COLLOQUY

volume VII
fall 2020

continuing the conversation

A Journal of the Graduate Institute at St. John's College

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Letter from the Editor

December 11, 2020

Dear Members of the Graduate Institute Community,

I'd like to start by thanking all the staff, students, and members of the community who contributed their time and hard work in helping to bring this issue together. Thank you also to our contributors and members of the editorial board. This issue would genuinely not be possible without each of you. As Editor-in-Chief, I am proud of the rigorous and wide-ranging array of writing and art that we have received and are able to put forth in our Fall 2020 Issue.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize those members of the editorial board who have supported *Colloquy* in a time of transition: Dimple Kaul, Jaime Marquez, Charlie Green, and especially our former Editor-in-Chief, Jordan Poyner. Mr. Poyner's guidance even beyond his graduation has been an invaluable help to me in assuming this position and assembling this issue. Without their steadfast commitment to *Colloquy*, this issue would likely not be in front of you all today.

There is no need to assign more adjectives to the year 2020. It's been called trying, unprecedented, uncertain, difficult— and yes, it has been those things. However, at this moment I'd simply like to highlight the abiding need for community, which has, in this year, become all the more pronounced. I hope that this issue of *Colloquy* may serve as a reminder of the strength and diversity of our polity, and the enduring spirit of the GI community at St. John's College.

I hope that you all keep well, and look forward to seeing many of you on campus very soon.

Sincerely,

Olivia Braley
Editor-in-Chief

Reflections on Zoom Seminars at St. John's College

Bonnie Naradzay

After a recent preceptorial session on Homer's *The Odyssey* with Mr. Townsend, I was feeling disoriented by the Zoom format; it was as if conversations were flowing by me, and I was standing on the bank of a river, following what was being said, but finding it hard to wade into the conversation. I realized in that particular session I'd saved up the ideas I'd wanted to express but seemed unable to share, partly because I'd been muting myself and by the time I'd unmuted myself, there was a pileup of others who were ready to contribute. Finally, toward the end of the two hours, I blurted all out the comments I'd wanted to share at various times. Clearly, I'd not grasped how to contribute to an absorbing Zoom conversation among fourteen students and a tutor, so I asked Mr. Townsend for guidance.

Mr. Townsend told me it's better to ask a question than make a statement, and he recommended that I ask succinct questions directed to others in the class. He added, "Try to say only one thing when you speak so that others can respond. Build a conversation by addressing others. Consider what might be the objections to your claim and look at it from many points of view together."

Then I thought back to my first GI seminar, when I'd also felt like an observer rather than a participant. There were two tutors and close to twenty students. I recall times after the sharing of Opening Questions when I would sit back and wait to see if my topic would come up rather than finding something compelling in the topics being discussed and weighing in. Or if the seminar was near the end, and no one had brought up an issue I'd hoped to focus on, I would try changing the topic while neglecting transitional phrases that could link what was being discussed with what I wanted to contribute.

Differences in being in a Zoom seminar include 1) the increased intensity of the Zoom format, since we're all gathered into a single frame, 2) the disorientation of two-dimensional discourse, when communicative cues we could intuit in actual seminars are now hard to detect 3) the fact that Zoom technology moves us around, so when I look for someone who was in one place for an hour, that person is no longer there but somewhere else in the frame of faces, and sometimes a person will get up, leave an empty chair, and return at a later time; and, most disconcerting: 4) the distancing that comes from seeing one's own face among the others, which leads to a fixation on how that face is connecting with the others, and where the eyes are focused. Distractions like this mean that one lacks real presence in the conversation.

In the GI classes I had with Mr. Zeiderman, I remember he liked to involve us in questions of process. Before starting into our Opening Questions, he would often question us on the quality of our previous session. Were there issues that needed our attention? Did we feel successfully engaged? Any ideas for improvement? (This group assessment is a key part of the Touchstones philosophy.) Now, as we transition to a radically different way of pursuing rigorous dialogue, reflecting on our process seems even more vital.

Before this semester started, I attended Mr. Braithwaite's online talk one evening in June on how Plato's "Meno" relates to the challenge of leading seminars on Zoom. Mr. Braithwaite noted,

"Meno is in some radical sense not really present in the conversation with Socrates. He recites, like a ventriloquist's dummy, opinions and arguments he learned from Gorgias, and he's more attentive to what impression he can make on the audience than to the questions of what is virtue, and can it be taught."

In the appendix to his lecture, Mr. Brathwaite included a list of possible ways to enhance the Zoom learning experience; one is to divide students (part of the time) into smaller discussion groups of perhaps three or four per group. I tried his idea in a limited way. Because we can't meet casually on the campus, in the coffee shop, for instance, to follow up on seminar conversations with others, I contacted a classmate in *The Odyssey* to explore a comment he'd made in class. We met on Zoom, which meant that the two of us were speaking side-by-side as well as face-to-face in the Zoom frame; this was certainly better than encountering him as one of the postage-stamp sized faces of fourteen of us plus a tutor, all looking out from a single frame. After our half-hour chat, I felt as if I'd gained a friend as well as insights into his comment and on the text.

The impulse to meet with one other fellow student (in a virtual Coffee Shop) worked well. But the concept can be enlarged. We could form smaller groups – perhaps four people in each, in different configurations each time, and meet at set times. This way, we could fine-tune the larger group's dynamics. Those who tend to distance themselves in the larger seminar setting could feel encouraged to formulate and explore possible text-based opening questions and theories. In addition, we could explore our paper topics with each other.

Here's another way to counter Zoom's artificial formality: Mr. Townsend has been available on Zoom fifteen minutes or so before our class starts. For those of us who tune in early, this impromptu salon is a way to chat before class starts and before we proceed, in earnest, with our Opening Questions. And now we students have decided to hang out on Zoom after the class ends if we'd like to continue our Homeric journey (picture oarsmen rowing in rhythm). We can use this time also to step back and take a look at our group's "process" during the most recent seminar. Think of it as being transported to Harry Browne's, upstairs, once the formal session has ended for the evening.

To sum up the importance of engaging with the Zoom effect on GI seminars, I turned to Mr. Townsend. "Zoom is alienating and challenging," he told me. "But otherwise we'd be isolated. So I'm grateful for it." Mr. Braithwaite, for his part, asked me, "What is it to be present in a genuine, serious, meaningful, absorbing conversation?" He said we know "what it's like to be physically present while our mind is elsewhere; we know this experience in ourselves and in others." So we are challenged to find ways to achieve that presence. How do we bring the mind into alignment with what is now a postage-stamp sized representation of our presence?

The Ancients Had It Easy

Jeanette Corey

The ancients had it easy

with their ships, and quests, and bands of like-hearted searchers. And time, as

heroes by trade, to search for god

to have that be enough

and a foundation of myth that proposed the divine

as something to be happened upon

or sought by way of trees and fountains, sheepskins, portals.

I'm new: I'm now.

No word on the exact coordinates of Jacob's ladder

just the hefty knowledge that the blue ceiling of my world is not, in fact, the underside of

heaven

but space only more and more.

Otherwise I'd connive to throw my fists at it, long enough to maybe dislodge a

floorboard or kitchen tile of paradise

climb up through eternity like a child thief

collapse into the presence of the creator as a stowaway.

Instead:

an increasingly closed system of physics and metaphysics

deepening the image of the reality that only forms the negative space around the more-than-real.

Literacy:

unmitigated privilege

of waterboarding myself with a treasure of accumulated theology in an attempt to

understand what I must acknowledge a desperate wail of mind to soul

to disclose a truth that's clearly there

WHAT WHAT WHAT DO WE BELIEVE

TELL ME WHAT AND WHY AND HOW

AND //NOW\\

and how

I'd love to set sail

in a long boat

and fall off the edge of the world

into

God.

Neha Gaddam

A Conversation with Four Graduating GIs, November 2019

Jordan Poyner, on behalf of Colloquy

Colloquy: Let's start by talking about our least favorite tutors. [Laughter].

Colloquy: I'm not really going to conduct anything. I may ask some questions—

Lee Cranberg: An opening question?

CQ: Yeah, an opening question: that's very fitting. The most obvious thing that I'm curious to hear you all talk about is the imminent time to come post-graduation. We can talk materially first: what is everyone planning on doing after they graduate?

Gregory LaMontagne: My goal is the military—I think most people know that. I will leave, go back to Texas— where I'm from—a week after the final day of class. And hopefully I'll hear something early January and then fly out to Rhode Island for Officer Candidate School in Newport and from there you move on with your military life. That's me.

Andrew Dorchester: Well, I guess I'm following in the footsteps of: I don't know what I'm doing next. But I think the goal is to figure out in what capacity can I live [according] to the standards that St. John's has set. And figuring out what it means to apply that to a day-to-day life.

LC: I'm going to do the fifth semester and leave St. John's in May. I retired just before I started St. John's, so there's no job I'm going back to. I want to continue to enjoy retirement with different adventures. I'm not sure quite what the next one is going to be, but one thing I've considered is volunteering as a physician abroad. I did that once in my career, once in my life. As soon as I got my medical license, my first position was as a volunteer in Samoa in the South Pacific, where I was the only doctor on an island of 900 people. And I met other volunteer physicians there who were in my current age bracket, who had retired from their careers in the U.S. But they were still using their skills and their medical license to see the world. And there were people who had done volunteer stints, like six months at a time in like six different countries. And I filed that away in the back of my mind, that it might be a good thing to do when I reached that stage. And I'm lucky that I have the health and wherewithal to do it.

Patrick Corry: I'll be leaving St. John's in May as well. I'm really unsure about what I want to do next. I'm fairly sure I want to be in education in some capacity. I'm applying to a master's program in theology. It's an interest I developed while I was here.

GL: Where's the program? Or is it classified?

PC: At Notre Dame. Yeah, I think there's a big possibility I'll try to stay around here and do education at the community college or high school level, or even in more nontraditional forms. I want to be talking about literature in some capacity and I'm not sure what that is yet. Like you, Mr. Dorchester, I've been entertaining thoughts of dusting off old trades. I used to paint houses and other things, [and] St. John's has made me much more interested in how that can go on in a flourishing life.

LC: Have you ever taught before?

PC: I taught high school for the first time this past summer: high school classes in history and economics. And I enjoyed it more than I thought I would. I disliked the school's administration more than I thought I would... [Laughter]. This is gonna be a recurring theme of my life.

CQ: With the exception of going into education, it's not clear exactly what the relationship is between what you all have been doing here and what you're planning to do next. So maybe we could talk about that: what do we take with us? [To GL:] How does that factor into either your decision to go into the military or, if it doesn't, how do you think it changes the way that you can approach that stage in your life?

GL: I'm curious about that myself. Because the military seems so antithetical to St. John's—the idea that [here] you're invited to ask questions whereas [there] you might be invited to never ask questions. [Laughter].

GL: One thing that I experienced at St. John's I think—personally and witnessing it in others—is an instability, a sense of doubt about all things, and like a reverence of doubt, and how that leads people to run towards tradition, [towards] orthodoxy of some kind, and run towards something stable, some belief of some kind. And I feel that perhaps I'm running towards a belief in the United States or something like that—a belief in the state, the nation, the republic that is the United States. And I'm curious about these different environments: I think St. John's fosters questioning and inquiry because it believes that maybe certainty, if it can be found, is hard to find. And I'm running to a place where one thing is certain, and that's the U.S. Constitution.

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I'm curious how I will react to that, and I'm curious what effect it has on people—if they want to talk about it. I feel like when I talk to non-Johnny people, I end up running into a lot of "this is how things are...." And so I've been really happy with the student veterans I've met here who seem to have a balance. Sometimes, if they've left the military, they say, "that's the reason why I left the military, because they were just like: this is how things are and you have to do that." But for those that are still involved with the military, [and] are still supportive of it, I'm curious how they navigate that: those two scenarios, two worldviews. I'm curious how I will react to it and I'm curious why it is that I end up finding veterans of all types so fascinating when they have this separate worldview. There's some type of different reverence that they have—not for doubt, but for either patriotism, God, country, family—that I really respect, even though it is alien to me. But it won't be alien to me very soon, I hope.

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If I have to make a question out of my journey into the military, my question is: what does a certain faith do to my individuality and my behavior in society? I think I'll be taking with me the idea that I want to investigate things that aren't certain, and that certainty is very hard to find, and I'm not sure I know what certainty is. So I'm taking that enquiring mind with me, but I'm going to take it into an environment that will combat that with a very strict faith in an ideal that is supposedly certain. And I might suffer turmoil because of that conflict, but I'm excited to see if I'll end up becoming like the student veterans I so admire, who seem to have navigated that conflict very well. So that's a very long way of explaining what I hope to take with me into a non-Johnny world.

LC: Was it a hard decision to apply to the military?

GL: No. My parents were supportive. People were like: "really?" And I said, "yep." And I guess it'd been on the back of my mind before this, when I was getting out of my original career path of performing. Back then I thought: "well, I know I don't want to do this. So I can either go back to school for something, specifically Great Books, or perhaps Peace Corps, or perhaps military." So it was in the back of my mind.

CQ: Why do you think that is?

GL: I'm wondering if it has something to do with the fact that I came here to question things. And [that] I think there's an extreme to questioning. There's an extreme doubt, an extreme skepticism, that I don't like. Whether or not it's morally right, I have no idea. I find extreme skepticism to be toxic rather than helpful, and knowing that the military seems from the outside to be the extreme in the other direction—of extreme certainty or extreme dogmatism in regard to a kind of bureaucracy, [in regard to] following orders—maybe I'm hoping to find a balance in between the two. And rushing from one extreme to the other might help me find the balance.

PC: How do you think questioning and extreme skepticism go together?

GL: I guess questioning implies more active initiative on the part of the skeptic? Because I guess you could be extremely skeptical and not question anything: you just don't believe it. Maybe those are two separate faculties or abilities. One is to not believe something and the other is to ask why you don't believe it or why it's not believable, to actually inquire into it. So, you're right: I guess there are two separate things. It seems to me that St. John's inspires you, as in the *Meno*, to be very active in the search, to not give up, to keep asking questions. But there's a part of me that thinks: "I don't know. I read Nietzsche and there are some things I don't want to know, some things I don't want to question." So finding the balance between questioning everything and not questioning anything is what I'm searching for, but maybe they're two different types of skepticism.

CQ: You were going to ask something earlier, Patrick.

PC: I was thinking that it's a weird tension at St. John's, where it seems like when you start to question something, you have to have some childlike thought about the possibility of finding an answer. From that point of view, it seems like it shouldn't be the least skeptical thing you do. But also, you have to suspend [already] having grasped the answers to do it, which does seem skeptical. So I wonder if that tension is what drives good things at St. John's and how it would express itself in the sort of balance you're seeking between firm ground and the activity of questioning.

AD [to GL]: Have there been any texts that have guided you in your thought process?

GL: Reading Nietzsche and reading Thomas Carlyle's works, or even reading the *Republic* and talking about music and gymnastic—I feel like I've had a lot of music, not too much gymnastic. [Laughter].

PC: I know the feeling of being inspired by the gymnastic section.

CQ: There's something demoralizing about the section on gymnastic and realizing that I'm almost thirty—I know that's young, all things considered—I'm not an undergraduate at St. John's. And in the *Politics* too, there's this discussion about when the proper time is for each of these forms of education to happen and realizing you can't go back and change the past. And it's not clear to me if,

at thirty, I'm supposed to go and learn natural science all over again. *That* probably would be helpful and attainable, but it's hard reading great texts sometimes, especially when they talk about education, because you become aware of how unlike the ideal education your own was. I don't necessarily despair of it, but I do wonder: what should I do? How should I take all these different teachings about how you need to have an education in music and gymnastic, and natural science. I can't go back and do all that, so I feel confused about what's the right thing to do, especially as a student in the Graduate Institute—someone who is definitely an adult. And it's different for every person. That's the nature of everything that has already been said, but I find it painful. Maybe I'm too fixated on the question of what the right thing to do is according to some authority.

GL: It seems weird to me, I don't know—I haven't read Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*—but I imagine that Plato wrote his books without having the education that he prescribes in them perhaps. I don't know if Plato had the type of education that he makes Socrates extol as the proper education, and yet he wrote very incredible things. I'm wondering about Rousseau, who wrote *Emile*, and John Locke, who wrote *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*: did they actually have the education they espoused? But there is a frustration that comes with being a GI especially, feeling that somehow we're tardy. And there are times when I think I'd be so brilliant if I had had these texts when I was four. If I could have just read Plato starting, you know, when I put my socks on for the first time—man, watch out world, I would have been the best scholar.

LC: There is a fellow in Santa Fe who graduated from the Graduate Institute there. He's in his sixties and then he started as an undergraduate at St. John's.

PC: But what would that get you? We're not here to become philosopher kings, or Plato? Plato isn't a product of an institution that educated him; he's a genius.

LC: I think I'm here to learn the underpinnings of my culture.

GL: I guess we're not supposed to graduate and be experts. Or maybe this goes back to the question earlier: what are we supposed to take away from this [our time at St. John's]? Because we read all these texts and we're not necessarily supposed to graft them onto our skin. What exactly are we doing here? What are we at St. John's for? Is there a use to it, besides going to class and getting to talk to great people, and ask profound questions that anyone else might scoff at? I'm still wondering about that myself.

AD: It's not only knowledge that we're acquiring so much as it is a kind of mindset: the ability to grapple with perplexing questions. I think one of the best speeches I heard during my entire time here was Mr. Sinnett's speech last fall for the graduating students, where he talked about the strength of the St. John's program being the ability to deal with perplexity, to be…

PC: Perplexed, but not despair.

AD: Thank you, yeah. And that's something pretty unique for our society. I think he was absolutely correct that the number of people in society that can be comfortable in perplexity is—it's a rare thing. And it is a strength of the Johnny: the ability to manage perplexity—not necessarily to resolve it, but to manage it.

PC: Do we love it? Is it a delight?

CQ: I think it's a fetish object for knowledge.

PC: What?

CQ: I'm just being perverse.

AD: There are still those moments where I get extremely uncomfortable around complex issues, but I do feel that this experience has allowed me to manage that much better. I'm taking one of the drawing classes right now—and it's probably the hardest class I've taken here—where I'm being forced to draw on the basis of shadow, to see in terms of shadow: it's unbelievably hard, and it's perplexing. I'm slowly starting to see what the instructor wants me to see, but I think the underlying base of the St. John's education has allowed me to be more adaptable to what needs teaching.

CQ: How?

AD: I got to a point last Saturday where I wanted to just give up. I wanted to throw down my charcoal pencil and say, "I can't do this." And I stuck with it. I worked my way through whatever the struggle was that I was dealing with. And I think part of the resilience that I felt within myself to go ahead and continue to manage that frustration is a type of resilience that—I don't know if it would have been there a year ago.

CQ: But how did St. John's instill that in you or help you form that within yourself?

AD: I think it's through the regimen of dealing with the constant perplexing questions that we are confronted with in these texts. And the fact that not only do we work our way individually through this, but we work our way through complex and perplexing questions in class.

CQ: But didn't you do that before you went to St. John's? You went to college before...

AD: Certainly the complex litigation that I've been involved with—I've done that.

CQ: And you had read some of these texts before you came, right? So surely some of the perplexing questions that the texts raise you had already encountered. So what's different? I know there's a different setting in terms of the seminar, the conversation...

PC: I think it's very easy to read a great text and not encounter any perplexity if you're not doing it a certain way.

AD: Especially if you're not a specialist on the subject area. And I do think that one of the advantages that St. John's provides is that we come into some of these readings cold. So I'm doing Lobachevsky right now—this is a whole new world for me and for everyone in my class, and the world that he is describing is bizarre in some ways, but it's slowly starting to make sense. But it's the fact that I have no background in it! And I think the advantage of any sort of Liberal Arts program is that it should be broad enough that you're eventually going to run into a text or multiple texts that are going to be on a subject area that you have no background in.

CQ: But we all took geometry in high school. So, you know, you may not have read Lobachevsky, but you've dealt with parallel lines. I realize that there is an immediate answer: first, the way we

learned geometry in high school might have elided all of the ambiguity out of it. You might have been told that this is how things are: it's fairly straightforward. We can explain satisfactorily, at least to you, a fifteen-year-old, how this works. But that's not always true when you take a class in college. I'm not sure how you read Hobbes, for example, and don't have a moment where you think: "no, this is weird."

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Someone could read the *Republic* and have an instructor tell them: "well, you know, this is fairly straightforward. It's an account of proto-communism or something else. This is how you'd have to set things up and that's what is being discussed." And that might work temporarily. Or, to be somewhat inflammatory, I think that a person who's really thinking, even a young person, is not going to be satisfied with that account for long. Cracks are going to start to appear in the edifice. I am in total agreement with the idea that St. John's does something differently, but I don't think we've said exactly how that is. Maybe you can't, but I'm asking.

PC: The first thing that comes to mind is that you're going to have a teacher tell you: "Hobbes believes in absolute authority because the English civil wars were very, very difficult, and he was living in a very violent time. No wonder this man had such radical, absolute ideas! You don't have to ask: "is this in me? Can I believe this? Do I believe this? Am I living in this world or not?" I think it takes a community or a conversation, or the right question to pose the text to yourself in that way.

CQ: You're not just talking about Hobbes as a historical thinker, you're talking about writing for a historical moment and saying, "does this make sense to me?"

GL: I came here, as LC was saying, to study the roots of my culture. And I've been thinking about Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and how we desire to know—and we don't really know things unless we can pinpoint their causes. I like knowing—with the Politics & Society segment—how America came to be through other thinkers and writers who perhaps were the efficient causes. We're able to sort of lead Western culture on paths, and I like tracing those paths back. I find that fascinating. And I guess you can do that on your own. But the conversational approach here at St. John's and the decontextualization you [PC] were referring to also allows us to ask deeper questions of ourselves then I think other places would.

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So it's not only a course in intellectual history— "Plato said that and then Locke said that, and then Hamilton said that"—but it's: "Plato said that—should we believe what Plato says? Is America wrong? Is Plato timeless? Is he bringing up something that is still pertinent?" And the answer is often: "yes." Or let's assume it's pertinent: what would that mean? Having those intellectual premises to work with, I think, leads to the most liberating treatment of the most profound subject matters in life. Should I be free? Is there freedom? Is America right? That's a big thing, especially after reading Tocqueville. What is America? I don't know if I want to live there. Maybe what St. John's does differently or well is that they take questions that were asked millennia ago and treat them as if they were asked today. And I feel like that has really been the key for me: to have a less assumptive way of thinking, a more liberated way of thinking. And it's allowed me to put myself in a lot more shoes that I would have if I thought: "they can't speak to me; they said that a long time ago." But having a diverse set of views, from ancient to modern, I really feel like I'm getting more out of life, purely just by considering another way of living. And maybe that's only possible through the St. John's approach where questions really elicit vulnerability and assumption-breaking.

LC: That's something I would not have been able to do on my own. I decided to come to St. John's because these books have always been on my reading list, but I didn't have the self-discipline to read them on my own. Most people would not choose Aristotle as bedtime reading. And it's so hard that I would not have been able to understand it on my own, and I'm *not* able to understand it on my own. That's why the seminar is really great: because we're helping each other to try to understand a difficult text and pooling all of our different insights. Mr. Townsend is fond of quoting Mortimer Adler: "reading is like drinking. It's something that you can enjoy on your own, but it's more fun to do it with other people."[1]

CQ: I hate this quote every time I hear it. [Laughter].

GL: Why's that?

CQ: Because the analogy doesn't make sense.

PC: That's what's funny about it.

LC: It makes sense to me.

CQ: It makes it seem as if reading alone is pathological.

AD: I also drink alone!

CQ: I hope you don't drink alone as much as you read alone. I hope you read alone like an alcoholic drinks alone.

PC: I thought it was a vindication of drinking alone. But you're right, it can be equally read as a pejorative comment about reading alone.

AD: In many ways, I do feel like the Program has, strangely, taught me how to read. Taking the Modern Poetry Preceptorial right now I've learned how to read a poem in a way that I didn't know how to do prior to—

LC: Is that part of the class? Explicitly talking about how to read a poem?

AD: No, it's a kind of culture that just comes with the class. To prepare for a discussion on a poem takes a lot of time, [it takes] really getting your hands dirty with the poem, reading it multiple times, becoming, as Eva Brann said, "preoccupied with the work."[2] To spend an entire day thinking about the poem that we'll be discussing in class on Thursday—that leisurely process of learning (leisurely in the Greek sense of the etymology of "school"), of really spending your time with something and *allowing* yourself the time with it, is something that I didn't recognize the importance of prior to coming to St. John's.

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[1] The editor has not been able to locate this quote. An approximate aphorism can be found in Adler's Harvard Lowell Lecture (April 11, 1990), "The Great Books, the Great Ideas, and a Lifetime of Learning," where he says, "Solitary reading is as horrible as solitary drinking."

[2] See Eva Brann, "Tips on Writing: Excerpts from the Fall 2017 Colloquy Symposium," *Colloquy* 2 (2017): 16.

LC: What's the etymology of "school"?

CQ: "σχολή" is the Greek word that means *leisure* and it ends up informing the English word "school."

GL: It seems like the program asks for you to have the leisure. And it invites me to be more vulnerable and more profound, and not so superficial with my inquiry and my researches. And that leads to more rewarding results, regardless of whether I arrive at answers—there's something fetishistic about asking the deep, dark questions that don't often get asked.

PC: Fetishistic? As in it's being overly sought?

GL: I think we get off on asking the deep questions.

CQ: The fetish object is a substitute for something else: the non-fetish object. That's what a fetish is. The fetish is the object of your misplaced erotic attention—it should be on something else, but it's on the fetish. So if it is that kind of a fetish, then what's the thing we're being diverted from?

PC: That's why I wanted to push back on the word.

GL: That makes more sense. Maybe I mean the erotic tendency of ours to be aroused by asking deep questions. But if it is fetishistic, maybe we should be committed to love of God, love of country, love of state, or something like that—and we're misplacing our desire by focusing it on whatever is not stable.

CQ: Those all seem like good things: the love of country—a love of one's homeland seems like an unambiguously good thing to me, in the sense that I haven't added on to it any other qualifications—we should be able to pursue all those things. But maybe any one of them pursued to its extreme precludes the others. The way that most GI's end up doing the Program, I don't see a lot of people who seem in danger of seriously undermining all their other noble or good civic aspirations or ideas.

GL: Maybe they're not reading deeply enough.

CQ: Yeah, it was interesting that you said you had read Nietzsche and you took that as a warning, a shot across the bow. You read Nietzsche and you thought: "I don't want to do what Nietzsche does. I don't want to look into the abyss." Do we all agree that we don't want to look into the abyss?

PC: I agree, but I might have a different understanding of what the abyss is. Maybe this moves us closer to what the abyss might be: do we call the impulse to question a fetish or is there a genuine end of the erotic impulse? It's a huge question. I think that St. John's has to presuppose that there's something natural and good about the desire being projected towards searching for truth by asking questions, and that that activity has meaning.

CQ: Yes. When I brought up fetishes in my offhand remark earlier, what I meant, as a joke, was that questions might be a fetish object for knowledge. Knowledge in the sense that GL talked about having a kind of—I don't want to call it faith—a certainty that some things are inviolable. You're

not going to question some things, and that's something that you could call knowledge or faith. It's something that doesn't get penetrated or dissolved. But the constant seeking—and this is the tension that you [GL] brought up and are wrestling with—if the life of the mind involves constantly asking questions, where's the stability? Do we have something we can stand on to do that? I don't want to raise my family in the jungle or in some anarchic state.

AD: Rousseau says it's great!

PC: You're just not allowed to come along.

Jaime Marquez

LC: I was curious if people had any criticisms of the GI, or [noticed] weaknesses or things you'd like to see done differently.

GL: Of the things that I think the Graduate Institute can control: there needs to be more of a variety of Preceptorial options. There are just literature Precepts and like one philosophy option. I want to take some math and science, I want to take another political theory class, I want a history Precept. I think they had trouble in the past getting people to sign up for math and science Precepts, so maybe that's why they stopped offering them, but I really think that I'm missing out when I look at the list [of Preceptorials] and have to choose either a piece of literature or an ethics text. Now obviously I think those choices are great too, but to get more variety in that regard—that's a criticism I've brought up before.

LC: Yeah, there have been semesters where I was not enthusiastic about any of the Precept choices. And some of them were on some rather obscure authors: it seems as if whatever the tutors wanted to devote their semester to ended up being the option.

GL: It used to be the case that you had to have the Precept match the same subject as your segment. It used to be required. And so in the fall they would have to offer math, natural science, and literature Preceptorials, and then they would switch to political science, philosophy, and history in the spring. But I also love the idea that it's an interdisciplinary education: you can take [the] Math & Natural Science [segment], and then read Jane Austen and see connections. I love that idea, but by doing that they may have lost the sense of diversity. Perhaps they think: "literature applies to everything, so we're just going to offer that all the time—and that's what everyone wants to take." I would be excited if I saw Darwin's *The Descent of Man* or even Descartes' *La Géométrie*: I would be scared, but if I was ever going to study those texts, it would be at St. John's.

CQ: I still don't understand exactly what the Graduate Institute is—especially given who the students are. It still feels like an experiment to me. I am favorably disposed to it, but—

GL: You don't feel like it has somehow settled into its identity?

CQ: Yeah, I'm not sure if the Graduate Institute knows where its place is.

AD: I don't know how you market it either. The identity of the people that come here—particularly people that are coming from a career—you couldn't necessarily use Google Analytics to figure out who would be a suitable GI candidate. It doesn't work that way.

CQ: *They* kind of have to find the Graduate Institute, right?

GL: It's very self-selecting.

LC: Self-selecting is one thing, but finding something in hiding is something else!

CQ: What do you guys think about the rigor of the Graduate Institute? On the one hand, there seems to be this standard, which is: "we don't expect more than this, because this is what we *can* expect an adult who is working full-time to be capable of. They're an adult, but we still want them to be able to come and do the Program, so we limit the scope of the writing, the oral exam, and—perhaps most significantly—the reading list." But how do we determine what that baseline is? And do the students feel that more could be asked of them? For example, an oral exam that's more than half an hour. I'm not suggesting we place more of an emphasis on grades or other formal academic qualifications, but perhaps the oral exam could be a little more serious. Of course it's nice to have a half hour conversation with a tutor, but I can take them to lunch and have the same conversation. I don't think that's being flamboyant; I don't know what your oral exams are like.

AD: I think the rigor is what you put into it. And there clearly are students that do less than other students, and probably do just fine. But I feel like if you really want to get something out of the Program, the opportunity is there—and the reward is definitely there—to do the extra work, to spend more time reading the texts that are assigned. Most of these texts are pretty dense. Somebody with a job could probably do a couple of readings and come into class prepared, or you can spend all

day preparing for this and have a much richer experience. So I don't feel like I've necessarily lost out on the Program because we're not given more [work]. I can always go read more. And there are also enough students that are doing the extra work, so that I can always have a discussion with somebody who is doing the extra work, and we can confer outside of classes.

GL: I think I agree that the opportunity is there to make it what you want, to make the experience be as rigorous as you want it to be. I think the best part about the student-tutor relationship here is how free the school makes the tutors be. They can't have office hours. We're able to approach a tutor at any time and say, "I need to talk more about this text; I have more questions." And they might give you more assignments, they might give you an extra essay topic to write on—I'm not quite sure, I haven't taken that step. But I know it's there. And I think the library has plenty of resources. I think there are opportunities to make more of the Program, to make the Program even more intensive than it is at first glance. But there are times when I think I should probably be writing more papers. There are times when I think: "I didn't need to prepare as much for this oral exam as I needed to prepare for certain other things." And I think: "is that actually a mark against the Program? Are the standards too low?"

—

There might be times when I think I really prepared for class, and then I show up and we talk about something that somehow slipped through my attention while reading *Oedipus Rex* five times and annotating—which I didn't do, but assuming I did. I think that the nature of the classroom—that it is so organic and unpredictable—doesn't lend itself to being something like a quiz on what happens in *Oedipus Rex*—where there's a pretty functional relationship between how much you studied the text and how you performed. As opposed to: I studied a lot and then I come to a discussion-based classroom where we can talk about something that doesn't interest me for two hours. That would lead me to think preparation and success do not go hand in hand at St. John's. Because you could read the text once and think, "well, I'm really not prepared for class," and then the class focuses on your opening question. And then you think: "cool, I get to talk for two hours about something I'm really interested in, and I didn't really need to prepare!" Maybe there's something about the loose nature of the classroom that might lead to a sense of lack of rigor, but I still think that there are opportunities to make it as rigorous as you want.

PC: I agree with a lot of what's been said about the rigor being something you determine for yourself and I've been really impressed with the way that students are motivated to prepare outside of class. I think you notice fluctuations in the discussions according to whether a text invites really intensive preparation or wards it off by its nature. This is something I think about a lot with the Program: there's so much conversation that we have, but there's not a lot of forum for dialogue on things about the conversation. Part of that is what's really cool about the spontaneous nature of it: because there are no rules of etiquette for talking in a seminar, people become better at doing it.

GL: What about the "Notes on Dialogue"[3] though?

PC: Right, but there's nothing that anyone is going to enforce.

GL: Maybe that's a problem.

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[3] Stringfellow Barr, "Notes on Dialogue," (address to the Fellows of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara, CA, 1968), https://www.sjc.edu/application/files/7614/9814/1117/Notes_on_Dialogue.pdf.

PC: Well, maybe the same could be said about practices for reading. I've noticed times when tutors explicitly encourage students to redouble their efforts, because they know that they're going to be more discouraged than usual, but that, if they dig in, there will be great profit in the seminar. I don't think it's only the tutors' responsibility. We could build a culture around what it means to read rigorously and how it is that that's going to help your growth, what the frustrations are and how they can be overcome. I think that could go a long way towards improving our culture of rigorous discussion. I think the current tutors do this already, but we, as students, could collectively encourage it and develop some sort of understanding. Maybe *Colloquy* is an organ for this type of thing—where the self-consciousness of the Graduate Institute can develop.

GL: And the Graduate Student Council—although we haven't done the best job of promoting it—is supposed to be a sort of intermediary between the academic administration and the student body. There's normally a forum that we invite students to come to and comment on the Program, on our classroom experience—they usually do that at least once a year. So that might be another avenue for critiquing the rigor and [generally] bringing up criticisms of the Program, because I do think that the Graduate Student Council should be another resource for students if the rigor is unsatisfactory. That should be one of their avenues for fixing that or discussing it.

CQ: My first two semesters I had almost the exact same tutors. Which is really interesting now—being in my third semester and having entirely different tutors—because I have realized that there were things that I had taken for granted due to having the same tutors. One of the things that I had taken for granted was this idea of there being rules for dialogue. Both semesters I had Mr. Townsend and he opened each class by stipulating that there are some rules—or guidelines if you prefer. And I had gone forth and been talking to family members and friends about my experience, and telling them that St. John's has rules! They're not rules that people necessarily enforce, at least not in the sense that you get a demerit if you violate them. Rather, people will gently correct you. What would each of you say the rules are—if there are rules? Or, if "rules" is too rigid a term, what are the guiding norms for conversation in class?

AD: During my summer semester, a lot of the students were new to the St. John's experience and I was in large seminars, and the first couple of classes were kind of chaotic. So I shared that sheet that Mr. Townsend gave us on the first day about rules or standards for discussion. Between that [sheet] and some comments that the tutors made in class, the students came around. But it can be tricky because the rules are not prescribed, they're agreed to in a social way.

PC: I think the experience of having that realized spontaneously is so rich and so important for coming to terms with what learning is that I think it would be a very regrettable thing to try to impose a written law on a seminar—even if you thought you might save yourself some convenience and the growing pains

GL: There are times when I think there should be rules—not necessarily about conversation—but there are times when I think: everyone should have the same edition, so you can save time. Invite students to have different translations, but for class I want this [edition] and I want us to be able to move through the text without spending thirty minutes on where a passage is. Regarding norms for discussion: even if they're suggested by "Notes on Dialogue" or the tutors, what seems to be a norm is just whatever is conducive to civility. I think if civility is the guiding principle then that would lend itself to: not interrupting, not hogging the conversation, and inviting people that haven't spoken to

speak up. That might be the principle I have in mind that leads to successful conversations about, [for example,] the rape and murder of this character, or whether or not society should be an absolute monarchy. It seems like if the classroom is devoted to civility, then all the norms work themselves out.

AD: I definitely concur that if we had the same translation of Aristotle that would help—different translations for all of the other texts, sure, but Aristotle...

PC: That's how the Middle Ages fell apart. [Laughter].

Neha Gaddam

Once a Void

Patricia Harden

My mind, a wind-swept oasis,
Craven and blind in the darkness,

Lay wasted, huddled in
An invariable nothingness.

Thunder rolled and
Lightning slashed the sky.

From whence, the faintest cry
Quickened my dry and dusty soul.

And I, as ere Kant professed,
Sought the light and then began to be.

On the Voluntary Nature of Virtue

Brandon Wasicsko

Why do some people become virtuous, others vicious? It is due in large part to their actions, says Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. If we want to be virtuous, we must conduct ourselves in ways that comport with virtue, which is to say our actions must be of the same quality as the moral virtues we wish to embody (1103b14-21). For Aristotle, the order of operations is clear: we act, the power of habit operates on us, and our characteristics—virtuous or otherwise—come into being imbued with the same qualities as the actions we repeat time and again (1105b4). Because actions are central to Aristotle's account of virtue, we should endeavor to understand precisely how they factor into his argument and how they function in ourselves. In particular, this paper will explore how and to what degree actions—and, by consequence, our characteristics—are within our power, with a focus on childhood.

Let's begin by laying out some of the key ideas in Aristotle's account of virtue as a foundation for our inquiry. We know, first, that moral virtues are not present in us by nature: they are characteristics that come to be as a result of habit (1103a16). Characteristics, being that part of the soul "in reference to which we are in a good or bad state in relation to the passions," admit of optionality (1105b25), a fact illustrated by the example of anger: feeling it too intensely or too weakly puts us in a "bad" condition relative to the passion of anger, but experiencing it in the proper, moderate way—i.e., feeling angry when one ought, at the things one ought, and in due proportion—puts us in a "good" condition. Similarly, an action becomes virtuous to the extent that the quality of the act and our condition in performing align with virtue. The "should" or "right way to act" or "good or bad condition" is a quality with origins in right reason or "practical wisdom" or "how the prudent person would define it" (1107a1).

Habit is intimately related to action in the process of character formation. It is the operative power that combines the qualities of our repeated actions into characteristics. Though we do not understand precisely *how* it works, we do know that one-off actions come, temporally, before the development of characteristics, though both are determined in part by how we turn or conduct ourselves. The long-term result of habit is that we come to have "a certain disposition" (1106a6). This disposition flavors and guides our future actions. We become accustomed to responding one way rather than another in certain situations, e.g. through repeatedly cowering in the face of fear, we come to have a cowardly disposition and are inclined to act accordingly. Our characteristics, in this way, gradually move outside of our direct control. Nevertheless, Aristotle concludes that characteristics are *voluntary* or *willing* things "because it was once in our power to make use of [them] in this way or that" (1115a2).

For Aristotle, an action is voluntary or willing if (1) the cause of the action is within the actor and (2) the actor has knowledge of the particulars involved in the action (1110a1). It is possible, according to Aristotle, for discrete actions to satisfy both of these conditions fully: if we are forced to act (violating 1) or are ignorant of the particulars involved in our actions (violating 2), our actions become involuntary (or nonvoluntary when awareness of our ignorance fails to produce regret). Voluntary actions, therefore, entail authoritative control over an action from beginning to end. But characteristics are only voluntary at the beginning. We lack the same beginning-to-end control over characteristics that we have over actions because the particulars of the process of habituation, by which our character is formed, are not known to us. Because we do not know *how* characteristics add

to themselves through the power of habit, we cannot satisfy (2) when thinking of character development as a whole. But because it is possible for us to satisfy both conditions in the case of particular actions, and because our actions, when compounded by the power of habit, result in our characteristics, Aristotle concludes that *our characteristics are voluntary to the extent that we have causal control over our actions early on.*

When introducing the power of habit and its relation to moral virtue, Aristotle claims that "it makes no small difference, then, whether one is habituated this or that way straight from childhood but a very great difference—or rather the whole difference" (1103b24). If characteristics are voluntary, what is meant here by "the whole difference"? On the surface, these two ideas seem at odds because habituation in childhood seems to entail a great many *external* causes, whereas the claim that characteristics are voluntary rests on their cause being *internal* and "up to us." Let's consider, first, how we should understand "the whole difference," then turn to the process of habituation in childhood to consider how and to what extent our actions are "up to us."

By "the whole difference," two main interpretations seem possible. One is that habituation in childhood is *fully and ultimately determinate* of the characteristics one comes to have in adulthood. On this view, how one is raised solidifies one's characteristics such that a person exiting childhood no longer has any control over the composition of their disposition. Though they retain authoritative control over individual actions, their characteristics are unchangeable. The other interpretation views an upbringing that accords with virtue as *necessary but not sufficient* to attain virtue. Being "raised right" endows the person with a fundamental predisposition upon which they can, through their own work and effort, ultimately attain virtue by identifying the mean and acting rightly many times, though there is no guarantee that they will succeed. Someone "raised poorly" is instilled with predispositions that are so antithetical to the attainment of virtue that reaching it is effectively impossible.

A third interpretation, admittedly weaker than the main two, considers "the whole difference" to be *directionally* determinate. On this view, childhood habituation endows the person with certain inclinations or predispositions, but leaves open the possibility of alteration and development. The difference can be considered "whole" if habituation in childhood is responsible for creating a fixed "starting point" in adulthood. A person of reasoning age could, from this starting point, deliberate and choose to act one way despite having been habituated in childhood to act another and could, through repetition, thereby alter his characteristics. It is possible, on this view, for someone "raised right" to corrupt themselves in adulthood and for one "raised poorly" to attain virtue.

What does habituation in childhood look like? Since the child is a being in development whose physical and mental capacities change over time, it seems, too, that the manner of habituation will vary accordingly. For a very young child, the first actions we can call "voluntary," in Aristotle's vocabulary, are basic motor functions. Such actions are voluntary to the extent their cause is internal to the child. But a greater share of causation at this stage of development belongs to the parents who decide what the child eats and when, how he is dressed, where he goes, etc. Indeed, the whole aim of parenting, at least in this respect, is to be the cause of the actions that a child is incapable of directing (or directing *well*) himself. As he grows and his capacities increase, he takes on a greater proportion of the causal responsibility of his own actions, his parents less. When the child can walk, he has greater command over where he goes, within the confines the parents set for him. When he is a teenager, the balance shifts even more.

In addition to the role of the parent, there is a complex web of other external causes impacting the child's development, including the broader environment one grows up in, role models one can tacitly learn from, and random chance. The claim is not that all external causes constitute "force." Aristotle makes clear that an action retains some element of the voluntary to the extent that we contribute to it (1110b16). Rather, we're left with a picture of habituation in childhood that is a mixture of internal and external causes, and the task of deciphering the voluntary and involuntary.

It will help to pause for a moment and say precisely what's at stake in sorting out the voluntary from the involuntary. Since Aristotle ties praise and blame to voluntary action and forgiveness and pity to involuntary action (1109b30), knowing the difference is important if we care about justice. If we wrongly attribute a voluntary cause to an action that was indeed involuntary, we risk blaming when we should be forgiving. In the opposite case, where we think a voluntary action to be involuntary, we risk becoming suckers to the calculations of evil that prey on our sympathies. The distinction matters, too, in the case of law, where understanding the nature of voluntary and involuntary action is necessary for rendering appropriate judgement in particular instances. Regarding characteristics specifically, if we agree with Aristotle's claim that they are voluntary or willing things, we have to understand *how and to what extent this is so* since the mixed nature of childhood habituation has proved nuanced.

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It may be instructive to think about character development in two distinct phases. Aristotle writes: "Neither *by nature*, therefore, nor contrary to nature are the virtues present; they are instead present in us who are *of such a nature* as to receive them, and who are completed through habit" (1103a25, emphasis mine). What does it mean to be "of such a nature" as to receive the virtues? The broadest interpretation reads "of such a nature" as human nature: our common human nature, lacking "completion" at birth, is nevertheless *of such a nature* as to find its completion in virtue. By contrast, a stone is not "of such a nature" because the quality that drives it downward cannot be altered no matter how many times it is thrown in the air. Man can become courageous, cowardly, or reckless, but the stone will always fall. And while only virtue, for Aristotle, is the *right* or *full* completion of a human being, a number of excesses or deficiencies are possible outcomes whereas the stone is not "of such a nature" as to admit of optionality in this way.

True as this may be, it seems Aristotle wants to make a distinction *amongst* human beings rather than between humans and non-humans. A stricter reading of the quote says that there is one kind of "of such a nature" that is capable of attaining virtue and others that are not. What is this "second nature" and where does it come from? It seems to be a quality or set of qualities on top of "mere" human nature that one comes to possess *prior* to virtue which makes virtue's attainment possible.

We can understand this second nature in two main ways: as inborn tendencies or as initial conditioning. The inborn tendencies view says: "although nature does not furnish us with full-blown virtues, we are born with nascent proclivities or predispositions that incline us one way or another." For example, an inherently skittish child may frighten easily and be more likely to act in a cowardly manner. It is not inconsistent to say all human beings share a common nature but are not born equal in all respects. We recognize this in cases where one is born with, say, a greater potential to achieve physical strength. On this view, the inborn tendencies are not *ultimately* determinate—just as a greater potential for strength does not guarantee that one will be strong—but they do give some children a natural advantage over others when it comes to the possibility of attaining virtue, all else equal. The internal and external factors of upbringing still play an important role in the outcome.

The other view understands this second nature as the initial conditioning that comes from one's childhood. On this view, we are born blank slates who come to be "of such a nature" in this preliminary sense by our upbringing. Since childhood habituation is a mixture of causes voluntary and involuntary, internal and external, the outcome of our "second nature" is the result of this complex web of causation. This view gives children more of an equal footing by nature but places greater determinate power in childhood habituation since one who is "raised right" will be "of such a nature" as to receive the virtues, the one who is not, not. This understanding seems most consistent with the "necessary but not sufficient" interpretation of Aristotle's claim that habituation straight from childhood makes "the whole difference." Nevertheless, it remains an open question how and to what extent the child causally contributes to his childhood and therefore to the constitution of his "second nature."

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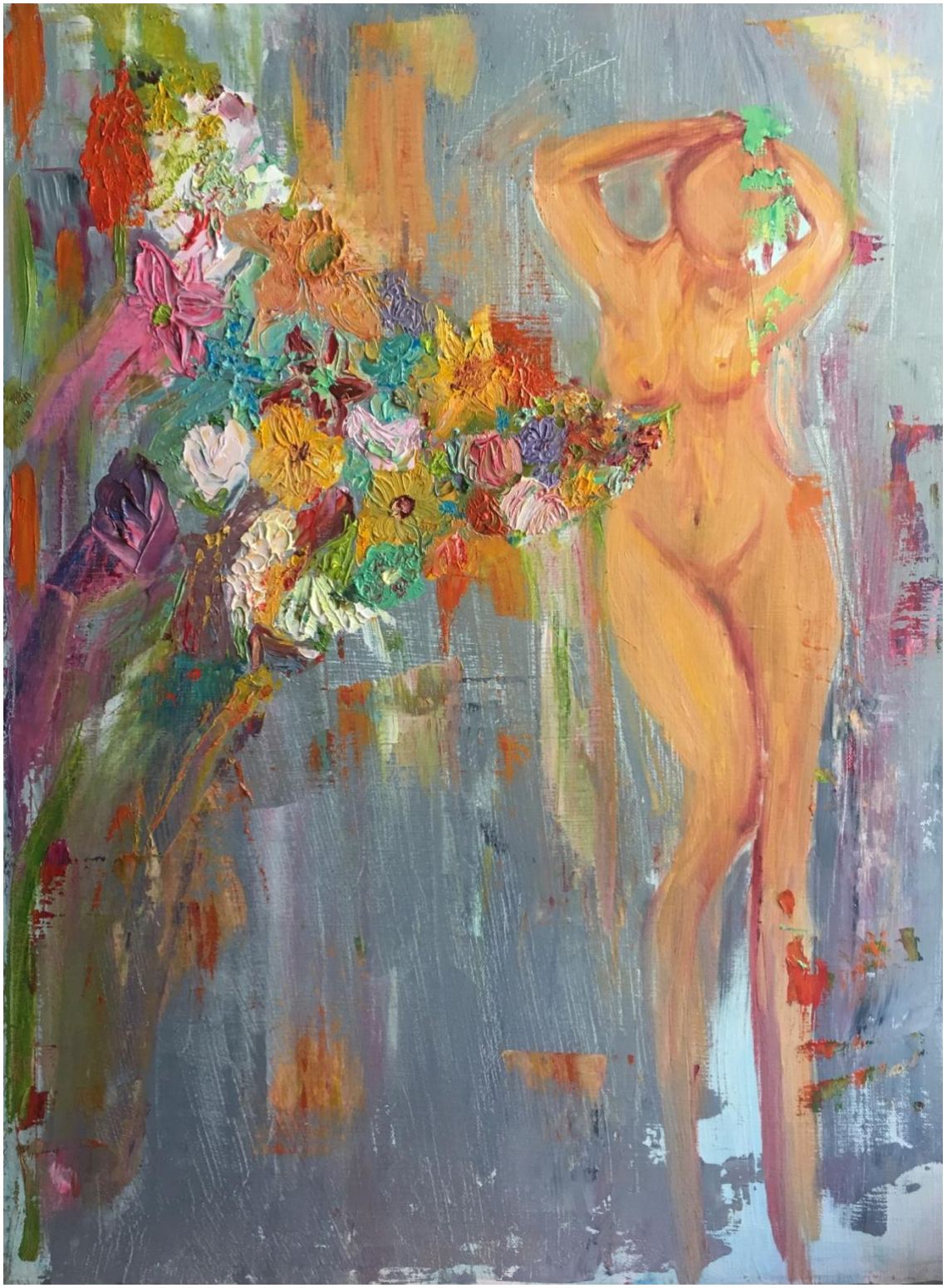
We suggested before that at least a small part of a child's development is "up to" the child and that the proportion of causal responsibility he shares relative to his parents and other factors increases as he matures. This framing gives us the chance to consider, if only in thought, a kind of social science experiment. What makes the difference between two people whose external factors are all the same but who turn out very differently? Of course, we cannot control for sameness of upbringing with true scientific precision—circumstances will necessarily differ, even for children raised in the same household. But for the sake of this thought experiment, let's say we know that the parents, environment, and all other external causes were all the same for two children. One becomes prodigal in adulthood, the other liberal. What accounts for the difference? If we understand "of such a nature" as the inherent qualities infused *by* nature, then it seems clear that different inputs through the same process will yield different results. The parents in this scenario should seek to identify these inherent qualities early on and tailor each child's upbringing accordingly. But if, having controlled for all external factors of childhood, we understand "of such a nature" to mean initial conditioning, we're left with *how each child, respectively, responds to his conditions and how he turns or conducts himself in action, to the extent he is able*. Suppose the two children were brought up in poverty. At some point early in life, the prodigal child may have responded to a one-time excess of money by spending it wildly for fear of losing it, aware of the pain of not having it, while the liberal child responded to the same circumstances by spending some and saving the rest. The power of habit then gradually took hold and cemented the quality of prodigality in the one, liberality in the other. Now, as adults, it is effectively outside of their power to be otherwise.

Whichever case may be true, the thought experiment reveals what it might look like for voluntary action in childhood to contribute to one's second nature, and ultimately to one's characteristics, even though habituation from childhood as a whole is a mixed bag of factors.

A definitive framework for determining the exact proportion of causal responsibility a child shares in determining his own character at each stage of his childhood remains elusive. Does the two-year-old who accounts for, say, 15% of the causal control over his action in the face of a particular fear play a decisive role in determining his character (if such a thing is quantifiable at all)? At what point does he become aware of habit's power, and how does this knowledge affect his future actions? To what extent should he be praised or blamed later in life for being courageous or otherwise? I do not think it is possible in this inquiry, or from the text of Aristotle alone, to answer these questions precisely. Yet their answers may indeed make "the whole difference" in how we conceive of justice and arrange our laws, how we relate to one another, and how we understand ourselves.

Marley Crank



On the GI and Online Seminars

Winston Elliott

What if we were to examine screen shots of my Graduate Institute online sessions (Summer and Fall 2020) and put an X through the faces of those who would not have attended if Annapolis residency was required? Many faces would disappear and their lives, and St. John's College, would be the poorer for the loss. In person conversation is wonderful for people who live in the area. Or for those who can take summers (or Fall/Spring) off from jobs, and families, and move to Annapolis. Shouldn't we continue to reach out to those who would love, and benefit from, the GI but aren't retired, childless, or have summers off? Is it reasonable to let the occasionally nearly perfect (in person) be the enemy of the often excellent (Zoom)? Sadly, there are several new Johnnies who, having begun the GI online, will not be able to continue if relocation to Annapolis is the only option.

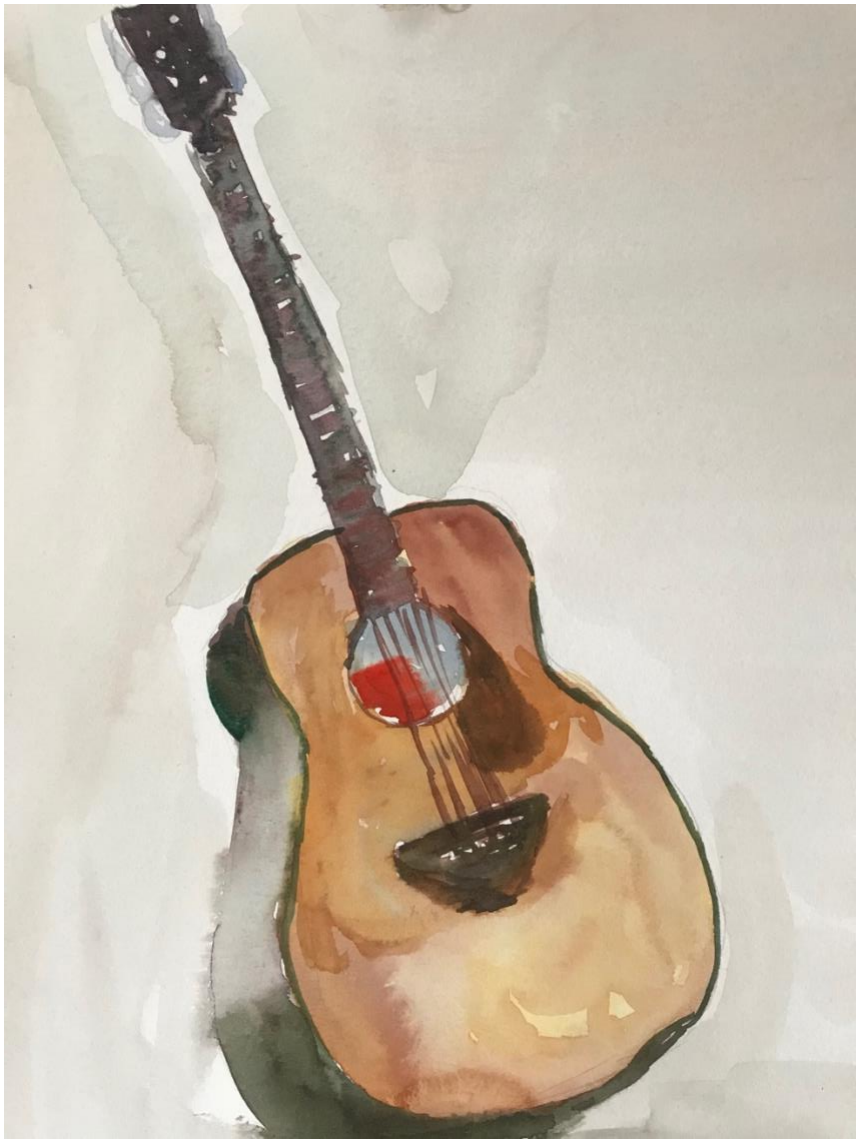
It seems the College benefits tremendously from broadening the reach of the GI and expanding the beneficiaries of the St. John's Program. Would it not be magnanimous to make the GI available beyond Annapolis area residents, teachers, and retired people? Many prospective GI students cannot afford to pay for classes *and* move for the four summers (or one year). The online GI option makes the GI possible even for those who take care of elderly parents, or special needs children, for whom relocation is impossible. I hope members of the St. John's community see that those who cannot come to Annapolis still may partake of the treasure that is St. John's. I think it would a great loss to deny prospective GI students a St. John's College experience only because they cannot move to Annapolis. After all, the books, the people, and the conversation are the heart of the St. John's College Graduate Institute and all are present in person *and* via Zoom.

In my Seminar, Tutorial, and Preceptorial this fall I see that Zoom brings advantages (hearing participants well, seeing our faces regardless of where we sit!) and some disadvantages (mute buttons, while necessary, reduce spontaneity and shared laughter, no informal time together before/after seminar discussion). It helps me to keep in mind that during my last three decades of seminar participation (regardless of whether participants were teachers, undergrad/grad students, or academics) any particular conversation may be too slow or too fast, a bit flat or too explosive, too singular in focus or too often skimming along the obvious. I have seen that requesting our colleagues to explain their thoughts may slow the pace so that we may enjoy contemplating the questions deeply. Instant answers are seldom the richest.

My *Odyssey* preceptorial has been a tremendous gift that transcends technology, speed, and distance. We often bring the joy of our days, or the anxieties of COVID-tide, with us each Thursday. However, we may *always* bring the overwhelming joy which is the beauty, adventure, and deeply powerful humanity of Homer's *Odyssey*. Even when life conspires to wound any particular shared conversation, I endeavor to remember that the *Odyssey* is a gift beyond measure. Occasionally, when we are doubting the progression of any particular discussion, we are refreshed by rereading some favorites parts of the poem aloud. The poem is variably enchanting, fantastical, sad, joyful, violent, and full of loving tears. Often it is easy to ignore the shimmering surface while we submariners plow through the subtle complexities of the subtext of the poem. Simply, it is lovely, and loveliness is always worth savoring.

As long as we are grounded in the text, polite, and present there is always the potential for great good to come about. Although that potential is occasionally left unfulfilled. Seminar may be messy, unpredictable, exhilarating, exasperating, enlightening and occasionally transformative. It may be what we humans are: dull, thrilling, entrancing, boring.

My wife and I have participated in many seminars over the past three decades. Fortuitously, twenty-four years ago we met in a seminar discussing American political novels. Barbara and I were especially pleased to join the Annapolis GI in summer 2017. I am happy to share that my experiences with the online GI this past summer, and this semester, have been excellent. In fact, the online conversations have most often equaled, and occasionally surpassed, those we had in person in Annapolis in the summer of 2017. I am proud to be a Johnnie and grateful to be a member of the St. John's community.



Neha Gaddam

Two Poems

Louis Petrich

At Wrist's End

Come round, I'll wave away,
my kindly hand, of course,
as you pass by. What more?

If *in* you want a look,
think this: to book with me,
from safe, part company.

Unopened am unlet
they'll soon forget to miss.
End good enough— at wrist?

Tanned and Tided Over
(A 2020 Conversation)

Me— on this world— have you— like sure—
if thought can have unreal turn real.

I can no longer live by thinking—
'tis purely by these manly words
Orlando sure turns Rosalind woman,

who liked as Ganymede, *ifs* love
to school of clock or cuckoldry.

The virus taught, worst *ifs* have virtues:
like wilderness of quailing numbers
on diet ontological
has pillared fire obedient raw.

Yet lunge they for Egyptian dishes!—
dark touches— there's the taste beats Law!

We tried to lap up milk, *sans* tongues—
say, what's the sum of mounting credits?

sapped soul adrift
as clouds from seas.

To stead, fill clefts and plaster walls,
new paint them splashing, careless care,
for nesting's pulled loose knots of carpet—

house bunny piles them, besting beds—
so marries cornered jets of instinct.

Our paradox: though tripping far
by instinct, still by caution benched.

'Tis hard, thought honest: sparks by night
need lying room for air to stage 'em.

I smoke, while homing lost o'er roofs;
you pray, to pose this wildness caged.

What proof of plot, as looks rebook?

the exodus,
plague started, goes.

I sought, years back, distraction's lease
from beauty's case load--found others by
to slant, diversify my peering
and footing, threads and colors,

O—
Achilles knew to get out when,
and when to put his all back in!

It cost him, lacked. Dishonor me,
and out I go, back in.

This needs
but taking being took, dark tactics.

Don't we prefer deep stirring black
to weakly tanned, weeks tided over?

Unsheathe your arrows, shoot home come
and cream the throng, so sweet to die!

God chums what's wrong:
wring longing's turns!—

spite topsoil masked as bottom stern,
assign to plight of leaves kite words—

than rather list this versing hand
to con complicit, bodied off,
and prop kind-faced old beaten cause.

For living contact— fated yearning!—
teach clay to risk its perfect cleaving,

or Pilate hands will bleach haled roughs
and gut the shells for shored defection.

The soul intact ne'er breaches thus,
but breathes blood buoyant seas, earth-welling!

Pan-safe, safe-swelling,
hearts go bust.

A Letter to St. John's: On Creating a More Inclusive Learning Environment

Hayley River Smith

As my time comes to an end, I would like to reflect on what the St. John's College's Graduate Institute has given me. I considered St. John's because throughout my education I have felt within me a drive to think deeply and examine the world around me. So when the question of what I would critique about my education thus far was asked in the Graduate Institute's essay application I knew instantly what I would say:

I love the community I am a part of and I share many of the same values as my peers, but the lack of diversity of ideas can constrain, rather than build. It is not because other views do not exist here but because they are often silenced. That would be the main critique of my education hitherto. People are unwilling to converse when someone's views go against their own. I want my peers to talk to me about information I have not heard before. I want my tutors to ask me questions that I do not have an answer to. But when we all believe the same things there is no room for transformation. We cannot circle back because we are not moving at all. The examining and reexamining of concepts is a part of how we come to understand them thoroughly. We stay the same and we do not do justice to our own identity.

St. John's was the answer to that in many ways. I am leaving with an abundance of knowledge that I otherwise would not have at this moment, a familiarity with texts that take me beyond the reaches of my undergraduate experience, and a better understanding of my own education. The reality is I wouldn't change my personal experience within the program because it has brought me to a point of realization that I can no longer sit silently and allow for someone else to do the same. There is a need to reevaluate the true purpose of the Graduate Institute and if that goal is being achieved within the classroom; that may be considered in terms of the discussion itself, representation, the feedback given, and the needs of each student.

During my first semester in the graduate program, I felt stupid and in certain moments I truly believed it. I often find myself listening and processing for a bit before I speak, but quickly I found that even though some say listening is enough it is not the case for everyone. So, I adjusted, as we must in new environments, and began to ease myself into the conversation, and I rarely found my ideas getting traction. In an environment that encourages extemporaneous speaking, occasionally ideas can fall flat, but I found some of my classmates glazed over my words as if they were but a whisper. And again, I found myself falling silent. It's not to say I interacted with the text less than anyone else, but it became more solitary in certain ways. I'd still have moments of excitement about a text or idea and while feeling completely enveloped by it found myself speaking from a place of passion and maybe clarity. I felt that about the poem "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," by William Carlos Williams, which we read for a Preceptorial class on American Poetry. You see, we were talking about the way in which he is expressing love to his wife and it lit a little fire in me. I found the way he spoke about himself, his affairs, death, and loving her frustrating. I questioned if his words were genuine or his love was true, and as the conversation progressed, I became quite sure of a sort of selfishness lying between the lines. It didn't feel too much like love to me, at least not a kind I would want. Some agreed and others didn't, but one response still sticks with me. A man at least twice my senior laughs under his breath and says, "what would you know about love." I pretended like I didn't hear his words.

Nevertheless, we moved on with the conversation and that was that. The issue here for me lies in the fact that his comment was not only patronizing but also irrelevant. Naturally, many people in the class brought up their own personal relationships in order to grapple with this poem. Why did his perception of my life experience thus far need to act as a mark against me, making my comments less legitimate or important than his? This has not been the most upsetting or only occasion this kind of behavior has been upheld and through conversations with my peers, I realize it is not an isolated issue. The toleration of comments like these points to the symptom of a greater problem and our inaction will only continue to allow for it to grow.

I began to see again that my silence did not go unnoticed as I would enter into meetings with my tutors halfway through the semester, "we would love to hear you speak more" they said. Like clockwork, I would nod, try, and then feel exhausted once more. Most of the time I could get my ideas across through my essays and oral exams which I grew to love and look forward to, but it wasn't always enough. Aware of it or not, each of us is perpetuating a problem at this college about the determination of who is heard. I did. Not in every moment but in many, I made a choice to say nothing because it was easier than feeling discouraged, unheard, or misunderstood. It has been in my last two semesters at the college that I have felt especially frustrated as I continued to wrestle with this feeling. Through conversation with peers that I trust I have realized the deep-seated issue that exists among us whether we can acknowledge it or not and I worry that the online classes as they are at this moment allow for this potential inequity to fester and grow.

In my classes over Zoom, I have personally felt a rise in comments tinged with privilege and a lack of self-awareness. Maybe the distance that online learning allows, while essential, is also a part of the problem. Something that ties us together in the classroom is our common humanity. However, at this moment, we are not sitting arm in arm, instead, we stare at each other in little boxes on the screen. It is during these times I have felt most constrained in whose voice is valued or simply listened to. I have watched as some of my classmates try to pick apart my words as if they don't make sense even though they barely listened to what I said in the first place. Then, others speak about things so far outside of the text that it becomes undoubtedly unproductive while those who couldn't try to conceive of what I was saying nod and engage in this off-topic conversation. We talk about texts, like the founding documents of this country and court cases that for a long time decided who was considered human or who deserved rights and we speak about inequality while we stare at those boxes, of mostly (if not all) white faces. It creates a distance which in turn gives some people more liberty to say things they might not if they had to look in the eyes of their classmates or sit with them and eat a slice of pizza after seminar. It also appears that the voices that speak up against these comments go unheard. We all come to the table with different ideas of the world and that is absolutely valuable but in that, it also seems essential to recognize our own positions and privileges as well. If we cannot do that the community becomes a difficult and disappointing place for those who do not look or think like the loudest or most persistent voice in the room.

Now, I come to this very moment at the end of my time in the program where I am writing to process what I will do with this knowledge I have gathered. So, in the very spirit of the college, I will ask a question: *Is this an equitable environment?* At this moment, my own answer would be no. I don't want to sound as if I am asking for pity or some sort of apology and that is not what I am hoping for. What I would like is a movement towards what I wrote about in my application because if someone asked me if I would do all of this again, I would say yes. I'm aware that the world is filled with moments similar to this one. I know that many voices don't even have the opportunity to make

it into these conversations. I am also sure that not every mind feels free. The way in which the program cognizes the depth of student knowledge, the validity of each student's voice, and the intention behind some comments made within the classroom demands acknowledgment and must be examined further. I believe that the perpetuation of this classroom culture, both through action and inaction, ultimately hinders the overall mission of the college and its philosophy. I know if I left without speaking up, I would regret a part of my time here and I don't want to wish any of this away.

I will end this letter with a few considerations for our community moving forward: How do we create an environment where the students listen fully and deeply to their peers? What responsibility do not only tutors, but students have in regulating one another? How can we empower students to recognize what comments are not helpful or even harmful? How can we create an environment that is receptive to constructive criticism? Are we given the resources and space to recognize inequity within the classroom?

Ultimately, I think if we allow for this to continue without true consideration and change the program will lose touch with itself completely. It will no longer serve a purpose to many individuals who want to be a part of it but can't because the feelings that deter them, while absolutely real, go unnoticed and unchanged.

Jaime Marquez

Two Poems

Alexander Andreosatos

K .Ø.

He kept no sleep for me in Brooklyn. I wrapped the whole night
around my shoulders, like it was fox fur—red, black, and white.

A kind of heaven had come over us—something sure, but with awful eyes,
and we were bent by the entrance of it, as wind bends a skirt,

and knees bend to dirt, and I could hear the city bark at the intrusion——

I tossed my head in widening circles, my neck on the soft animal,
and kept him close to the chest—my precious forest—and, after all,

it was his dark hair, his stark thoughts, long, and sometimes cut,
that I desired so much as to be forthwith for the first time in my life,

and nothing is as beautiful as when the gloves come off——

I'd never seen such a proud moon before. He shed on the city his equal figure,
and crouched on the steps of his apartment, smoking and listening to the dogs.

He kept the whole night wrapped around his shoulders, feeling empty like fire must——

PRECIOUS

Precious, mint, and honest sweet things, sweet ones, overrun.
O how it is— they go by in the hard field.

I've always wanted a brother. A kind of twin. He would know how it is.
I know he's there. Gone like a dolphin. Tissue paper sky——

Mint overcomes the wallflower. Being sensitive and shy
is the family business, so I've studied the phenomenon closely.

I wonder how much of it is just wanting to be picked.
The sweet-story mint. It overgrows the head——

All shades under green to nurse the wound.
O how easy it is to recreate— it goes by in the hard field with a wish.

I miss him. My brother, the buried firework. He harbored colossal emotions.
I know he's still there. Paper beats rock. He's underneath everything——

We drive out to Belfast in old sun. Two kinds of firsts in the front seats.
I want the battle dug up and winged. Black fern growls on the shoulder.

First thing we see is a mother. A too-kind darkness. Piano-feet sky.
We kid ourselves. O how it is— she goes by in the hard field——

A Toast to the Tutors, Spring 2020

Sam Hage

During the quarantine I've heard a lot of people ask, "What are you doing to keep busy?" This question strikes me as both appropriate and tragic.

It's appropriate because "keeping busy" is a tactic employed during all kinds of hardship—layoffs, breakups, the loss of a loved one. And this virus, no doubt, presents many real hardships.

And yet "keeping busy" is not a strategy employed only by the bereaved— if anything, it has become our country's dominant attitude toward life. "Keeping busy" is no longer just a means of escaping the extraordinary pain of unusual tragedies, but instead a constant refuge from existential dread and the terrors of inner life. The frenetic activity we rely on simply to fill up our lives keeps us from encountering life's contemplative moments with pleasure and curiosity. We distract ourselves from thinking about what life really *is*.

St. John's has shown a lucky few of us an alternative.

Reading *The Stranger* last month, I was struck by the parallels to our own situation in Camus' stunning depiction of humanity. The book is subtler and less obviously relevant than the more conspicuous quarantine choice, *The Plague*, but there is at least one feature I find particularly germane.

Camus' protagonist spends a great deal of the book's final section in solitary confinement awaiting his trial, and perhaps even his execution. We read many pages of his reflections.

At first Meursault misses his work, his friends, and his routines, finding it difficult to pass the time in isolation. But he quickly adjusts to the new reality, learning how to live with only his thoughts and the changing color of the sky. Exploring the simple memory of the objects in his bedroom over and over in greater and greater detail, he muses that a man who had lived a single day in the world could easily endure 100 years of solitary contemplation. He realizes that his supremely unexceptional life really contained the most sublime joys in its most ordinary moments.

Meursault learns this in isolation. St. John's teaches us the same thing among friends.

The pressures of solitude and austerity are less explicit for us right now than they were for Meursault, but I find myself thinking about them anyway. Most of the time, it's easy for us to avoid looking at the question of what life is very closely; to assemble all the different pieces—work, school, hobbies, family time, socializing—and assume that life is more or less the sum of its parts. By disrupting these routines, the virus shows us that life is something else. It compels us to reflect carefully on what life is all about; a St. John's education gives us the tools to do so. Rather than desperately filling up any quiet lacunae with diversions, we can look directly at the space itself. We might even come to realize that this space above all is what life really is.

Before St. John's I read lots of books like *The Stranger*, and even a few of the books on our program. But I never had thoughts like these. The books alone are not enough to teach us about life, let alone about the good life. We need each other, and most of all we need our tutors. Our tutors teach about what is good in life, but they also do something a book never could: they model the good life for us.

Last Spring, I met my seminar tutor outside a Friday night lecture and asked if he planned to stay for the Q&A period. He told me no, since he had to go read freshman essays. I said something like, "Gosh, on a Friday night—being a tutor seems like a lot of work." He smiled and said, "Not really—I love every minute of it."

His sentiment ought to be an aspiration for us all: not merely to fill up our lives, but to find a way to live life such that we love every minute. To embrace life rather than simply keep ourselves occupied until it's over. By merely staying busy under normal circumstances we shirk that greatest of duties to live an examined life. Doing so while quarantined, we risk giving up a greater than usual opportunity for introspection.

Only by taking a close and sustained look at what life really is can we actually live it. To do so took Meursault solitary confinement and the guillotine. For me all it took was St. John's.

This is what our tutors offer us: the ability to live, because we now know how to think.

To the tutors of St. John's College.

Rise Up and Come Away: An Ode for the Marriage of Friends

Ryan Shinkel

My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; The time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. —Song of Songs 2:10-13

For ten years men fought at Troy for Her face.
A thousand ships had set sail, to what end?
For power, riches, wisdom, and strength, placed
With honor, glory, and blessing to fend
Against Trojans? Greeks warred to destroy Troy.
Another motive these ancient heroes,
Who gave so much, must have had, to have fought.
Yet what more reason is needed, with joy
In Love: he who can endure any blows
Knows flame reasons enough for what hearts wrought.

One Achaean knew there was one more war
He had to wage, the fight to return home.
Ten years at Troy, ten years wandering for
A way back to take back Ithaca. He roamed,
Odysseus, named at birth, Son of Pain.
For his wife, Penelope, he withstood
Barbarians, Lotus Eaters, the Cyclops, Man
Eating Giants, Witches, Sirens, Storming Rain,
Sea Monsters. Even Immortal Life offered
With Calypso he swapped for her and swam.

Immortality he exchanged to die.
Naked, helpless, he begged kind Nausicaa.
He wished her in supplication this blessing:
For spouse, house, and lasting harmony, a
Gift no finer or greater to be unfurled
When man and woman possess their home, one
Of a marriage with true souls, two minds, and
Two hearts thinking and beating their own world.
Despair to enemies, joy to friends, done
like two souls merged into one flesh, they stand.

The lovers who last must befriend truly, or
So the poets report of marital bliss.
That covenant like two wings or two oars
Roves the waves to our true home to the kiss
Of the Lamb and his bride, a cosmic feast
Which beckons our lifelong odysseys.
One bird with two oars, one boat with two wings

Can sail to a celestial city fleeced
With men sacrificing immortality
to gain the everlasting homecoming.

Arise, my love. Let us hear the birds together.

Neha Gaddam

Human Space Is Where St. John's Exists

Jordana Rozenman

originally published on Colloquy blog, April 2020

I've been, as we all have, on a cycle of heartbreak and of deep gratitude and hope the past few weeks, generally as we began to move into whatever this time period is, and then very specifically as news came from St. John's.

Because these feelings were solidified by St. John's, there is a lot to say about the school. There already was a lot to say, as I am moving toward the end of my last semester in the GI, frequently thinking about what it has given me, what has come from it expectedly and unexpectedly, how the program and the people have come to mean what they have come to mean. In this legitimately unimaginable development, there are now even more things I can say about St. John's. St. John's is a small focus in the midst of a truly gigantic crisis, a small personal thing in a global event that is not about us, but to be sad and to be grateful I suppose is important at any time.

To be told, four semesters in, and seven years into imagining attending, that you cannot return to the St. John's campus after spring break to finish your time there in person is a punch to the gut. How can it mean so much, some of you first semester GIs might even be asking (and I perhaps would even have asked during my first semester here)? How much proverbial Kool-Aid have I drunk? As it turns out, I am so happy to report, the answer is none. No Kool-Aid at all. The marvel is (and this does not come through rose-colored glasses–how exactly did I end up in TWO semesters about sixteenth-century French writers?! I DO NOT LIKE THEM) …the marvel is that St. John's exists as one of what must be a very, very few places that does what it says it is doing. No Kool-Aid needed. It might not do it immediately. It surely won't do it in the way you are expecting. It might take three or four semesters for you to even see it happening. Because the texts work very slowly. But beyond that, the people working with you on the texts–students and tutors–require time together for the program to happen.

To use the term "heartbreaking" for not being allowed to finish St. John's at St. John's might seem hyperbolic. But it is testament to the power of finding people who are about what they say they are about. A major, perhaps the main, reason that works is that the program is not, and cannot be, online. There is a reason that there are a disproportionate number of GIs who come to read and discuss the great books and who have flip phones, not iPhones. There is a reason we are specifically asked not to use digital versions of the text in class, but to use hard copies. Of books. This is probably one of the most important foresights in the program. It is only in small part about what (deep) benefits that kind of reading will have for the reader, and in much larger part about what kind of reader such a caveat will bring to campus. The intention of the community is to be found in people who want, and need, to gather around a text, in at least equal part as it is to be found in the texts themselves. I suppose I am talking about form and content. The content can be made available anywhere. The form is found only at St. John's. If the form disappears, the entire meaning of the program is lost. To my mind the need to explain any of that doesn't exist, because everyone who has ever been or will ever want to be a Johnnie, or who has been a tutor, understands this. It is why Pano was able to say at my Convocation that this is not a community,

but a polity (and the undergrads went wild with enthusiasm at this). The particular idea of this polity can only live in classes and a campus that exists in real, not virtual, space.

In case all this makes it sound like St. John's GI is actually not a "real place," or is an escape from the real world, a four-semester-long respite from what is actually happening out there in the digital age to which you will have to return when you finish, let me be clear about just a few other points. St. John's is perhaps one of the realest foundations for being in the real world that I've found. It is the opposite of an escape. It is a stepping stone. Nothing has made this clearer to me than the pandemic. In a program that is so short and so special to begin with, I was not surprised to speak with more than a few people who shed some tears about losing everything that it meant to them in the home stretch. But in the weeks that followed the closure of SJC and the closure of everything in the world, and the abrupt cutoff from a million things we love, I could not stop hearing in my head the words of a wise tutor last semester as we discussed a character who couldn't get something he wanted: "Good practice for death!" (A very Johnnie response to a minor problem.) I had laughed when he said it, because he did not mean it gloomily. He meant only, take a breath. Let go when necessary. Be graceful. We do not have control over when our most beloved things (people, experiences, lives) are taken from us. So–good practice.

I thought also of Odysseus. (I'm not sure there will ever be a time post-SJC when I *don't* think of Odysseus.) And I thought of the class when we discussed Odysseus' long, long-awaited return to Ithaca. After 20 years, he is asleep when it finally happens. What can possibly be the meaning of his being denied the poignancy of seeing his home, his awareness of reaching it, as he sails into it after 20 years of imagining it? It seemed a cruelty to me. Our tutor suggested that the moments we think we are waiting for, the moments we anticipate and that take on utter importance in our imaginations, are perhaps not the important ones, as real life unfolds, at all. The parts of the future that we cannot possibly anticipate sometimes offer the realest moments, if we are open to them.

I think of these as only two of the times that what has come out of St. John's has been grounding for me, in a way that is the opposite of coddling. It is not an exaggeration to say that I feel better off in a pandemic having had St. John's than I would without it. I am so grateful for it, to have something I feel so sad about losing the end of. We have adjusted pretty quickly to the flimsy, flimsy substitution for classes in this emergency. But we are missing deeply, even grieving, everything real and organic that grows, during the classes ("facing with each other the questions of the text in front of us," as one classmate put it), in between the classes, outside of them, through the people surrounding the texts. Such a polity does not happen often. I do not want to oversell St. John's. It is not nearly perfect. But it is real, which is better. It is for the real world, and everything that St. John's is capable of accomplishing is only so because of the fullness of the program as it exists. I am so excited about the stepping stone it has provided me, and the other stepping stones it will provide me that I can't even see yet. It doesn't stop, I don't think.

The Soul with Good Sense Guides Correctly

Sam Hage

"The natural road is from what is more familiar and clearer to us to what is clearer and better known by nature; for it is not the same things that are well known to us and well known simply."
Aristotle, *Physics* 184a19

Doubtless every reader of the *Meno* has at some point asked the same question: What is a geometrical demonstration doing in the middle of a dialogue about virtue? The introduction of this lesson is abrupt, and the supposed teaching about "recollection" is difficult to take at face value. Now, it isn't hard to see how a certain specific type of mathematical learning might help us understand, in general, the process of coming to know, and to feel confident in the truth of, a proposition that was previously opaque; but it is substantially more difficult to understand how this type of learning fits into the conversation about virtue in particular, and especially its teachability. Part of the trouble, I think, stems from a confusion about where exactly in the encounter with the slave recollection is supposedly taking place, and indeed about the status of recollection as opposed to teaching in the first place. This latter difficulty leads to two further questions: Why does Socrates insist, as a partial answer to the question of whether virtue is teachable, that *nothing* is teachable? And then, having done so, why does he collapse the distinction between teaching and recollection shortly thereafter? His coy reversion at 87c makes me think there is something in the nature of recollection that may be important for the reader to bear in mind even at points in the dialogue where Meno himself has obediently yielded to Socrates' equivocation. I would like to look closely at the geometry lesson in order to better understand the type of learning that is being described. But first, some context may be helpful.

The Good Things

At 77b, well before Socrates brings the slave into their discussion, Meno attempts to identify virtue for a third time, offering the following definition: "for one who desires the noble things to be capable of providing them for himself."[1] Unlike the previous two attempts, Socrates doesn't immediately counter the argument or point out the ways in which Meno hasn't truly answered the question. Instead he turns to a single point of clarification around what it really means to "desire the noble things." Socrates first asks Meno to affirm that not everyone desires good things—some, Meno wants to say, actually "desire the bad things" (77c). But from this, of course, arises the question of whether he who desires these things does so "in the belief that the bad things benefit him…or knowing that the bad things harm him" (77d). It quickly emerges that everyone who desires bad things does so in the mistaken belief that the bad things are the good things—that is, out of ignorance—and so everyone, in a sense, really desires the good things for himself (77e–78b). It is indeed difficult, knowing what it means to "desire" something, even to imagine Meno's paradoxical

[1] Plato. *"Protagoras" and "Meno"*. Translated by Robert C. Bartlett, Cornell University Press, 2004.

alternative, that some people actually desire to be "wretched". But Meno is clearly onto something important: Most people, while desiring good things in the most general sense, in fact end up pursuing at the very least a mix of good and bad things, and often bad things simply. From here Socrates goes in a surprising direction. Having collapsed Meno's twofold definition, "to want the good things and to be capable," into the single criterion, "being capable" (78b), Socrates does not ask what to me would be the obvious next question: What is it that allows some people to correctly recognize the good things, while others are mistaken about the objects of their desires? Could such a faculty be the very virtue we've been seeking? I can guess why Socrates does not suggest this. These mistakes were identified at 77e as coming from ignorance; wouldn't the opposite, then, have to be a form of knowledge? Since he never refuted Meno's claim that virtue has something to do with pursuing the good things, Socrates is perilously close at this moment to admitting that virtue is essentially knowledge. Were he to make such an admission this early in the conversation, Meno would, no doubt, jump immediately to the conclusion that virtue is teachable—and indeed that the teachers of virtue are the men he has been going to for his lessons. Socrates still has other things to show him.

Instead of investigating the faculty that might allow one to distinguish from among health, wealth, honors, offices, and "things other than those of that sort" (78c) which ones might be the "good things," Socrates misdirects Meno in a way that seems intended to result in perplexity. He accepts Meno's assertion that the things popularly held to be goods are in fact goods, and then introduces the nakedly circular argument that getting these things for oneself can be done both virtuously and viciously, and is only virtuous when undertaken with "justice or moderation or piety, or some other part of virtue" (78e). He then chastises Meno for relying on virtue in his definition of virtue, as though it hadn't been his own idea to twist Meno's argument that way in the first place! Meno's definition seems internally consistent so long as we inquire further about the all-important ability to identify the good things. Instead, Socrates has chosen a line of questioning that makes the definition appear contradictory. But there's a certain beauty in Socrates' strategy—if virtue depends on a knowledge of what the good things are, and vice stems from an ignorance thereof, then surely a knowledge of one's own ignorance would be preferable to a mistaken belief in one's knowledge. Meno certainly is ignorant of some things, and by 80a Socrates has at least gotten him to admit his ignorance, even if he has done so rather duplicitously. The confusion also elicits a docility from his interlocutor that allows Socrates to direct the conversation in a way Meno had stubbornly resisted before.

By Zeus, Socrates, For My Part I Don't Know

I will put off looking at the specifics of Socrates' mathematical example for a moment longer, turning first to the description of recollection that comes right *after* his exchange with the slave. At 85c Socrates proposes, based on what has just been demonstrated, that even in someone who doesn't have knowledge, "there are present true opinions about those things that he doesn't know." Recollection, it seems, is the process by which such a man, through questioning alone, may

come to possess knowledge, "he himself recovering the knowledge from within himself" (85d). Armed with this working definition of recollection, we may confidently return to the beginning of the geometry problem and follow Socrates' exhortation at 82b to pay attention to whether the slave is "recollecting or learning from me."

Socrates beings with a series of four opening questions, none of which strike me yet as aiding directly in the process of recollection. They all pertain merely to the knowledge of what it means for a figure to be square and to the possibility for the image of a geometrical figure to represent a conceptual object of arbitrary size (82c–d). The next set of questions serves a similar purpose, this time testing the slave's knowledge of arithmetic, which, though he stumbles a little at first, is sufficient for Socrates' purposes. So far none of these questions seems to involve either teaching or recollection. Everything up to about 82e is of the same character as Socrates' first question at 82b: "does he speak Greek?" They constitute a few epistemological prerequisites for conducting the real investigation that follows. Those out of the way, the process of recollection begins in earnest, I think, with the slave's first incorrect answer to the question of creating a square with double the area of the original—that the lengths of the sides, too, would be doubled (82e). This is one of the opinions the slave already possessed; one that perhaps seemed so obvious to him that he thought it was his only opinion on the matter. Now we see the questioning at work that Socrates later identifies as crucial to the process of recollection. By drawing on two things the slave does "know"—arithmetic and the size of the original square—Socrates creates a sort of syllogistic middle term in the argument, showing conclusively in 83a–c that the supposedly doubled square actually contains four of the original square, making it not twice, but four times as large. This first opinion having been dispelled, the slave realizes he has another: that since the doubled square is (in a sense) halfway between the original and the quadrupled squares, so too must its side lengths be halfway between two and four. Socrates uses an abbreviated form of the earlier argument to disprove this opinion as well, relying this time on the simple arithmetical fact that three times three is nine, not eight (83e).

The dispelling of the slave's incorrect opinions is illuminating, but the real point of interest as regards recollection comes from the realization of the *correct* answer. Just before 84d Socrates again reassures Meno, "I'm doing nothing other than asking [the slave] questions and am not teaching him." In what follows, I think this ceases to be true, a troubling fact that somewhat muddles the lesson about recollection. After guiding the slave through the entire construction of a new figure, this time of the quadrupled square with a smaller square rotated and inscribed inside it, Socrates asks him to perform a simple calculation to determine that the inner square is indeed double the area of the square they started with. This technique has much more in common with the method Socrates used to *disprove* the previous two opinions, and in the final analysis is not, I think, the best way to demonstrate recollection. He spoon-feeds every step of the argument to the slave, asking him only to verify the final calculation. But the truth being "recollected" might just be uniquely suited to Socrates' kind of learning. The side length they have ended up with has a very important property: being the hypotenuse of the right triangle formed by two sides of the original

square, it is incommensurable to those original sides. Modern algebra tells us that it does have a numerical length, the square root of eight. But this bland description obscures something fundamental about what a number (as opposed to simply a magnitude) is—one that is important to understand if we want to take what Socrates calls recollection seriously. Though convenient in proving the truth of the proposition, the figure, in which we can count triangles and squares for ourselves, actually hinders the consideration of the nature of magnitudes that cannot be described with a number. I can truthfully say of such a magnitude "I know how large that is," but it's hard to meaningfully *tell* you how large it is. I must resort to ratios or to special symbols whose uniqueness renders them almost completely inert.[2] Whole numbers do not work this way. They have the power to communicate meaning by themselves, even in totally unfamiliar contexts, because they represent a number of units that can always be directly compared. Absent such units, then, we might ask: What does it mean to "know" a magnitude?

I think it may be this type of knowledge in particular that Socrates wants to draw attention to in talking about recollection. A more effective demonstration might have come at 84a, had the slave not failed Socrates' injunction to say "what sort of line" would give the required square, which failure prompted Socrates to lead him through the construction of the second figure. Couldn't the slave have indicated at this point that the new side must be somewhere between two and three, and perhaps even that it's quite a bit closer to three than to two? Certainly he knows this to be the case—but *how* does he know it? It wouldn't have been on Socrates' authority, because the precise, authoritative answer comes after the new diagram. It also couldn't have come from the type of arithmetic that has allowed the slave to understand certain parts of the lesson up until now. Even for a student who understands modern trigonometry and irrational numbers, the algebraic calculation hardly grants as pure an understanding as is available if she simply looks at a picture and allows her mind to grasp the manifest truth. To state the case more strongly: Because the new side length is irrational, I cannot constitute it out of discrete units representing the natural numbers. But I can draw the length precisely (to the extent that precision is actually possible in a drawing)—Socrates himself has just done so using his "diameters". At the risk of stating the obvious, there is a part of my mind, then, that simply grasps what this length is, just not in a way I can easily and rationally describe. Teaching as usually understood, no matter how skilled the teacher or how exhaustive the lesson, cannot resolve the fundamental discontinuity between a series of factual statements and logical arguments, on one hand, and the intellect's sudden comprehension of this kind of noetic truth, on the other. The student can be turned in the right direction, shown why initial opinions were incorrect, and perhaps taught certain subsidiary propositions that make use of previous knowledge—but the final act of learning consists in an active apprehension rather than the passive reception of knowledge like a vessel being filled from without. This, I think, is what it means to recollect.

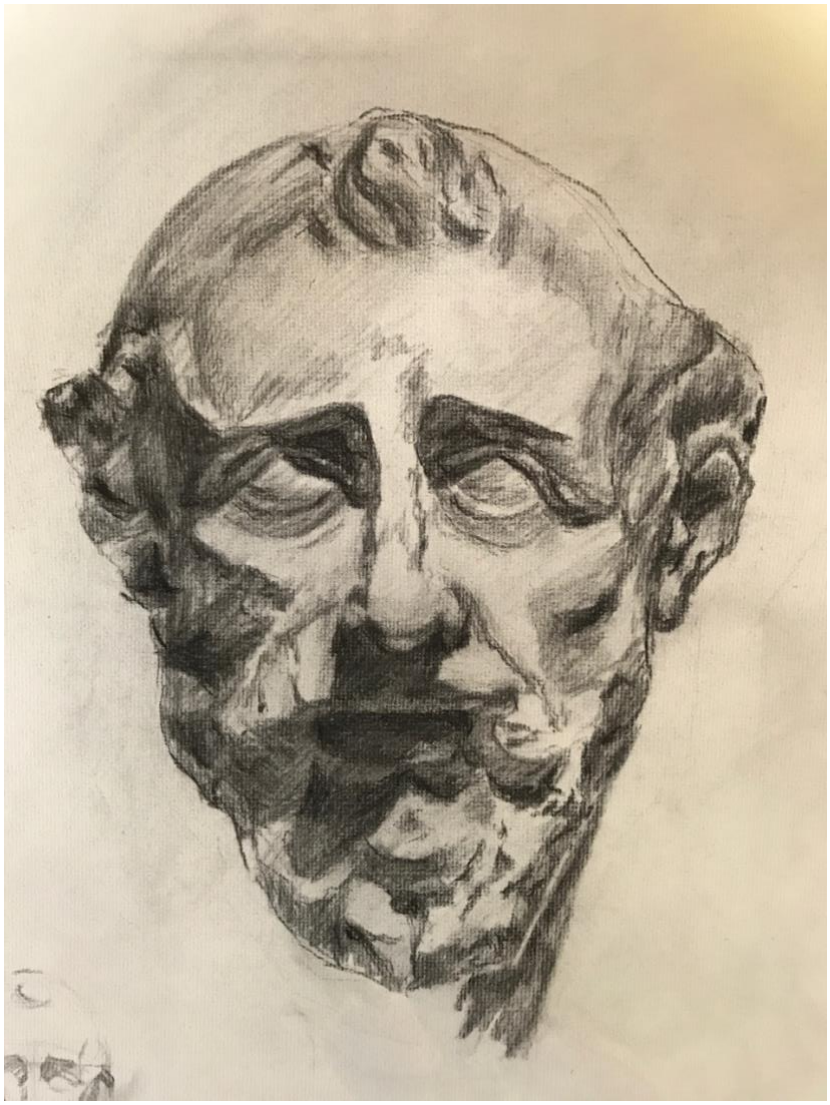
[2] In other words, a symbol like $\sqrt{8}$ or π or e or $\ln(2)$ can have meaningful reference only to itself, or to fractions and multiples of itself. In all cases, knowledge of the original magnitude must come first.

Knowing Virtue

Socrates' application of a kind of rigid syllogistic reasoning throughout the dialogue to questions about virtue's teachability feels at times like a deliberate obfuscation of a clear path through the argument. By insisting on statements like 'if virtue is knowledge, it must be teachable' (87b) and 'if virtue is teachable, there must be teachers of it' (89d) Socrates can disguise certain subtleties he might be omitting behind apparently incontrovertible logical propositions. This leads to what in my mind is clearly a circular argument. Meno wanted to know whether virtue was teachable, in response to which Socrates said that it would then have to be a kind of knowledge. But if virtue were knowledge, there would be teachers of it, which there are not, and so virtue is not knowledge and not teachable. I can easily forgive Meno and Anytus for their frustration. But Plato has provided the careful reader a way out. By allowing the slave to apprehend the truth of the geometrical principle behind the square problem, Socrates has shown that the soul of the learner may be turned toward a certain kind of knowledge, which it can then grasp on its own, merely by contemplating it. The demonstration gives the lie to his sophistical insistence that anything knowable must admit of teaching in the conventional sense. Spending much of the dialogue insinuating that the categories "knowable" and "teachable" are identical, Socrates' lesson with the slave has demonstrated just the opposite; there is a category of abstract truths that may—in fact must—be known without being taught. These things may just be the most knowable of all. What if knowledge of the good, which Socrates and Meno have both identified as being so crucial to virtue, belongs to this category too? Could the recognition that good things are good and harmful things harmful come to the knower in the same way this lofty mathematical abstraction came to the slave?

I'm inclined to believe that this is what Plato is pointing us to. The conjecture at least allows us to make sense of the inclusion of Socrates' geometry lesson in the dialogue, and of the obvious parallels between the categories of knowledge and true opinion in both cases. And as previously noted, it also resolves the apparent stalemate of virtue's being neither teachable nor inherent. The problem with this supposition, possibly a grave one, is that the virtue discussed throughout the dialogue, though simply referred to as such, clearly seems to be a specific kind of practical virtue related to matters of action and governing. Although individual character virtues like moderation and courage are mentioned a handful of times, the examples discussed are overwhelmingly of a practical nature—and Meno's abiding concern throughout the text seems to be with ruling over others. Meno even assents at multiple points to the explicit equation of virtue with *phronēsis*—or at least the assigning of *phronēsis* to a kind of architectonic role, present in the exercise of all virtue—as at 88d, 89e, and 97a. Anyone asserting that the soul can apprehend the principles of right action in the same way it understands the *archē* of mathematics must overcome the objection that mathematical certainty in the practical realm is plainly impossible—and probably nonsensical. And yet it's hard to deny the necessary existence of a faculty of our intellects, common to both cases, that is somehow able to assimilate from among disparate particulars the unified whole that we refer to when we say that we "understand". What does seem clear is that self-rule plays an important role in the development of this faculty, something that Meno utterly fails to grasp. Socrates repeatedly chides him for his inability to rule himself, as at 86d: "you don't even attempt to rule yourself—so

you can be free, I suppose—but attempt to rule me." Meno appears to place self-rule in the middle of a kind of hierarchy, in which absolute freedom from any sort of rule is best, and being ruled is worst. He fails to take note of Socrates' suggestion that self-rule is really a critical first step both in virtue and in ruling others. Why would this be, other than because it is a well-ordered soul that grants a proper orientation in practical matters, allowing one to see the good things and the bad things for what they are? Meno's tyrannical nature and his desire to be taught simple techniques for rhetoric and politics thwart his understanding of Socrates' important teaching: that some things come to be known in a very different way, and that the process of coming to know requires a type of soulcraft he would be unwilling to engage in. He is consumed by a desire to know and to be taught, but it is this desire that prevents him from seeing that the highest things are knowable *without* really being teachable. Meno will never be a virtuous ruler until he understands what it is to be a knower. No teacher can offer him the knowledge he seeks if he does not first look within himself.



Neha Gaddam

Love and Suffering in Joyce's *Ulysses*

Christine Mooradian

"Why should I describe a sorrow which all have felt, and all must feel?"
— Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

The death of a child can bear down hard on a marriage, splitting couples apart and destroying intimacy, as can many of the accidents of life. The death of Rudy, Molly and Bloom's son, at 11 days old created a pain between Molly and Bloom which turned into an alienation that continued 10 years later at the time Joyce provides an account of one day in the lives of several Dubliners, June 16th, 1904. *Ulysses* is a story about the human struggle between the desperate need for intimacy and the constant threat of alienation, a chronic condition of mankind. And not just for Molly and Bloom but perhaps even more so for Stephen Dedalus. While Molly and Bloom struggle with the pain of troubled intimacy, Stephen struggles to establish intimacy in his adult life. Intimacy is one of the most profound of human needs and among the greatest of human goods, a state of being deeply known and deeply knowing. To be known is a mystical or spiritual need. The Psalmist expresses awe at understanding God knew him before he was formed.

> My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in secret, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all my days were written in Your book and ordained for me before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139 NIV)

And the Apostle Paul said, "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Corinthians 13 NIV). While the Biblical concept of intimacy with God will only be complete "then," as Paul says, human intimacy can reach its highest point of expression in the conjugal relationship between a man and a woman, and can also be found in its human completeness between a parent and child.

It seems we swing between the alienation we fear and the intimacy we desire, and that fear and desire compel us forward from the moment we are born. An infant leaves the womb at birth, a place of the most complete intimacy between two humans, sharing the same flow of blood and water, and if fortunate, that infant is drawn into intimacy in his mother's arms, feeding from her body on her life sustaining milk - an intimacy without words, but human desire and fulfillment mutually achieved. An infant who is not held will not thrive, and perhaps an adult who is not held will not thrive either.

This intimacy and alienation as revealed in Ulysses will be explored through the two protagonists, Stephen and Bloom, with the following questions: What do we learn from *Ulysses* about this human struggle between alienation and intimacy? Why do unfortunate circumstances of life tend to drive us apart from the relationships we need the most? What blocks or confuses our attempts at intimacy or destroys established bonds? How do the images of blood, water, and milk

help reveal this struggle? And does *Ulysses* offer any resolution for our characters or any hope for the rest of us?

Stephen and Bloom

Alienation dominates Stephen Dedalus' life as he is cut off from nearly every type of human intimacy – he is cut off from God, from family, from friends, and even from himself. Once on a track to become a Jesuit priest, he has rejected the church and struggles with faith and doubt in the wake of his mother's death. His refusal to grant her dying request, to kneel and pray at her bedside, is a source of recurring torment. He has no friends that he trusts. Mulligan harshly accuses Stephen of killing his own mother. Haines dismisses or is blind to Stephen's artistic gifts, jotting down quotations from Stephen as if they are quips for a greeting card. For whatever reason, he refuses to acknowledge his biological father, and instead of drawing familial warmth from his sister, he fears her needs will drown him. Stephen is intelligent, well-read, sensitive, an artist - but he is paralyzed artistically.

Like Telemachus in *The Odyssey*, Stephen is half boy half man as the book opens. As far as we know, he has not yet truly known the intimate love of a woman and is separated from the love of the mother. "Pain, that was not yet the pain of love, fretted his heart." (1.102) The desire in Stephen for mother-love, an enwombing love, takes on special importance from the start and images of the nurturing mother are repeated. In "Scylla and Charybdis" Stephen states, "*Amor matris*, subjective and objective genitive, may be the only true thing in life." (9.842) The image of mother-love, love that starts our journey in this world, is present in the milk maid and in the milk she brings in "Telemachus." The milkmaid is a mysterious figure that brings the nurturing, praiseworthy milk. "An old woman came forward and stood by Stephen's elbow." (1.389) Her physical proximity to Stephen is important, and her presence is noted by Stephen as she stands close to him.

> He watched her pour into the measure and thence into the jug rich white milk, not hers. Old shrunken paps…Old and secret she had entered from a morning world, maybe a messenger. She praised the goodness of the milk, pouring it out…a messenger from the secret morning. To serve or to upbraid, whether he could not tell: but scorned to beg her favour. (1.397)

The milkmaid is the first of many mystical experiences for Stephen, experiences outside his conscious awareness but experiences that have profound impact on him. Stephen has an odd but sensitive reaction to the milk maid. Why would it cross his mind that the milk is not hers? Of course it is not. But as a mother figure she is providing the nurturing milk that can make men whole, that can heal them. Stephen seems to sense, if only subconsciously, his need to be healed and made whole. Mulligan, surely unaware of the depth of his comment, confirms the power of the milk saying,

> If we could live on good food like that…we wouldn't have the country full of rotten teeth and rotten guts. Living in the bogswamp, eating cheap food and the streets paved with dust, horsedung and consumptives' spits. (1.411)

Stephen is jealous for the affection of this mother figure as he feels she bestows her attention on the unworthy Mulligan. "Stephen listened in scornful silence. She bows her old head to a voice that speaks to her loudly, her bonesetter, her medicineman: Me she slights." (1.418) He scorns the scientist, but he – the artist – is frozen in indecision.

In "Nestor," mother-love again surfaces as a pure and sacrificial love when Stephen helps an awkward, dull student with his lesson. Stephen imagines the boy's mother, "Yet someone had loved him, borne him in her arms and in her heart. …She had loved his weak watery blood drained from her own. Was that then real? The only true thing in life?" (2.140) Stephen, for a moment, takes on the role of mother as he cares for, encourages, and nurtures the student. Stephen sees himself in Cyril Sargent, "Like him was I…Secrets, silent, stony sit in the dark palaces of both our hearts…" (2.170) In this moment with Cyril Sargent, Stephen shows his artistic gift for teaching and his ability for compassion and intimacy, but immediately shrinks back into his shell of despair as the lesson ends.

Stephen's walk home along the Sandymount Strand clarifies his state of alienation from self and others. As he walks on the beach, the half boy half man, Stephen longs for the touch of a woman and imagines the healing touch of a soft hand. Can he bridge the span from the mother-love to the intimate love of a woman? "Touch me. Soft eyes. Soft soft soft hand. I am lonely here. O, touch me soon, now. What is that word known to all men? I am quiet here alone. Sad too. Touch, touch me." (3.434) But alienation from the self is Stephen's deepest struggle expressed in his lack of self-awareness and his self-neglect. While still on the beach longing to be touched, Stephen either masturbates or urinates, or both; the passage is unclear, suggesting Stephen's lack of attention to what he is doing and lack of self-awareness. "Better get this job over quick," he says to himself. (3.456) What job? Stephen is out of tune with his body and with his sexuality. Instead, during the process, whatever process it is, Stephen's mind floods with thoughts of despair,

> …My ashplant will float away…Vehement breath of waters amidst seasnakes…And, spent, its speech ceases…writhing weeds…sway reluctant arms…Lord, they are weary...To no end gathered; vainly then released… (3.454)

Even his body has become a stranger. Care for his physical body is limited as he hasn't eaten in two days though he has money in his pocket, he hasn't bathed since the previous October (17.238), his teeth are rotting, and even his body is foreign to him, "Who chose this face for me? This dogsbody to rid of vermin. It asks me too." (1.136) Although he clearly needs money, he abandons his teaching job and is careless with what little money he has, giving it away or losing it. Stephen hides at times inside a drunken stupor. And like a child without a parent nearby, he is terrified of thunderstorms.

Bloom also struggles with alienation, but differently from Stephen. Since Molly and Bloom's son died 10 years ago, the couple has been unwilling or unable to have sexual relations. This is a long time for a marriage to lie dormant and for two people to live without the embodying of intimacy in conjugal love, which should be at the heart of a healthy marriage. Bloom is obviously

not impotent, but he seems to be with Molly. They share a bed, but Bloom sleeps with his head at Molly's feet. Bloom muses on the liquid nature of human intimacy,

> I was happier then. Or was that I? Or am I now I? Twentyeight I was. She twentythree. When we left Lombard street west something changed. Could never like it again after Rudy. Can't bring back time. Like holding water in your hand. (8.608)

Bloom unsuccessfully attempts to fill the void of intimacy in his life. He carries on a trifling affair by letters with Martha, a woman he has likely never met and has very little fondness for. Bloom has been with prostitutes in Dublin, a slim attempt at intimacy. But he has no real friends, and he misses the son he should have had. He thinks about the intimacy of a father-son relationship that he longs for,

> If little Rudy had lived. See him grow up. Hear his voice in the house. Walking beside Molly in an Eton suit. My son. Me in his eyes. Strange feeling it would be. From me. Just a chance…I could have helped him on in life. I could. Make him independent. Learn German too. (6.75)

However, in spite of Bloom's alienation from other people and the lack of intimacy in his marriage, he maintains a connection with life and with himself that Stephen is unable to do. Bloom displays a hearty appetite for the sensory aspects of life, especially food. He feeds himself well, in fact he has several meals during the day of June 16th, each of which he relishes. He drinks but with moderation. He bathes. Bloom notices all the smells and sounds and beauty around him and finds the world a wonderous place. Bloom, while timid at times, stands up for himself when he is pushed. And Bloom is kind. It takes great strength to be kind, and kindness defines Bloom; he is aware of other people's needs, he remains open to people, and he is willing to risk being wounded for the sake of another - perhaps these are the prerequisites for establishing intimacy.

While Stephen is guarded, cuts himself off from the world and drinks himself into a stupor, Bloom remains vulnerable and sober. "…Mr Bloom, who at all events, was in complete possession of his faculties, never more so, in fact disgustingly sober…" (16.61) Bloom is our hope for redemption from alienation.

Alienation

What draws us away from bonds and intimacy with others? Or renders us unable to establish intimate relationships initially?

Joyce provides a day full of the occurrences of life that pull us away from intimacy with others, which can be summarized in the "Sirens" chapter. Sirens are all things that call us away from life, away from bonds, with false promises of sustenance, with offers of imitation intimacy. Whether the sirens come with intent or are accidental, the influence is the same. Miss Kennedy and Miss Douce, the proprietors of Ormond's Pub, personify the sirens of life. While they are serving customers at the pub, the two are clearly singing, luring, unfaithful sirens, drawing men towards them with no good intentions, just for the joy of leading them low. "…miss Douce's wet lips said,

laughing in the sun…Her wet lips tittered: ---He's killing looking back. She laughed: ---O wept! Arent' men frightful idiots?" (11.72) Breasts that should provide the life giving milk, the kind of milk we see in "Telemachus," instead lure and deceive. The breasts of the barmaids tantalize but disappoint and frustrate.

> Miss Douce reached high to take a flagon, stretching her satin arm, her bust, that all but burst, so high./ O! O! jerked Lenehan, gasping at each stretch. O!/ But easily she seized her prey and led it low in triumph. (11.360)

For Boylan, who stops in Ormond's pub as he is heading to Molly's bed, the barmaid pours a glass of sloe gin, a blood red syrupy liqueur. Again, what should be life sustaining, the blood of the human body or the saving blood of Christ, is poured as an inebriant, confusing men's minds. The "milk" the barmaid pours is a false nurture, a sickeningly sweet lugubrious wine, drunk by an imposter with bewitched vision.

> Boylan, eyed, eyed. Tossed to fat lips his chalice, drank off his chalice tiny, sucking the last fat violet syrupy drops. His spellbound eyes went after, after her gliding head as it went down the bar by mirrors, gilded arch… (11.419)

Bloom is seemingly immune to these particular sirens. While he imagines or remembers an interlude with Lydia, or perhaps Lydia's hand on the beerpull reminds him of some soft, soft hand,

> On the smooth jutting beerpull laid Lydia hand, lightly, plumply, leave it to my hands. All lost in pity for croppy. Fro, to: to, fro: over the polished knob (she knows his eyes, my eyes, her eyes) her thumb and finger passed in pity: passed, repassed and, gently touching, then slid so smoothly, slowly down, a cool firm white enamel baton protruding through their sliding ring. (11.1112)

Bloom is not drawn off course by these sirens. "Get out before the end. Thanks, that was heavenly. Where's my hat." (11.1122)

The sirens for Bloom, which dash him on the rocks and widen the distance from Molly, are his own anxieties demonstrated in his shame and sadness. At the funeral early in the day and at Ormond's bar later, he feels deep sadness remembering Rudy and a sense of shame for Rudy's death.

> A dwarf's face, mauve and wrinkled like little Rudy's was. Dwarf's body, weak as putty, in a whitelined deal box. Burial friendly society pays. Penny a week for a sod of turf. Our. Little. Beggar. Baby. Meant nothing. Mistake of nature. If it's healthy it's from the mother. If not from the man. Better luck next time. (6.326)

> "Well, my fault perhaps. No son. Rudy. Too late now. Or if not? If not? If still? /

> He bore no hate. / Hate. Love. Those are names. Rudy. Soon I am old." (11.1066)

Bloom also seems to feel shame at growing old.

Shame is a powerful force behind alienation, causing people to withdraw, to cover themselves, and feel unworthy. Stephen is described by Mulligan as a reverse Jesuit. Perhaps shame is reverse intimacy. Perhaps the opposite of intimacy is not alienation, but shame. Molly recognizes death and shame in the "Penelope" chapter,

> I suppose I oughtnt to have buried him in that little woolly jacket I knitted crying as I was but give it to some poor child but I knew well Id never have another our 1st death too it was we were never the same since…(18.1448)

Molly speaks to the shame of all mankind in her allusion to the first death of the world. Adam and Eve give us the first example of shame when, upon the tragedy of sin, they knew the shame of nakedness, and futilely tried to cover themselves with "the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3.8 NIV). But God knew that more than leaves were needed to cover their shame, that only a blood sacrifice would do, and covered them in the skin of a dead animal, the first death on earth. "…God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them." (Gen 3.22 NIV) And nothing was the same after that, as shame took the place of intimacy.

The Mystical Nature of Intimacy

Does Joyce offer any solution for this chronic condition of swinging between intimacy and alienation? Is there hope for our characters, or for ourselves? If Bloom is our hope, how does Joyce develop this hope? Can intimacy be created, or must it be given like grace?

Joyce suggests that something transcendent, something outside of our control, something even mystical is part of intimacy. In *Ulysses*, intimacy is found in the relationship that grows between Stephen and Bloom, a relationship that begins the morning of June 16th, even though the two don't meet until evening. A mystical bond begins between Stephen and Bloom, one a child – symbolically – without a parent and the other a man in need of a son, one seeking the word known to all men and one who knows the word known to all men, and both men relatively friendless and alienated from the intimacy they desire. This mystical bond is established in part in the parallel experiences of Stephen and Bloom during the day of June 16th, experiences that later create a link between them that even they do not fully comprehend. Two of those parallel experiences are found in their reaction to sunlight and shadow, and in their experience on Sandymount Strand.

Both Bloom and Stephen have similar reactions to the sunlight and shadow they encounter early in the day. Both experience a brooding and fear as a cloud covers the sun, followed by a restoration of spirit as the cloud passes. Stephen standing alone on the parapet after Mulligan has descended, looks out to sea. Something or someone seems to be present with him.

> Woodshadows floated silently by through the morning peace from the stairhead seaward where he gazed. Inshore and farther out the mirror of water whitened, spurned by lightshod hurrying feet…A hand plucking the harpstrings… (1.242)

But as a cloud begins to cover the sun, Stephen's spirit darkens, and he thinks of his mother's deathbed.

> It [the bay] lay beneath him, a bowl of bitter waters. Fergus's song: I sang it alone in the house, holding down the long dark chords. Her door was open: she wanted to hear my music. Silent with awe and pity I went to her bedside. She was crying in her wretched bed. For those words, Stephen: love's bitter mystery. (1.249)

Wracked with turmoil, he cries out, "No, mother! Let me be and let me live." (1.279)

Mulligan's voice rouses Stephen from his darkness just as the sun reemerges and "Stephen, still trembling at his soul's cry, heard warm running sunlight and in the air behind him friendly words." (1.282) This is a profound experience animated with something living, and revealing of Stephen's deep despair and deeper hope.

Bloom has a parallel experience with the same cloud that morning from his own vantage point on his way home from the porkbutcher. "A cloud began to cover the sun slowly, wholly. Grey. Far." He begins to have very dark thoughts of brimstone, death, and desolation, and "a grey horror seared his flesh." (4.218-230) Bloom's reaction is to head home. As he turns on to Eccles street "hurrying homeward" he reassures himself, "Well, I am here now. Yes, I am here now." (4.233) and he thinks of friendly, mundane and sensuous soothing thoughts: that he must exercise more, that "number eight is still unlet," that he longs for the smell of tea and sizzling butter and to "Be near her ample bedwarmed flesh. Yes, yes." (4.236) And presently the sun reemerges and a presence of some kind is sensed, just as Stephen had noticed. "Quick warm sunlight came running from Berkeley road, swiftly, in slim sandals, along the brightening footpath. Runs, she runs to meet me, a girl with gold hair on the wind." (4.240) Both men are visited by something beautiful, and it restores their souls, at least for a moment.

Another parallel experience between Stephen and Bloom that contributes to this mystical bond is each man's compulsion to masturbate, or urinate as the case may be, while on Sandymount Strand. These scenes take place at different times of day, but their parallelism is not coincidental. Stephen's experience takes place in the morning and Bloom's later in the day when, "the summer evening had begun to fold the world in its mysterious embrace," (13.1) In addition to the same location, both men assume the same physical posture stretched back against rock with their hands in their pockets. Stephen, "…lay back at full stretch over the sharp rocks, cramming the scribbled note and pencil into a pocket, his hat tilted down on his eyes." (3.437) And for Bloom,

> It was getting darker but he could see and he was looking all the time that he was winding the watch or whatever he was doing to it and then he put it back and put his hands back into his pockets…He was leaning back against the rock behind. (13.557,744)

Both men are desiring the touch of a woman, but making do with their own, but the men differ in their cognitive impressions. Stephen, as described earlier on page 3, is cut off from himself and perhaps somewhat unaware of what he is doing, with confused and wandering thoughts. Bloom, on the other hand, is very focused and engaged. "Still, I feel. The strength it gives a man. That's the

secret of it." (13.859) As with other sensuous aspects of life, he embraces his sexual desire with intention.

Joyce presents numerous parallel experiences, some small and some significant, that suggest the potential for an intimacy between people might begin before they ever meet and might never be fully comprehended.

Eummaus

The "Eummaus" chapter establishes the relationship between Stephen and Bloom as father and son, resolving the tension of alienation for both men. Bloom initiates this relationship in the previous chapter "Circe" when he speaks to the two policemen who want to rough Stephen up for insulting the king. Bloom says, "I know him. He's a gentleman, a poet. It's all right." (15.4485) *I know him.* To know and be known is the beginning of intimacy. And Bloom doesn't just know him, he knows he is a gentleman and a poet. This is the only time all day (which is all we have) that Stephen has been known for what he is, or for what he is capable of becoming, the kind of knowing a parent has for a child.

Eventually all others leave, and Bloom and Stephen are alone. The scene can be likened to a birth, and perhaps it is Bloom who has given birth to Stephen. This image is supported as Bloom is portrayed earlier in the chapter as both male and female. Dr. Punch Costello refers to Bloom saying, "Professor Bloom is a finished example of the new womanly man." (15.1798) and Bloom replies, "Oh, I so want to be a mother." (15.1817) Joyce seems to be establishing the enwombing relationship between mother and child that Stephen has searched for all day - the relationship of shared blood and water, and sustaining milk.

Stephen, in his drunken stupor, resembles a newborn, curled on his side, stretching out his arms and curling his body. Bloom "(he bends again and undoes the buttons of Stephen's waistcoat) To breathe." (15.4937) Bloom calls out to rouse him, "Stephen! (There is no answer. He calls again) Stephen!" (15.4926) Bloom calls him by his name, or names him. Bloom stands over him with concern and "looks down on Stephen's face and form" saying, "Face reminds me of his poor mother." (15.4946) Bloom murmurs an oath or maybe a blessing over Stephen.

The scene then moves to include a vision of Rudy. Bloom "(wonderstuck, calls inaudibly) Rudy!" (15.4961) The connection between Stephen and Rudy is strong, and perhaps Joyce suggests the metempsychosis of Rudy's soul into Stephen's body. During this mystical moment Stephen is mumbling in his drunken stupor lines from "Who goes with Fergus." Bloom doesn't recognize the words and assumes he is talking about, "Ferguson, I think I caught. A girl." (15.4950)

Joyce further develops this father/son relationship as Stephen and Bloom sit in the cabman's shelter. Paternal behaviors emerge in Bloom in the form of admonitions, caring questions, and awareness of the similarities and differences between Bloom and Stephen. Their parallel experiences of earlier in the day begin to manifest themselves in a familiarity that Bloom doesn't fully understand. Bloom notes, "Though they didn't see eye to eye in everything a certain analogy there somehow was as if both their minds were travelling, so to speak, in the one train of thought."

(16.1579) Just as their parallel experiences established a commonality, differences between Bloom and Stephen are evident, and Joyce suggests the differences are as much a part of establishing this intimate relationship as the similarities. Bloom eventually asks Stephen to come home with him for cocoa, which Bloom will make with milk, Molly's milk, "…the viscous cream ordinarily reserved for the breakfast of his wife…." (17.364)

The pivotal passage of *Ulysses*, a point when the mystical becomes present with the natural, occurs late in "Eummaus" and can be easily overlooked, buried among chatter about sweeping the floors and the sleeping sentry. Bloom says to Stephen as they leave the cabman's shelter,

> The only thing is to walk then you'll feel a different man. Come. It's not far. Lean on me. /Accordingly he passed his left arm in Stephen's right and led him on accordingly./
>
> --Yes, Stephen said uncertainly because he thought he felt a strange kind of flesh of a different man approach him, sinewless and wobbly and all that. (16.1719)

Though hesitant, Stephen says yes to this sinewless, wobbly flesh. Who is this being Bloom has become? Joyce refers to him as "the unconquered hero," "our hero" (16.1643), he is a father figure and a mother figure, and in "Cyclops" Bloom is revealed as Elijah the prophet. Or is he Fergus come to take Stephen in his brazen car? Or is he all of these?

On the walk home, Bloom and Stephen demonstrate an intimate relationship that neither has been able to establish all day. They are parent and child, they are husband and wife, the two organic forms in which intimacy manifests itself in human relationships. "--…the two figures…both black, one full, one lean, walk towards the railway bridge, *to be married by Father Maher*." (16.1886) -- and they are friends with arms linked. The subject of their conversation is the subject of *Ulysses*: "…their *tete a tete* … about sirens, enemies of man's reason, mingled with a number of other topics of the same category, usurpers, historical cases of the kind…"(16.1889) The book, *Ulysses*, it could be argued, is the offspring of their union, written by the Stephen character, Joyce, which is strongly suggested in the ending line, "Trieste-Zurich-Paris/ 1914-1921." (18.1610)

Memory

Steven and Bloom find metaphorical or mystical significance in each other and discover the friend each needs. While Stephen and Bloom establish an intimate bond, Bloom and Molly need to maintain or reconcile intimacy. And what can reconcile intimacy? If knowing and being known is a basis of intimacy, Joyce suggests that memories provide ongoing fuel for intimacy.

Bloom fondly recalls Molly frequently during the day of June 16th. He remembers her voice, her perfume, "Know her smell in a thousand." (13.1024), her "bedwarm flesh", he shares her picture with Stephen – all of his senses are engaged in remembering her. In Molly's soliloquy in "Penelope" she fondly remembers details about Bloom "…if they only knew him as well as I do…the last time he came on my bottom… I could always hear his voice talking when the room was crowded…when he asked to take off my stockings lying on the hearthrug in Lombard street…" (18.45, 77, 182, 266) Molly's memories are earthy and sexual.

But shared memory might be the most powerful call back to intimacy and to maintained intimacy. Molly and Bloom, each in their own moment, relate the same memory of an intense physical and emotional encounter. Bloom's memory occurs early in the day at Davy Burn's as he has red wine and a cheese sandwich, waiting for 4 o'clock to pass, the time Boylan is to visit Molly. The imagery of wine and bread alludes to communion, which is a repeated act of memory designed to restore intimacy with God. "Bloom ate his strips of sandwich, fresh clean bread…Sips of his wine…" (8.818) Bloom seems to feel the memory coming upon him, something somewhat beyond his control, invoked by the wine. "Glowing wine on his palate lingered swallowed…Seems to a secret touch telling me memory. Touched his sense moistened remembered." (8.897) And he remembers,

> …Ravished over her I lay, full lips full open, kissed her mouth. Yum. Softly she gave me in my mouth the seedcake warm and chewed. Mawkish pulp her mouth had mumbled sweet and sour with spittle. Joy: I ate it: joy…High on Ben Howth rhododendrons … Wildly I lay on her, kissed her: eyes, her lips, her stretched neck beating, woman's breasts full in her blouse of nun's veiling, fat nipples upright. Hot I tongued her. She kissed me. I was kissed. All yielding she tossed my hair. Kissed, she kissed me. (8.906-916)

In "*Penelope*," Molly recalls the same scene from her own point of view,

> …the sun shines for you he said the day we were lying among the rhododendrons on Howth head in the grey tweed suit and his straw hat the day I got him to propose to me yes first I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth and it was leapyear…and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes. (18.1572-1609)

The most common memory they share is Molly's gesture of passing a bit of seed cake from her mouth to Bloom's - an act of extreme intimacy. While perhaps a cultural symbol of marriage, Molly's gesture came from her heart, her erotic being, her deep human desire to be one with her lover. To share a bit of masticated cake from one wet mouth to another is something only lovers, or a parent, will do. Molly and Bloom are deeply linked by this gesture and it provides a memory of strength. It is ritualistic and spiritual in the deepest sense.

Hope

Joyce does not offer us a plan for complete redemption from our struggle between intimacy and alienation. The relationship between Stephen and Bloom is based on very thin reeds of cocoa and urinating together, and the restoration with Molly is only hinted at by Bloom asking for breakfast in bed. But Joyce does offer hope. We are left with a wise notion I once heard, that to live is to love and to suffer. And the best we can do is hope to love more and suffer less.

Appendix

Who goes with Fergus?
By W. B. Yeats

Who will go drive with Fergus now,
And pierce the deep wood's woven shade,
And dance upon the level shore?
Young man, lift up your russet brow,
And lift your tender eyelids, maid,
And brood on hopes and fear no more.

And no more turn aside and brood
Upon love's bitter mystery;
For Fergus rules the brazen cars,
And rules the shadows of the wood,
And the white breast of the dim sea
And all dishevelled wandering stars.

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