressure, but a peaceful promise.

Gabriel brings us glad tidings. Tidings of peace on earth in a joyous, but somehow wistful manner... Something in the struggle and the blaze is attractive to the human soul. Tragedy is romantic, powerful, and moving in a way which no happy ending can ever be. It is strange that his glad tidings are not more powerful, nor any more compelling. And at the same time it is utterly appropriate. One could not paint peace in violent, vivid color. His message has, as he himself does, a melancholy, almost awkward, glory.

What is this peace? The biggest, best part of it is the fact that the war with time is over. The sun need not stand still, nor fly from us. For somehow, as the snow falls, blanketing absolutely everything, truce is declared. Yes, yes, that would happen very soon, Gabriel muses on Julia's death, knowing that he does not need to fear her death, or even his own. We are all, living and dead, in this thing together. Death is all that has ever given time any sting at all. But strangely, the victory over time strikes me as a bigger one than the one over death. Time's shrinking gives Michael and Gabriel the chance to love Gretta completely or shall I say, to make Gretta completely loved, each loving as much and as well as he can. Were Gretta loved by one man or the other, she would be a sad, grey woman. She is not. Two loves in two different time schemes have made her warm, rich and beautiful; and each love has done the same for each man as well.

When Gabriel accepts Michael's love, he joins Michael in a new, strange world where the living and the dead are equally present, equally important. That world, however, has been building the whole time. Part of the reason a timeless, deathless, lifeless, snowy world seems so natural is that we have spent most of the story at a holiday ball; it holds every one of its past manifestations in it, as only an annual party held where it has been held for a good thirty years can hold its past. What is

it about that party which makes it see so frighteningly real? Reading the story now halfway between Thanksgiving and Christmas, and the parties I have been attending since I was born, I feel self-conscious. That's it. That's a holiday ball. Right down to Freddy Malins and his poor mother, everything is captured. Everything can be captured because there is a universal element to a party like Julia and Kate's. Year after year they remain the same; and year after year they go off splendidly, in spite of Freddy and Mr. Browne. Every year the old ones get a little frailer, and every few years one of them dies. The party never changes. This party, this truly changeless, unremarkable occasion is our entrance into timelessness. Having entered, we find eternal love, and we find it twice: Living and dead.

The two loves do not oppose each other. Both are warm and fiery. One is a pale and tender flame which never wavers, and the other is a blast of heat and fury, quickly doused in rain. But as Michael Furey dies for Gretta, he gives her all his warmth in one mightly explosion. He leaves her warm, but ready to receive more warmth, quieter and steadier. Gabriel gives her this with all his heart and with all his tender, deep passion, dissolved across years, books and children, but never stilled, never doused. His love grows when he learns that it has been completed by a strange young boy from Galway long ago. It grows more quiet, but it also grows stronger. Finally Gabriel sees that there is nothing to fight and no need to deny. He can go west. He is not excluded and he does not lack the wild watery romance which is Ireland. Rather, he shares in it through his wife, who has been filled with it by another, different lover. And at the same time, as he watches the quiet snow which binds him to the wildness with peace, he holds his wife close to himself, and he rests deeply and warmly with her. He guards Gretta, he keeps her feet dry. She lets him watch her, hair dry, bronze, and clean. They are dry and warm and safe. Michael Furey is wet and cold and dead. Both, or shall I say all three, are quiet, peaceful, snowy.

Times' winged chariot may hurry as close as it likes. It is empty. It has been emptied by a new, compound, eternal love, shouted forth by two men: one tearing through the iron gates of life toward death; and the other, quietly, with world enough and time, letting his vegetable love grow vaster than empires and more slow.

The Flesh Made Word: Some Thoughts on Gogol's Story "The Overcoat"

Christopher K. Watson

If modern philosophy can be said to begin with Descartes' methodological skepticism, his making ontology essentially problematic, a whole tradition of the novel, as the paradigmatically modern narrative genre, is informed by the same critical-philosophical awareness, beginning almost a half-century before Descartes with Cervantes. Ontological critique in the novel, moreover, is carried on typically not as discursive exposition but as a critical exploration through the technical manipulation of the very form that purports to represent reality.

This observation by Robert Alter in his book Partial Magic is extremely helpful in a consideration of Gogol's "The Overcoat", for in such an endeavor one must necessarily begin with the problem of perspective. However, the story does not willingly lend itself to the normal avenues of approach. In fact, the most revealing characteristic of the story seems to be its virtual absence of perspective. We are not presented with a concrete structure but with an elusive and constantly changing entity. This applies equally to the parts as to the whole. For this reason "The Overcoat" tends to escape the greedy and prosaic clutches of analytical interpretation. Not because its words and sentences will not retain meaning, but because its protean prowess is so great as to enable it to take on all possible meanings. This process extends itself in such a way that a complete reversal of meanings, hierarchies, and even characters can be seen to occur throughout the course of the story. Hence, ongoing metamorphosis being the predominant aspect of this text, one begins to question the place in which a reader might figure in this self-contained and (as will be shown) self-consuming Gogolian universe.

In the department...

Starting with the first paragraph, we are immediately exposed to Gogol's elliptical style. The normality of the first three words is fleeting and they quickly become enshrouded in an elaborate digression. Thus the formal beginning is yanked out from under the reader, exposing him to the acutely self-conscious considerations of the author. Gogol forces the reader to realize just how impossible it is to designate relevancy or give meaning to anything without dangerously enormous and escalating effects. He even repeats this process in the digression when he claims that he can't recall the town of the police commissioner even though the incident occurred "not so very long ago". The careful reader finally has to commiserate and even take on a certain amount of the anxiety that has infected the narrator. The whole process ultimately endows the undefined department with immense significance. As if by magic, a concerted attempt to make something insignificant and undefined has mysteriously given it the utmost significance. But what is significance? "A certain department" could mean anything, and in its infinite possibilities lies both its significance and absence.

Absence most certainly plays a central role in the dynamics of the story. The most perplexing absence is that of the narrator. As the classical pillar of perspective, the narrator's frequent disclaimers, his states of amnesia, and his lack of control over the course of events and descriptions of characters (as if they were queuing up behind his pen and pushing it across the page) continually deflate his worth as an interpretive gauge. His self-professed lack of memory progresses to such an extent that towards the end of the story he says:

> ...everything in St. Petersburg, all the streets and houses, has become so blurred and mixed up in our head that we find it very difficult indeed to sort it out properly.

An amusing example of Gogol's craftiness in this respect is the derivation of Akaky's name, undoubtedly from the Greek ἄκακος: "innocuous" or "guileless", of which the narrator innocently states:

> His name and patronymic were Akaky Akakyevich. The reader may think it a bit odd, not to say somewhat recherche, but we can assure him that we wasted no time in searching for this name and that it happened in the most natural way that no other name could be given to him.

The name itself denotes absence (in-nocuous or guile-less. Among other things, Gogol has conceived a multilayered mimicry of his own denial of device). Of course, the christening of Akaky comes about in the most unnatural way: this is, through an obstinate mother's fear of novelty and the creative whims of an intractable calendar. Akaky himself, who when only a tot seems to have had "a premonition that he would be a titular councillor one day", is described as the paradigm of stasis: his constancy is so extreme as to verge on non-entity:

> During all the years he had served in that department, many directors and other higher officials had come and gone, but he still remained in exactly the same position, in exactly the same job, doing exactly the same kind of work, to wit, copying official documents.

We are told that Akaky is the butt of the office wits' jokes, but that he is utterly immune to their disparaging jibes, living in "a multifarious and pleasant world of his own"--the Russian alphabet. Moreover, his "tormentors" must invent special stories about him, as they are hard-pressed by his lack of character. Even an attempt to compare Akaky to a "real-life" counterpart is baffled by Gogol; for he says that Akaky's rank, which is equivalent to his identity.

> ...has been sneered at and held up to scorn by all sorts of writers who have the praiseworthy habit of setting upon those who cannot hit back.

This implies that the character's derivation is not one from nature but from nature as refracted by established fictional conventions. This serves to nullify any understanding of Akaky qua human being.

Seen in this light, Akaky's quest for a new overcoat, which is properly spurred by physical necessity (it is the inclemencies of the St. Petersburg weather which drive him into the world of contingency), seems to be a progression towards normality. He raises his voice "probably for the first time in his life" upon hearing the

price of the new overcoat and after reconciling himself to the fact "His whole existence indeed seemed now somehow to have become fuller". The overcoat becomes "a sweet helpmate", "as though he had got married" and "his character even got a little firmer". The day of the overcoat's delivery is "one of the greatest days in Akaky's life", a life which has been depicted as an absolute homage to uneventfulness. Akaky, who previously was gustatorily unconscious, eating "flies and all", is even affected physically: his heart begins "beating fast", he suddenly is aware of the St. Petersburg night life, and he feels the first impulses of erotic attraction. When he is invited and compelled to the assistant head clerk's birthday party, he is like a debutante going to her "coming out" party: "and indeed he had not left his room in the evening for several years".

At this point I would like to make my own small tribute to excursiveness and absurdity. When Akaky grins in front of the provocative painting of a woman "taking off a shoe and showing a bare leg", the narrator questions, "Why did he grin?". He then proceeds to posit the following seriocomical reasons:

> It might have been because he had seen something he had never seen before, but a liking for which is buried deep down inside every one of us, or because (like many another Civil Servant) he thought to himself, "Oh, those damned Frenchmen! What a people they are, to be sure! If they set their heart on something, something...well, something of that kind..." But perhaps he never even said anything at all to himself. How indeed is one to delve into a man's mind and find out what he is thinking about?

This last question, adequately dressed in ironical trappings, is perhaps one of the most central questions of the story; however, another, completely illogical intuition arises as an answer to the initial question--that is, posterity. In the beginning stages of the story the narrator, struggling to find something revealing about Akaky's "unremarkable" persona, traces the etymology of his surname, Bashmachkin, to the word "bashmak"--"to wit, shoe". But any facts concerning the "metamorphosis" remains a mystery, the whole endeavor seems to yield nothing. Nevertheless, this simple act of research impresses the image of a shoe on the reader's mind; and through Gogol's artistry this word, as do many others, takes on a certain magnetism and seems by itself to be able to retain the reader's attention. This also serves as a good example of how Gogol's concerns for the insignificant, the purely quotidian, pervades the whole story.

Returning to the hypothesis that Akaky's overcoat may represent a catalyst for identity, or even a spiritual mediator (a kind of textile Beatrice), we must immediately begin to doubt it. An inspection of the overcoat's source seems to be the most proper place to begin. And, although one might contest the source as not being in any one place, Petrovich, the tailor, appears to be its most striking abettor.

In introducing Petrovich, the narrator gives us subtle admonition: "We really ought not to waste much time over this tailor". However, "time", which seems to have very little to do with this story anyway, is wasted and Petrovich proceeds not only to function as an important transitional vehicle, but also as the most externally unique character in the story. Everything that characterizes him is mysteriously nefarious, his flat is in a back alley and surrounded by mist so dense "that even the very cockroaches could no longer be seen". He drinks "in the tradition of his forebears", "on any church holiday, on any day, in fact, marked with a cross in the calendar". And when Akaky brings him his bedraggled overcoat, Petrovich is sitting "with his legs crossed under him like a Turkish pasha"--an infidel. To his wife he is a "one-eyed devil" or at least a lesser demon under the dictates of a Devil, who occasionally nudges him and makes "him ask more than he is worth himself". And one

must concede that it is a brilliantly comical stroke on Gogol's part to emphasize in this way the necessity for a tailor after the fall.

Petrovich is said to be "greatly pleased that he had neither demeaned himself nor let down the sartorial art". Here one must ask oneself just what it is that this "sartorial art" consists of: a tailor patches, he alters, he hems and covers, he is the "Artificer". And at a crucial point in their encounter he seems even to cast a spell over Akaky:

> At the word "new" a mist suddenly spread before Akaky's eyes and everything in the room began swaying giddily. The only thing he could still see clearly was the general's face pasted over with paper on the lid of Petrovich's snuff box.

This is an amazing example not only of the command which the insignificant exercises over the events of the story, but also of the way in which Gogol is able to reverse and even merge opposites, in this case presence and absence. The clearest thing to Akaky in his state of vertigo is a non-picture. We had previously read of this portrait of "some" general that "the place where the face should have been had been poked in by a finger and then pasted over with a square bit of paper". But this picture is more than simply an amplified absence: it is also an example of the way in which predestination seems to figure in this Gogolian universe. Not unlike Akaky's premonition that he would one day become a titular councillor, we discover later on in the story that the rank of the Very Important Person, who ultimately becomes Akaky's agent of doom (being his last hope for the recovery of his overcoat), is that of a "general". Moreover, Akaky's encounter with the Very Important Person culminates with Akaky fainting in front of him.

But who is this Very Important Person? On one level he is seen as the menacing counter-pole to Akaky's meek obsequiousness. However, there are striking parallels that seem to call this relationship into question. In the first place, we are told that this Very Important Person was once a "rather unimportant person" which seems to oddly echo what was previously speculated about Akaky's diligence:

> If he had been rewarded in accordance with his zeal, he would to his own surprise have got as far as a state councillorship.

Like Akaky, who on his nocturnal excursion drinks champagne and feels sexual desire before the disaster, so the Very Important Person seeks diversion in champagne and a visit to his mistress before the ghostly encounter. The Very Important Person is defined by his false and authoritarian facade:

> "Strictness, strictness, and again strictness!" he usually declared, and at the penultimate word he usually peered very significantly into the face of the man he was addressing. There seemed to be no particular reason for this strictness, though, for the dozen or so Civil Servants who composed the whole administration machinery of his office were held in a proper state of fear and trembling, anyhow.

The voice of Akaky Akakyevich when he asserts himself "for the first time in his life" at the police department and threatens "that if he lodged a complaint against them, they would see what would happen" is equally authoritative. Further, the rumor of his vindictive ghost (as if it were a new fashion trend) is enough to cause "alarm and dismay among all law-abiding citizens of timid dispositions".

Viewed from this angle our initial and instinctive sympathy for Akaky's progress

towards a "fuller" self is thwarted. The overcoat now begins to symbolize a spurious growth towards selfhood, a false idol. And Akaky's former state, which "might have flowed on as happily to a ripe old age", appears idyllic, as if it were a kind of civic Eden. Also in support of this view one comes to see another correlation, but in this case it is to literature itself. The first details of the robbery are related as follows:

> Soon he approached the spot where the street was intersected by an immense square with houses dimly visible on the other side, a square that looked to him like a dreadful desert.
>
> A long way away--goodness knows where--he could see the glimmer of light coming from some sentry-box, which seemed to be standing at the edge of the world.

Is this not reminiscent of Dante's and after him Tennyson's depiction of Ulysses' errant quest to "the unpeopled world"? Perhaps for a brief instant we imagine Gogol with disheveled hair laboring away in the eighteenth ring of the Inferno.

To isolate either one of these views as "correct reading of the text" would be just as erroneous as taking Chaucer's Nun's Priest seriously when he asks his audience to "taketh the fruyt, and lat the chaf be stille". For, as has been mentioned above, Gogol does not always create a reversal of hierarchies and meanings, but seems to merge them as well. So that the final effect becomes what Nabokav calls "a vicious circle". The ghost at the end of the story which is taken as being Akaky's is in fact that of the miscreant who had robbed Akaky in the first place (he displays "a fist of a size that was never seen among the living" and "a pair of huge moustachios"). Even the most traditional opposition is blurred: the cops and robbers, the good guys and the bad guys. We recall that the story began with a police commissioner, and that both the policemen and the thieves are characterized by the same anatomical parts. The first policeman that Akaky bumps into is defined by his "calloused fist", well-used and expansive receptacle for snuff. And the "guardsmen", who were the only known witnesses to Petrovich's wife's facial appearance, have "twitching" moustaches, all of which correspond to Akaky's marauders with their own moustaches and "a fist the size of a Civil Servant's head". Can we in any way not be dizzy at this point? Is it not clear that this conglomeration of words will not allow themselves to be glossed over and quickly reshelved?

Ultimately a "message" must be discerned through the sentiments of the reader himself, priority must be imposed. Gogol's comedy seems to have an uncanny effect upon its reader: if pondered too long it unfolds, revealing a limitless sadness which cannot be defined by any text. The way in which this occurs structurally is by a dovetailing of humor and horror. The most striking instance of this is the effect of Akaky's voice on the departmental rookie who falters:

> ...abruptly at Akaky's mild expostulation, as though stabbed through the heart; and since then everything seemed to have changed in him and he saw everything in quite a different light. A kind of unseen power made him keep away from his colleagues whom at first he had taken for decent, well-bred men. And for a long time afterwards, in his <u>happiest</u> <u>moments</u> he would see the shortish Civil Servant with the bald patch on his head, uttering those pathetic words, "Leave me alone! Why do you pester me?" And in those pathetic words he seemed to hear others: "I am your brother".

Here, unlike the other examples, there is no "vicious circle", and there is no sign that the young man returns to his former state; he is unable to sneak back through

the point of departure. Something similar occurs with the Very Important Person when he is remembering his delightful evening at the party:

> Feeling very pleased, he recalled without much affort all the pleasant happenings of the evening, all the witty sayings, which had aroused peals of laughter among the small circle of friends, many of which he even now repeated softly to himself, finding them every bit as funny as they were the first time he heard them, and it is therefore little wonder that he chuckled happily most of the time...All of a sudden the Very Important Person felt that somebody had seized him very firly by the collar. Turning around, he saw a small-sized man in an old, threadbare Civil Service uniform, and it was not without horror that he recognized Akaky Akakyevich.

It is most likely impossible to state succinctly what Gogol wants us to consider when he propels us into this realm, but I leave you with Pascal's thirteenth pensée, which seems to come close.

> Two faces are alike; neither is funny by itself, but side by side their likeness makes us laugh.

La Reine de Jadis

Liz Waldner

I.

Here again amongst flowers and candle--
not roses, no more the little lantern
its breathy fog, its quavering star
no night through the casement rolled wide, but a dry
room, splintered and bare, higher in air: this is winter.
Old brick, this; old wood, old care
cups of tea old, too, however made new
in hope of the queen's coming.

Remembering the advent of various princes
of wine in the afternoonses, kisses
elaborated, slumbers ennervated, many
a dawn met with an own transparency
temporary, for the medium of air;
hair that flowed while walking, that bobbed
that flew, that lay on the pillow so
and new new new: nothing to think on
simply to do. Feel the night, meet the day
go on an own way, back remarking angles of repose
along the stem of the carnation
spiraling into a receiving known as the heart
of the rose, a hope for coronation. Goes, goes
the time proposed; my assent was head to toe
and then some. But here the chair scrapes the floor
and I sit on bones that scrape the chair
feeling my knowing Ago and There, ghosted by this or that
remembered damp. Fair, fair was eclipse of apperception
debonair was skin's near kin. How then with such short hair
have I come to be here in the presence of dead wood
and the province of books? It was memory
brought the one and stole the other flower.
My like power, until my book is opened anew
shrinks to two breadths and inkily goes
as prose across some page. Is it reading
or writing the queen must do?

The candle climbs the carnation across or through
the angle of wall and roof. I sit and drink and stick
tea twigs into its steepley flame and look
at the shadow not mine any more, nor mine were I in disbelief
to look to lovemakings not mine anymore
to deliver me from Memory who will deliver me my name--mine
whose hand was raised against every man's
who reaches now to those who felt its blow before I knew Ago.

II.

My hand itches where the scab is coming off pink skin
and I am filling the room with heat and drinking, thin
the first uncalculated drinks in years since when
in my other life where it was warm, I'd swallow
afternoons entire to evade their evenings; even so
such quickenings are only signs by which I know

that I am dead. For instance, when I read that the queen
that Elizabeth of Romania called Carmen Sylva
(given a Celtic brooch and a Balmoral shawl by Queen Victoria)
waved a napkin to a grazing cow she'd taken
for a loyal subject, then I knew. Quixote, aha, oho
I said; the life is more than windmills. I know
when one lives and when one's dead (as Lear
also de la Mancha, said). For me no feather
sirrah, nor mirror. Cordelia lives and I am dead;
these are clear.

III.

It's not the food that I want--it never was;
but the jars of jelly marked a place and held it
until another day I could in atonement
come bellying up like a fish to the surface
to the grinding place where the days and I met
like a face with a mirror, gnashed together our teeth
held one another to the promise:
asked for bread, ate want made flesh.

It's not the moon which isn't risen yet
or is set, nor her Pleiades
nor the loved men named Baptiste or Ben
neither the life nor the death of the motorcycle boy
nor the women peculiar with liquids and bridge--
the myriad longed for, imagined one by one
now arriving like leaves on the top of a pond
that cancel the sky with their gold;

not any silence of Cordelia's, Hermione's, Penelope's
Philomenas who showed me the surface of faith
not the thought of the thinker, a profile in lamplight
a Gretel fed on breadcrumbs behind somebody's back

but to be in clear water
safe, unseen
suspended and shadowless:
not to be denied.

IV.

I am growing in, growing in, growing in
into the life my mother bled.
Like a window framing a very particular air
or a shape, a figure, heading through an air
I am come to stand inside her knowing.

A luxury here of knowings how: of how
one loves, of how they need
of how one needs, of how they love
how one is no more taken care of--
here, just here, I stand congruent with her.
She bled a prescient blood.

Surprised by the silence and numbed by the air
in the coolness of distance I hear with her ear;
hailing Mary, angels bear Damocles' sword.
Denied! I heard. Bleed air, breathe fire
spin, spin, spin. Take in
the laundry of the earth and hide its poor
beneath your skirts. Beware
the dark, the car, the bar, the men.

Then flee, flee, flee on what ass?
to the stable, the gate, the way you came in.
See her shadow pour from your feet as you walk
see her eyes in the mirror they will bring.
Or sing: Stella Maris, amongst women
blessed, and what for? She gave no birth unbegun
of her blood; unbegun and always her blood
was a window giving onto his growing in
to be born of her prescient blood.

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