

Editorial Introduction

Jonathan Locke Hart

In a time of discord, harmony is more important than ever. That is an aim of *Veritas Review*, an attempt, through visual and verbal art, of analysis and interpretation. We look back to look ahead in the present moment. I read to learn from the past, to draw on it to understand the now and the to be. For instance, I am reading an article on Greek ideas of harmony in music, written in 1963, the year John Kennedy was assassinated.¹ Etymology shows that harmony has an ancient root. As Edward A. Lipmann notes, *ar* or *har* are verbs in the Indo-European languages, meaning *unifying and ordering diverse or conflicting aspects into a whole*, and he observes: “Homer uses *ararisko* ‘connect,’ *aresko* ‘adapt, reconcile, satisfy,’ *arasso* ‘slam together, strike, play the lyre,’ and *harmozo* ‘fit together.’”² Homer and Plato make an appearance in this issue of *Veritas Review*, and Lipmann also reminds us about Plato and harmony: “Plato’s interest in the discipline of harmonics is grounded his conviction that harmony and music have a close relation to One of the ironic etymologies of the Cratylus specifically couples music with the harmony of nature.”³

Other ancient concerns are dignity and human rights. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, dignity can be found in *imago Dei*, the notion that humans are made in the image of God, and something also expressed in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486).⁴ What if we had and will recognize human dignity rather than embracing violence, sin, and death in the world, wandering with Cain, or whatever secular equivalents of alienation or estrangement, pain and conflict? If we seek harmony and prosperity and scientific and other advancement, how can we allow for such a gap between self and others—something I explored in my book *The Poetics of Otherness* (2015)⁵—between harmony and discord? Do not most humans want to live in peace as individuals, with their families, in their communities? Stoicism considered natural law a way forward for human rights, although this point has been much debated.⁶ Another figure who was important for natural law and human rights was Hugo Grotius, who builds on others such as Thomas Aquinas and who sees right action as being based on the rational and the social.⁷ The main thing is the dignity and freedom of the human. I maintain that culture, art, and creation are distinctive aspects of what makes us human. Artificial intelligence has come to challenge what makes us human and what is human creativity, and even pioneers such as Geoffrey Hinton have had qualms about it, as an article in *The New York Times* outlined.⁸ We create in a changing, strange, and volatile environment that may be increasingly fascinating but dangerous. In its own way, *Veritas Review* seeks to celebrate human creativity and harmony, expressing and exploring human dignity, freedom, rights.

Like the Abigail Adams Institute (AAI), *Veritas Review* encourages students and creates a framework for the exploration of creativity, arts, humanities, social sciences, and science. This issue begins and ends with two Harvard students. Darshan Kalola tells about his experience of how Jacinta Hogan moderated, at AAI, a conversation on Solzhenitsyn’s Harvard Commencement Address in 1978. Among other things, Kalola sees Solzhenitsyn’s contribution is to demonstrate moral weakness will lead to “atrocities, suffering, and evil.” Hogan, who sees the Russian as a hopeful artist, explains that she led a discussion group on Solzhenitsyn’s speeches. She explains that he sees the role of the artist “to sense more keenly than others the harmony of the world, the beauty and ugliness of man’s role in it—and to vividly communicate this to mankind.” This brings us back to harmony, which, from the start, is the key word for *Veritas Review*. Mohammed Said Alhalimi maintains that Solzhenitsyn is an artist using narrative to humanize history and one who stresses moral choice. Alhalimi sees Solzhenitsyn an example, someone suffering for belief in righteous ideas.

The next contribution is a selection of two poems from the manuscript of my poetry collection, *Les poèmes de Paris*, and my two translations of them into English. I grew up with both languages in the community and

so, in keeping with the interest in translation and poetry in *Veritas Review* from the first issue, I discussed this contribution with my fellow editors.

Film reviews follow, providing a typology of then and now. Movies are an art form that speaks to people across the spectrum and have also been a focus of our previous issues. Providing analysis and illuminating context, Manuel Lopez goes to the heart of *His Girl Friday* (1939), asks some perceptive questions about this political and romantic comedy and prompts us to go back and watch the film. Xavier Symonds revisits *Galipoli* (1981), its importance for Australia, what makes it such a pivotal film, in representing a defining event for that nation and for New Zealand, letting us know why without giving too much away for those who have not seen the movie. In interpreting *Ma Nuit chez Maud/My Night at Maud's* (1969), Jeronimo Ayesta considers doing philosophy through film; he likes textual analysis as a method of interpreting image in film and is interested in narrative and interpretation, inner and outer horizons, and the choices that are made.

Fiction and the interpretation of fiction have also been part of what we have been doing at *Veritas Review*. In his article on Cormac McCarthy, Constantin Waldschmidt explores, his comments on the novels suggesting how to read this author, text, and context. Waldschmidt sheds light on opaque passages in *No Country for Old Men* and discusses McCarthy in terms of the canon. Emil Pitkin's "Capital Impressions" furthers that exploration and focuses on Washington, DC, and the reader may ask if this is autobiographical fiction or fictional autobiography, or something else. Whatever the genre, the work is distinctive.

One of the distinctions of *Veritas Review* is the art of Catherine Ezell. She has a number of striking portraits in this issue, including a drawing of three Southern writers. Ezell says that she combines her love of literature and her need to draw and paint, as she is challenged to represent the characters of authors from her reading of their works.

In discussing the women in Homer, Eirene Allen examines the word *andra* (ἄνδρα) in the *Odyssey*. Her analysis of Greek opens up networks of meaning that cast light on Homer's work. Allen observes the relation between interpreting and translating Homer and how the women have been lost. Lauren Heilman examines the example of Aelia Eudocia Augusta, née Athenais, who travelled from Athens to Constantinople to Jerusalem, and Heilman maintains that the religious, literary, and philosophical ideas of Eudocia helped to bring Athens and Jerusalem into close conversation.

Danilo Petranovich introduces the last part of the issue under the rubric of "The Problem of Justice in Homer and Plato," which grew out of a series at AAI this fall. Beginning with Thucydides, the series then moved to the Homeric epics and to Plato's *Republic*. Petranovich gives a detailed idea of this significant series and some highlights. Manuel Lopez, who led the seminar, speaks about a psychological analysis of an attachment to justice that is present in the Melian dialogue and occurs throughout Homer and Plato. Maura Cahill calls attention to the Socratic method and the allegory of the cave, of seeking truth and reality beyond the shadows. In discussing Homer, Mathieu Ronayne asks questions about the relations among justice, persuasion, speech, and action. For Gabriel Margolies, the Melian Dialogue from Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* is suggestive and tells us something about justice for the Athenians, which has implications for today, as regards ethical and political philosophy. Dr. Iryna Mykhailova talks of the community of AAI where the young can come to read and discuss philosophy to learn. Mathis Bitton talks about the importance of natural justice for the seminar and about asking about wrestling with the neglected questions of philosophy.

Rather than say too much about this section of the issue and the contributions to the whole issue, I shall refer the reader to the actual words and images of these accomplished contributors. In search of justice, beauty, truth, dignity, and rights, people may disagree, but to create and consider verbal and visual works, we all move forward even as we look back. Perhaps we glimpse beyond the shadows and hear the music of the spheres.

Notes

1. Edward A. Lipmann, “Hellenic Conceptions of Harmony,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 16, no. 1 (1963): 3–35.
2. *Ibid.*, 5.
3. *Ibid.*, 15.
4. See Remy Debes, *Dignity: A History*, Oxford Philosophical Concepts (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
5. Jonathan Locke Hart, *The Poetics of Otherness: War, Trauma, and Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
6. See Michael J. Meyer, “Stoics, Rights, and Autonomy,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1987): 267–71; Richard Bett, “Did the Stoics Invent Human Rights?”, in Rachana Kamtekar (ed.), *Virtue and Happiness: Essays in Honour of Julia Annas*, Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
7. See C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); Jon Miller, “Stoics, Grotius and Spinoza on Moral Deliberation”, in Jon Miller and Brad Inwood (eds.), *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 116–140; Jon Miller, “Hugo Grotius and the Makings of Modern Natural Law”, in Rafael Domingo and John Witte Jr. (eds.), *Christianity and Global Law* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 127–142.
8. See Cade Metz, “‘The Godfather of AI’ Leaves Google and Warns of Danger Ahead,” *The New York Times*, May 3, 2023.

Solzhenitsyn's Harvard 1978 Commencement Address

Darshan Kalola MA '24



Tucked away on a quiet street near Harvard Square is an organization called the Abigail Adams Institute. Created in 2014, their purpose is to “revive the traditional liberal arts at Harvard” through reading groups, discussions, seminars, and fellowships. I stumbled upon one of their posters in the Smith Student Center. It was an invitation to a discussion on the works of the renowned author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. I had heard about his seminal work *The Gulag Archipelago* but had never approached any of his work directly.

On the day of the discussion, I was greeted by a friendly young woman named Jacinta, who would moderate the conversation. The venue was cozy and tastefully decorated. About 20 people slowly filed in, served themselves dinner, and took a seat. There was a diverse mix of generations, occupations, and nationalities.

The focus of the conversation was Solzhenitsyn's 1978 Harvard Commencement Address, a fiery hour-long speech in which he outlines looming threats to Western societies. As the discussion

unfolded, I was impressed by the level of dialogue. There were many articulate points of view, differing but always respectful. Very soon every one of the 20 people gathered had the opportunity to share their thoughts.

The first thread in the discussion, which engendered significant disagreement, was Solzhenitsyn's critique of what he deemed an overly legalistic society. He felt that a system of laws that was not supported by strong moral convictions was destined to fail. His philosophy could be explained by a modern analogy: the notion that society should not pass laws against pornography because such laws would steal the virtues of restraint and discretion from citizens.

During this point in the discussion, a powerful quotation from President John Adams came to mind. What better place to share it than in an institute named for his closest advisor, his wife? The quotation was “Our constitution is made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to a government of any other.” This quotation acknowledges that the liberty that exists in the United States comes with a hefty price tag—responsibility. It is incumbent on individual citizens to restrain their own vices to promote the common good. The alternative, which our founders feared, is to have an intrusive government restrain them instead.

The discussion then veered to the future of the United States. Several participants who were immigrants, including a group of English scholars, provided insightful commentary from the perspectives of outsiders. There was a general sense among the participants, a sentiment shared by many in our nation, that the United States is in rapid decline. One individual, a student not born in this country, offered a curious question: “So what if America falls? All societies in the past have fallen and new ones have emerged. What makes this coun-

try so special that we should save it?" I wish I could say only a foreigner could offer such a fatalistic perspective, but too many of my peers also mirror his apathy.

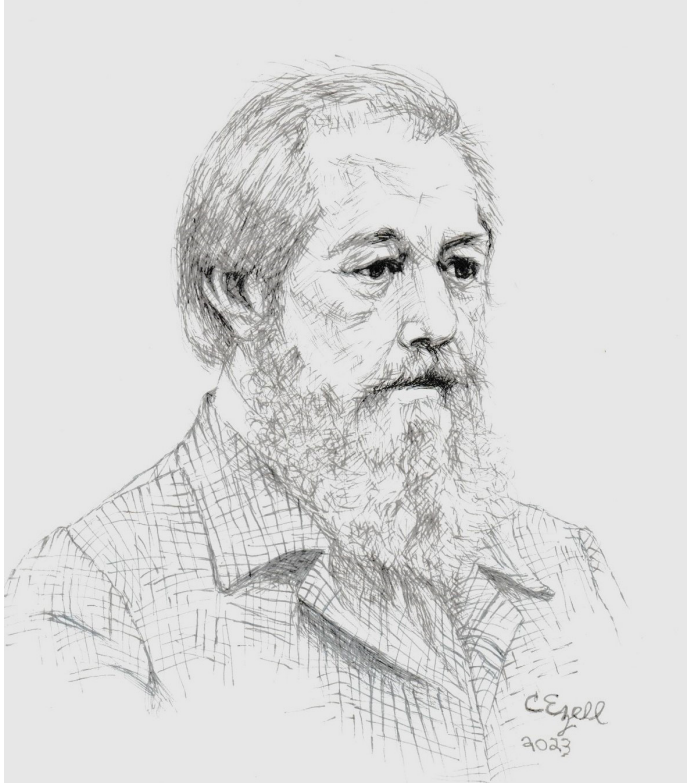
My opinion, which I believe Solzhenitsyn would have sympathized with, is that our world is made better by the existence of an America grounded in its founding ideals. When we are at our best, we are an instructive example to the world that liberty, democracy, equality, individualism, hard work, innovation, and excellence are better alternatives to despotism, state control, collectivism, tyranny, and cowardice.

Solzhenitsyn ends his speech with an inspirational call to arms: "...[the future] will demand from us a spiritual blaze; we shall have to rise to a new height of vision, to a new level of life." His message in 1978 is as timely now as it ever was. In modern Western society, we have grown accustomed to peace and abundance. The desire for material comfort has become the north star of all our energies.

If we do not heed Solzhenitsyn's warnings, we may very well find that this indulgence in simple physical well-being has rendered us morally weak. And it was Solzhenitsyn's great contribution to the world to show that this moral weakness will inevitably lead to great atrocities, suffering, and evil.

Solzhenitsyn: The Hopeful Artist

Jacinta Hogan



Alexander Solzhenitsyn

en to the artist,” he says in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, “to sense more keenly than others the harmony of the world, the beauty and ugliness of man’s role in it - and to vividly communicate this to mankind.” Solzhenitsyn does not ask for a keen insight, nor does he believe that he has a comprehensive perception of the world. He sees glimmers of truth and is compelled to share them.

As is often the case for modern readers, the participants of the AAI discussion group wanted to piece together precisely what Solzhenitsyn’s world view is. Clarifying the role of the artist, though, Solzhenitsyn says “it was not [the artist] who created this world, nor does he control it.” Solzhenitsyn is not creating a world; he is revealing one. The artist has a unique and valuable gift to give to society.

Solzhenitsyn’s most famous speech is the Harvard Commencement Address of 1978, “A World Split Apart” (see Darshan Kalola’s article in this edition of *The Veritas Review*). He critiques elements of American society, including materialism and legalism. He describes what he sees, not offering a political solution. The absence of solutions in Solzhenitsyn’s writing is often the primary criticism of his work. Recall, however, that Solzhenitsyn does not perceive himself as a politician. He is an artist whose role is to reveal; in this speech, he reveals trends in American behavior that do not reflect the ideals Americans pride themselves in having. Solzhenitsyn’s insights are strikingly accurate, and prompted the AAI discussion group to wrestle with the concepts of truth, the telos of law, and the meaning of freedom.

Because Solzhenitsyn had experienced such extreme suffering in his life, his works can often feel weighty and depressing. New readers of Solzhenitsyn can be disheartened at his recognition of evil in the world. The AAI

Does an artist have a duty to society? Is legalism a weakness of America? How do we find hope when every political system seems flawed? Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn offers answers to questions such as these throughout his works. At times, though, his answers can be challenging to decipher.

This summer, as an intern at the Abigail Adams Institute, I had the pleasure of leading a discussion group through five of Solzhenitsyn’s speeches. The discussion group welcomed twenty-seven participants over the course of five weeks. Participants spanned generations, political beliefs, education levels, and backgrounds. The expertise of members in the group included philosophy, psychology, mathematics, and politics. The interdisciplinary nature of the group shed light on the universal applicability of Solzhenitsyn.

For all his novels, short stories, histories, essays, and speeches, Solzhenitsyn believed himself to be an artist. Not a politician. Not a historian. Not a philosopher. An artist! “It is merely given

discussion group reflected this pattern, but Solzhenitsyn is firmly committed to hope. Those who commit time to reading his works will discover his hope.

The final speech discussed in the AAI group was “We Have Ceased to See the Purpose,” Solzhenitsyn’s farewell address to the West in 1993. At the conclusion of this speech, he says, “we have not experienced the trials of the twentieth century in vain. Let us hope: We have, after all, been tempered by these trials, and our hard-won firmness will in some fashion be passed on to the following generations.” Suffering strengthens the human person. For Solzhenitsyn, individual persons passing strength on to future generations is where the hope of a whole people is found. There will never be a utopian society, but Solzhenitsyn believes that the freedom of the individual to choose the good at every turn is the means by which mankind can achieve higher things. The conclusion of his Harvard Address reads, “this ascension is similar to climbing onto the next anthropological stage. No one on earth has any way left but - upward.”

Solzhenitsyn: The Artist who Humanized History through Narrative

Mohammed Said Alhalimi



For me, Solzhenitsyn is a remarkable figure who was simultaneously an intellectual with an unmatched breadth of historical insight and an artist with an eye for beauty and a story to tell. It was this apparent contradiction that led me to approach Solzhenitsyn's writings with extreme caution. However, as I became more familiar with his life story and the overarching ethic that drove his work, I realized the power of Solzhenitsyn's method; that is, the use of narrative for historical documentation. I have always recognized that historians assume a responsibility to establish a clear account of a particular event that approximates an objective description thereof, unswayed by ideological commitments and devoid of normative judgments to the greatest degree possible. Solzhenitsyn, on the other hand, although meticulous and concerned with historical objectivity, does not hesitate to share the personal moral lessons he derived from his meditations through the tragedies of the twentieth century.

Engaging with Solzhenitsyn's numerous volumes, especially *The Gulag Archipelago* and *The Red Wheel*, I was struck by the dissident's disregard for standard academic practices in relating major historical events; in this case, the Bolshevik Revolution and the transition that ensued from imperial Russia to the Soviet Union. This, I believe, explains the historical significance and impact of Solzhenitsyn's account. For Solzhenitsyn, the drama played in the political arena was a direct reflection of the moral choices of each and every member of society. This heterodox, bottom-up approach to history is much more compelling. It places the individual at the center as a responsible citizen, rather than a marionette pulled by evil forces outside his control.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky proclaims that "there is only one way to salvation, and that is to make yourself responsible for all men's sins." In his writing, Solzhenitsyn takes this maxim seriously. In *The Gulag Archipelago*, for instance, Solzhenitsyn constantly employs the second-person point of view to compel the reader to experience what it would be like to be under interrogation and torture, or to have the power to inflict these fates on other people. He recounts the internal dialogue that inevitably takes place in the mind of each prisoner. He gives stories of the people one is bound to encounter in a corrective labor camp. He elaborates on what he calls the "intoxication" of power that drove State Security representatives to exercise their authority. As he puts it, "Only a little while ago your parents were deeply concerned about you and didn't know where to turn to launch you in life. You were such a fool..." But now, "you have a power over all the people in that military unit, or factory, or district, incomparably greater than that of the military commander, or factory director, or secretary of the district Communist Party. These men control people's military or official duties, wages, reputations, but you control people's freedom." It was his experience as both a communist artillery officer in the Soviet army and then a Gulag prisoner that provided the psychological depth that characterizes Solzhenitsyn's writing and led him to declare that "the line separating good and evil passes not

through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either - but right through every human heart - and through all human hearts.”

This emphasis on the moral significance of each individual contains a vital ethical lesson to the reader: your actions matter! As Solzhenitsyn puts it, “you can resolve to live your life with integrity” and “the simple step of a courageous individual is not to take part in the lie.” In *The Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn recounts the story of what transpired at the conclusion of a party conference in a Moscow province. As was always the case, a tribute to Comrade Stalin was called and everyone was expected to stand up and clap. As he describes it, the hall echoed with “stormy applause, rising to an ovation.” This continued for three minutes, four minutes, and then five minutes. Even Stalin’s staunchest supporters became aware of the “insufferably silly” nature of this ritual, especially after the ten-minute mark. Despite this, no one dared be the first to cease clapping for the great Comrade Stalin, particularly as “NKVD men were standing in the hall applauding and watching to see who quit first.” After eleven minutes, the director of the local paper factory made a decision. Having witnessed the hypocrisy of a myriad of men who, aware of the falsity and absurdity of the situation, kept on clapping, the strong-minded director “assumed a businesslike expression and sat down in his seat.” Everyone else followed suit, and the “uninhibited enthusiasm” in the hall vanished instantly thereafter. This courageous man was arrested that same night and given a ten-year sentence, which gave rise to the remark, “don’t ever be the first to stop applauding.” Despite the terrible fate that had befallen the honest man, it is precisely this truth faculty that Solzhenitsyn seeks to awaken in his readers. It is the ability to tell the truth despite the consequences that demands our respect. Having been condemned to work in a labor camp himself and experienced censorship and other Soviet horrors, Solzhenitsyn retains unique credibility as well as power, the kind of power that history bestows on people who are prepared to suffer for their belief in the righteousness of their ideas.

Selections from *Les poèmes de Paris / Poems of Paris*

Jonathan Locke Hart

[translated by the author from French]

Pour/For Nadezda Vasbkevich

4.

À beauté la beauté le monde épandre,
Les fleurs de glace, l'exil, le désir
Qui ne désire pas. Le plaisir
Et le déplaisir, le liminal : ne

Vous inquiétez pas. L'ombre et le mensonge
Ils se cachent à l'arrivée de la nuit d'hiver,
Le vrai et le faux se fondent à l'horizon
Comme le ciel, la mer et la terre

Devenir l'un l'autre. L'image est songe,
Le songe, l'image, les mots et les choses se rassemblent
Sur les terres entre les frontières. Nous tombons
Entre la vie et la mort, un bourgeon

Tourné feuille, puis au sol, comme une volta
Tournant le dos à l'amour, alto ultra.

4.

To beauty beauty the world spreads out,
Ice flowers, exile, desire
That does not desire. Pleasure
And displeasure, the liminal: do not

Worry. The shadow and the lie
They hide until the winter night arrives,
The true and the false merge into the horizon
Like the sky, the sea, and the earth

Becoming each other. The image is a dream,
Dream, image, words, and things come together
On the lands between the borders. We fall
Between life and death, a bud

Turned leaf, then to the ground, like a volta
Turning its back on love, alto ultra.

5.

La toile, le mythe, les deux sans fin,
Les déserts sont des jardins et l'inverse.
Le temps et ses douleurs ont un remède
Tardif. Je m'en remets lentement.

Je cède. La traduction de mon âme
Est opaque et oblique, la lune de sang
Saigne dans mes rêves, mes doigts en ruine,
Les bleus et les blessures du monde,

Le traumatisme d'une énigme. Les sables
Avalent le sang qui tombe comme l'histoire
Et la tristesse jusqu'à ce que toute la nature
Gémisse au crépuscule de nos jours.

La volta se retourne sur elle-même
Jusqu'à ce que Pétrarque abandonne les sonnets.

5.

The web, the myth, the two without end,
Deserts are gardens and vice versa.
Time and its sorrows have a remedy
Late. I am getting over it slowly.

I give in. The translation of my soul
Is opaque and oblique, the blood moon
Bleeding in my dreams, my fingers in ruins,
The bruises and wounds of the world,

The trauma of an enigma. The sands
Swallow the blood that falls like history
And sadness until all nature
Moans at the dusk of our days.

The volta turns on itself
Until Petrarch abandons the sonnets.

His Girl Friday (1939)

Manuel Lopez '90



His Girl Friday, made in 1939 and released in 1940, is the most popular movie adaptation of a 1928 play written entirely by two former Chicago newspapermen and best friends, Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. It is closely based on real people they knew: Walter Howey, celebrated Hearst editor, and “Big Bill” Thompson, Chicago’s last Republican mayor and an intimate ally of Al Capone. Thompson, like the mayor in the movie, was also dependent on racial politics; the black vote was decisive for his victories. The press, led by the *Chicago Tribune*, helped bring him down. (Thompson’s opposite number was New York’s

Republican mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, who is mentioned in passing with admiration in the movie.) Hecht also wrote much of this movie adaptation, along with his other collaborator, Charles Lederer. The main change in the 1939 version is the last-second decision of the producer, Howard Hawks, to change one of the lead characters, Hildy, to a woman. This was truly inspired, and gives the work a whole new dimension: besides a political satire, it is a delightful romantic comedy—actually, a subgenre known as a comedy of remarriage. The scheming, fast-talking editor of the paper, Walter Burns, played by Cary Grant, is trying to win back the love of his rightly distrustful ex-wife—and ace reporter!—Hildy Johnson, played by Rosalind Russell. She is about to marry a genial but dull insurance salesman, Bruce Baldwin, played by Ralph Bellamy.

The political half of the movie centers on the story Burns seduces Hildy into covering: The mayor of Chicago wants to speed through, on the eve of election day, the execution of a feeble-minded man named Earl Williams, allegedly a red, a revolutionary, for killing a black police officer. The mayor wants this so that he can win re-election with the backing of many thousands of angry black voters. The governor, unseen but heard, proves more politically agile than the mayor; he redirects popular indignation against the mayor when it’s beneficial for himself, outdoing him on law and order rhetoric. He avoids getting his hands dirty. But does the governor’s greater caution and cleaner reputation mean that he is less corrupt than the mayor, or more?

Nor is this all there is to the political corruption. Urban life is dominated by poor, uneducated immigrants, and with them arise not only radical agitators, but ward heelers, gangsters, criminal rackets, and political machines. We see the shocking, casual prominence of cutthroat Diamond Louie, and hookers like the albino Evangeline and the compassionate Mollie Malloy. Just as in Al Capone’s Chicago, the local police (represented in the movie by the sheriff), when they are not incompetent, serve the will of their paymasters, carrying out crimes for their crooked political bosses.

What is the solution to this mess? This is not *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (also made in 1939), or any Frank Capra movie. The hard-boiled editor played by Cary Grant cannot be mistaken for an idealistic Jimmy

Stewart. Now, if one pays close attention, one notices that those high or high-blown Jimmy Stewart-type sentiments are, in a way, praised in the movie—and this is one of the more subtle and interesting questions the movie asks us to consider. To what extent are these hard-boiled journalists, at bottom, really motivated by a reformer's zeal over the crooks? The silence among the reporters after Mollie Malloy reprimands them for their inhumanity is telling. There is a parallel question raised by the romantic plot: to what extent does Cary Grant's Burns, despite his carefree and glib exterior, prove instead to be the real lover, the romantic risk taker, compared to the decent, cautious, and kind insurance salesman played by Ralph Bellamy?

But on the whole, this movie is surprisingly, even shockingly, unsparing in its harsh view of our politics. The public is portrayed as sentimental and stupid, repeatedly falling prey to the hypocrisy of the speeches of politicians and their transparently criminal schemes. One detects the movie's desire to break free of the then-prevailing Hays self-censorship code. Herman Mankiewicz, who wrote *Citizen Kane* with Orson Welles, summed up the code to Ben Hecht this way: "The hero, as well as the heroine, has to be a virgin. The villain can lay anybody he wants, have as much fun as he wants cheating and stealing, getting rich and whipping the servants. But you have to shoot him in the end." To which Hecht replied, "I'll skip the heroes and heroines, to write a movie containing only villains and bawds. I would not have to tell any lies then." Whether the end of the Hays Code has improved movies, or the country, readers will have to judge for themselves.

Why are the reporters the heroes? Not because they don't also cynically prey on the people. On the contrary, among other things, they use "sob stories" to prey on the sentimentality of their readers and sell papers. The term "sob sister" is used in the movie to refer to women journalists who would run the human interest angle, attending criminal trials and manufacturing tears for profit. Hildy is actually working as a sob sister in her interview of Earl Williams. However, she is effective precisely because she is not compassionate; the genuinely pitying woman, Mollie Malloy, is the object of laughter, no one listens to her—well, that's not quite true, and perhaps not true at all (and this is the question that is raised by the movie's more Capra-like aspects).

Another example of a newspaperman's work mentioned in passing in this movie will likely be obscure to viewers today: "stealing pictures off old ladies." In the pre-Hays Code version of this movie, the full quotation is: "Stealing pictures off old ladies of their daughters that get raped in Oak Park. And for what? So a million shop girls and motormen's wives can get their jollies." This was Ben Hecht's first job: picture-chaser for a newspaper. Families of victims who were raped or murdered were not keen to have their photographs in the press. So papers would hire picture-chasers, which called for ingenuity and a good set of burglary tools. Hecht had both. Once he smoked a family out of its house in winter by sealing off the chimney, then proceeded to enter and begin his search. Another time he stole a four-foot-square oil painting of a murder victim, leading his editor to say, "I'd go a little easy if I were you."

The point is that these hard-boiled journalists were not, by and large, respectable or decent. Is that what it takes to see through the lies of politicians, to not to be taken in by them—to hold their own against crooks? To be nobody's fool? The virtues of frank, shrewd, worldly republicans? Or are journalists just another type of crook? Does it take a thief to catch a thief? And is everyone who is not a thief, a fool?

One might also wonder whether the love of truth has the same root as the love of morality. There is doubtless a close relationship between them, but are they *identical*? Think about how the world looked to Ben Hecht, who, as a teenager, dropped out of the University of Wisconsin after a few days, and took a train to Chicago with \$50 on him. Wasn't he dropping out, in a way, to get an education, to learn the truth of the world? All the excitement, then, is about "spectacular crimes and municipal frauds," and the "general atmosphere" is "of license, exploitation, and swindle." What does life look like to a smart young man? For example, early on, Hecht tells us, "The Stockyards' owners imported Billy Sunday to divert their underpaid hunkies from going on strike by shouting them dizzy with God." Is it possible to see that, feel the force of that, love seeing the truth of that, and *also* be respectable at one's core?

One quotation in particular captures the harsh yet joyful spirit of the political side of this movie. This is an

old Ben Hecht, in his autobiography, describing himself as a young newspaperman and his colleagues, and it reveals a lot about himself, perhaps more than he realizes: “There was, I am sure, neither worldliness nor cunning enough among the lot of us to run a successful candy store. But we had a vantage point. We were NOT inside the routines of human greed or social pretenses. We were without politeness. . . . We who knew nothing spoke out of a knowledge so overwhelming that I, for one, never recovered from it. Politicians were crooks. The leaders of causes were scoundrels. Morality was a farce full of murders, rapes, and love nests. Swindlers ran the world and the Devil sang everywhere. These discoveries filled me with a great joy.”

I'll close on the better half of this classic: the romantic comedy. The movie sweetly vindicates the battle of the sexes. We hope that viewers today can still appreciate that on their own. Burns and even ordinary reporters know that Hildy would not be happy if she marries her insurance salesman fiancé. Why doesn't she see it? The desire for the solid and respectable seems to get in the way of her instincts, and to block the marriage (or rather re-marriage) of true minds. But to get her (and us) to see this requires some considerable harshness at the expense of her sweet, perhaps sickly-sweet, moral, and decent fiancé (not to mention his mother!). I think this corresponds to a certain contempt for the public shown by the movie's political side. It is a grave injustice, and it would be a real tragedy, for an intelligent, lively, cutting woman to marry a decent lunkhead, even one who would never (intentionally) wrong her. Such a marriage would be wrong, one might say, by nature: she would be giving up her soul. But can she trust a love that is free (or freer) from ordinary decency? Certainly there is no question that Burns has to use highly improper schemes—grossly illegal yet very funny—to win her back. But is the core of love separable from admiration and love of what's right? And aren't women wise only to be excited by—but not to marry—“bad boys”? If one were to replace Ralph Bellamy with Jimmy Stewart and consider how a Frank Capra version might proceed, one would see the problem that lies at the heart of *His Girl Friday*.

Gallipoli (1981), Four Decades On

Xavier Symons

Peter Weir's 1981 film *Gallipoli* is a powerful exploration of youth, friendship, lost innocence, and the brutal realities of war. It is also an artful depiction of the ANZAC (an acronym for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) spirit: a war mythology that has shaped Australia's national identity and that has enduring relevance today.

Gallipoli tells the story of two young Australian men, Archie Hamilton (Mark Lee) and Frank Dunne (Mel Gibson), who sign up for the Australian Imperial Force and are sent to fight in the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign (1915-1916) in what is now modern-day Turkey. Archie is a young and winsome athlete from a farmstead outside of Perth, Western Australia. His energy and impetuosity are in sharp contrast to the slow pace of rural life. Frank Dunne is a cheeky, irreverent, fiercely independent young man who lives a vagrant existence in the city. Frank encounters Archie at an athletics track meet and they forge an unlikely friendship. Archie reads about the war in the newspapers and is quick to enlist. Frank, a son of Irish migrants, is more skeptical and has an instinctive suspicion of the British, but eventually Archie convinces him to join.

Viewers then find themselves in Egypt, where the Australian Imperial Force trained. We follow Archie, Frank, and a small group of young Australian soldiers who are blissfully oblivious to the grim realities of war as they enjoy their sojourn in North Africa. Shortly, though, they are called up to fight in Gallipoli. They are sent to the notorious beachhead known as the Nek, where hundreds of Australian soldiers would eventually be killed. Director Peter Weir embarks on a loose, and slightly historically inaccurate, depiction of the disastrous Entente campaign to advance inland via the beaches on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The outcome is tragic for both of the film's young Australian protagonists (I'll avoid a full spoiler).

The film was made on a very modest budget, but is widely considered an Australian cinematic classic. Mel Gibson's acting is superb, and the film helped launch his career. The cinematography is brilliant and captures the surreal realities of the First World War; at one point, we see the soldiers swimming leisurely and frolicking on the beach at the Nek while shells rain furiously down around them. The film famously begins and ends with a sprint in the barren countryside, a symbol of dashed hopes and the immortalisation of the ANZACs. The theme of *Adagio in G Minor* by Thomaso Albinoni and Remo Giasotto adds to the foreboding mood.

As Australian film scholar Nick Prescott has observed, *Gallipoli* has more in common with Terrance Malick's *The Thin Red Line* than with Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*. The emphasis in this film is on the collision of radically different worlds: an innocent world of friendship and Australian larrikinism with the raw and unforgiving realities of the First World War and a particularly futile military campaign. The film also gives deep insight into the ANZAC myth, which has its own legends and liturgy and is like a secular religion in Australia today. ANZAC is a source of unity in a nation of vastly differing cultures and worldviews. Weir's film deftly captures the paradoxes of this spirit.

Ma Nuit chez Maud/My Night at Maud's (1969)

Jeronimo Ayesta

The French film director Éric Rohmer (Tulle, 1920–Paris, 2010) is one of the greatest filmmakers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and is one of the most long-lived members of the French New Wave. In the 1990s, he released some of his most important feature films, to which René Prédal referred as “the twilight of the masters of the 1960s generation.”¹ Rohmer began as a teacher before moving to Paris and becoming a journalist; in 1956 he began working at André Bazin’s *Cahiers du Cinéma*.² His first feature film, *Le Signe du Lion/The Sign of Leo* (filmed in 1959; released in 1962), was not successful. It was not until ten years later that Rohmer got his first success, making small-budget films in 16mm format.³ In his personal life, Rohmer was Catholic and ecologist. He valued the intimacy of this private life,⁴ and that may be one of the reasons why, compared to other New-Wave filmmakers such as François Truffaut or Jean-Luc Godard, he is usually seen as a “more marginal director” or as “humanistic and sentimental.”⁵ Although his films do touch deeply on the profound dilemmas of human existence, they are optimistic and humorous, to the extent that, in his 80s, Rohmer was considered “more than ever the director of adolescence and young people of today.”⁶ Rohmer distributed his main films in three series: the first one is the *Contes moraux/Six Moral Tales* (1963–1972); his second, the *Comédies et proverbes/Comedies and Proverbs* (six films, 1981–1987); and his third, the *Contes des quatre saisons/Tales of the Four Seasons* (four films, 1990–1998). This article presents my philosophically-loaded interpretation of *Ma Nuit chez Maud/My Night at Maud's* (1969), the third *Moral Tale*.

However, let me take advantage of the opportunity that *Veritas Review* gives us to broaden the frame of our filmic considerations to reflect briefly on the question that, I believe, lies at the core of this publication: why is it possible to do philosophy through film? Why is film—and the spectatorial exercise of watching a movie—a philosophical exercise? Understanding film as philosophy requires widening the horizons of our understanding of what film, philosophy, and art consumption are. First, I believe, with Robert Pippin, that film can be considered “a form of philosophical reflection, given a capacious enough understanding of philosophy, one not [...] wedded to a notion of philosophy as committed to ‘problems’ for which definitive ‘solutions’ are to be provided.”⁷ Second, and following Stephen Mulhall, films are “philosophical exercises, philosophy in action—film as philosophising.”⁸ This means that analyzing a film philosophically does not imply, using Paul Ricœur’s terminology, an exercise of “hermeneutic violence” against the movie. Rather, the paradigm of “film as philosophy” contends that the film itself—or the exercise of watching the film itself—is already a philosophical exercise, even if philosophical topics are not directly present in the movie. This understanding of the nature of the relationship between philosophy and film has led me to believe that textual analysis is the most respectful methodology toward the nature of the filmic image. Finally, I think the French philosopher Paul Ricœur has written one of the most insightful paragraphs on the philosophical and existential value of narratives: “[S]elf-understanding is an interpretation; interpretation of the self, in turn, finds in the narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation [...]”⁹

Rohmer, as a filmmaker, was particularly concerned with the representation of the tensions of human life: “Ever since the cinema attained the dignity of an art, I see only one great theme that is proposed to develop the opposition of two orders—one natural, the other human; one material, the other spiritual; one mechanical, the other free; one of the appetite, the other of heroism or grace—a classical opposition... a universe of relationships that only the cinema could embrace fully.”¹⁰ In my interpretation of *Ma Nuit chez Maud*, I focus on how Rohmer depicts the human tensions regarding erotic love. Specifically, the two poles of this tension are, on the one hand, the traditional morality concerning marriage and sex, based on Catholicism, and, on the other hand, the sexually-liberated values of the Parisian May 1968 revolution. My claim is twofold: first, that some visual and stylistic elements of the movie—in particular, the interactions between the performers in and out of the frame—aim specifically to depict this set of tensions; second, that Charles Taylor’s notion of

authenticity can constitute a philosophically fruitful way of understanding the main character's main conflict.

Ma Nuit chez Maud was successful both at Cannes and with Parisian audiences.¹¹ It tells the story of Jean-Louis (Jean-Louis Trintignant), an engineer in his thirties who, after several years spent working in Canada and Latin America, decides to return to Clermont-Ferrand to work in the Michelin factory. In the first sequence of the film, we see him commuting to a Sunday Catholic mass. There, while distracted and looking around at the attendees of the service, he crosses glances with Françoise (Marie-Christine Barrault) and decides—as explained by the voice-over—that she is going to be his wife. Soon after that, he meets his friend Vidal (Antoine Vitez), a communist philosophy professor, who invites him to dinner with his friend Maud (Françoise Fabian), a divorced, intelligent, and witty woman. The night Jean-Louis spends at Maud's house gives the film its title and conveys its central moral conflict. Jean-Louis, who used to be a lapsed Catholic, is going through a moment of conversion. During his night with her, both Maud and Vidal mercilessly challenge Jean-Louis' Catholic convictions, especially in relation to Catholic morality regarding marriage and sex. Jean-Louis falls in love with Maud; although he starts seeing her often, he manages to invite Françoise for dinner and ends up sleeping in an actual spare room in her house, due to the snow. For the sake of avoiding spoilers, I will not give more details on the movie. Suffice it to say that the protagonist has a conflict between two women: one (Françoise), who represents the traditional Catholic ideal of love; and other (Maud), who represents a liberated view.

It is precisely due to this structural characteristic of the movie that I find Taylor's notion of authenticity a fruitful way to give an account of it. Jean-Louis, the protagonist, is seeking his true self—in the fashion of the French “moralist” tradition—and the choice of one woman over another implies, in the context of this movie, choosing certain convictions to guide his existence. Jean-Louis' seeking inwardness is fraught with an ambiguity linked to Rohmer's commitment to a realist film style: if his films aim to depict the reality of human life faithfully, they have to depict moral conflicts with the ambiguity they have in reality. In his book *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Charles Taylor provides a conceptual tool that I consider helpful to think through this set of tensions. Specifically, in my own understanding of Taylor's notion, authenticity ultimately relates to the internalization of the external horizons of meaning such as religion or family. That is, part of what is at stake in the quest for authenticity is that we internalize, appropriate, and make ours those external horizons of meaning that stop being perceived as imposed and start constituting sources of meaning. Ultimately, the protagonist's inauthenticity lies in his conflict between the horizons of meaning he considers valuable and his own desires, between the traditional morality as the horizon of meaning and the liberated claim that we should fulfil our own desires, even if they are in opposition to the horizons of meaning.

As Taylor claims, being authentic requires “a background of intelligibility”, a “horizon against which things take on significance for us”; that is, external sources that provide “horizons of significance” to one's existence. Thus, “one of the things we can't do, if we are to define ourselves significantly, is suppress or deny the horizons against which things take on significance for us.”¹² The key to this notion's usefulness in giving an account of the tensions in Rohmer's film is that it contains in itself the tension between “traditional” sources to define one's identity and the restless human anxiety of being original without relying on what is external. Thus, ultimately, Jean-Louis' evolution throughout the movie relates to his internalization of the horizon of meaning of Catholicism by choosing Françoise over Maud. And the masterful way in which Rohmer depicts the difficulty of this process lies precisely in how he uses the stylistic elements that operate in film, by contrasting how Trintignant, the actor who plays Jean-Louis, relates within the filmic space with both Maud and Françoise.

Notes

1. Alistair Fox et al., 'Introduction: Contemporary French Cinema—Continuity and Change in a Global Context', in *A Companion to Contemporary French Cinema*, ed. Alistair Fox et al. (Chichester & Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 5.
2. Antoine de Baecque et al., *Éric Rohmer: A Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 52.
3. Michel Marie, 'The Veterans of the New Wave, Their Heirs, and Contemporary French Cinema', in *A Companion to Contemporary French Cinema*, ed. Alistair Fox et al. (Chichester & Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 167.
4. Richard John Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, 2nd ed, Wisconsin Studies in Film (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 245–48.
5. Neupert, 249, 132, xvi.
6. Michel Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*, trans. Richard John Neupert (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003), 137.
7. Robert B. Pippin, *Filmed Thought: Cinema as Reflective Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 5, doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226672144.001.0001.
8. Stephen Mulhall, *On Film*, Third edition (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), 4.
9. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 114.
10. Éric Rohmer, *The Taste for Beauty*, ed. Jean Narboni, trans. Carol Volk, Cambridge Studies in Film (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 64.
11. Norman King, 'Eye for Irony: Eric Rohmer's *Ma Nuit Chez Maud* (1969)', in *French Film: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 202, doi.org/10.4324/9781315006024.
12. Taylor, 37.

Cormac McCarthy in Style and Content

Constantin Waldschmidt

The University of Notre Dame's de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture is holding its 23rd annual Fall Conference this week. "Child of God: Personhood in Cormac McCarthy" is one of the first day's colloquies. The title alludes to a 1973 novel about a young homicidal vagabond, an Appalachian serial killer. Its violence and specificity make it an unusual topic among opening liturgies and pro-life panels; no other writer received a dedicated panel, academics and philosophers inclusive.

RealClearPolitics held its second-ever "Books & Culture Symposium" during the week of McCarthy's death, publishing three essays about the author and redistributing at least a dozen more that *First Things* and *The American Conservative* printed in his honor. Even Nick Land, the notorious founder of "neoreaction," has taken to calling McCarthy's work "scripture." Mainstream newspapers and art journals released tributes, but some major journals at the other end of the spectrum, which normally comment on culture, were mostly silent. A political bias against recognizing McCarthy may seem puzzling: despite the critical popularity of his work, McCarthy was barely even a public figure, let alone a political one. He infamously lived in seclusion, and declined almost every interview request across his 58 years as a writer. Why do some conservatives show warmth to McCarthy, and some progressives do not?

Why does McCarthy receive special attention among conservatives? We can approach this question in its first principles: the form and content of the work itself. McCarthy has a classical style of narrative conflicts, and his letters insist on submitting human characters to chthonic metaphysical forces.

Rarely do McCarthy's characters express the Christian virtues normally associated with conservative literary heroes such as Dostoevsky and Tolkien. Actors of good are hard to come by, frequently finding themselves vexed by fate. His most iconic characters are his villains. Anton Chigurh and Judge Holden, his two most well-known, seem to wash up naturally from the setting, like artifacts from some lost civilization.

Modern novels tend to eschew man-versus-man as a mode of literary conflict, preferring to depict man against society, or against himself. When major, named antagonists do exist in modern novels, they are either distant and absent (Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* opposes Marlow not in a literal, but rather in a psychological or moral way), are an impersonal face for a large-scale conflict (Sauron, Big Brother), or are aggressively characterized as nuanced and multifaceted victims of circumstance. By writing about dynamic and personal villains who nonetheless embody evil, McCarthy chooses a method of literary conflict that feels more traditional, hearkening back to Goethe and Shakespeare. The words and actions of McCarthy's evildoers contribute most heavily to his story's thematic keys, rather than those of his protagonists. They often give extended monologues defining the philosophy of the novel, as Mephistopheles or Shylock would. This is not to say that his other characters are passive—they tend to be virile, blue-collar heroes—but that characters possess theodic parameters. Heroes and villains respond to each other but also to God, a triangular approach to characterization from which McCarthy bares his own theology.

Opaque passages from *No Country for Old Men* serve as an illustration of both this triangular relationship, and the antique principles McCarthy applies to the substance of his novels. Sitting in the office of a Houston drug kingpin, the professional assassin Carson Wells is tasked with cleaning up after our more brutal and erratic villain, Anton Chigurh. Accepting the mission, he asks one last question:

"Can I ask you something?"

Sure.

I couldn't come back up in that elevator, could I?

Not to this floor. Why?

I was just interested. Security. Always interesting.

It recodes itself after every trip. A randomly generated five digit number. It doesn't print out anywhere. I dial a number and it reads the code back over the phone. I give it to you and you punch it in. Does that answer your question?

Nice.

Yes.

I counted the floors from the street.

And?

There's a floor missing.

I'll have to look into it.

Wells smiled."

Written as a classical gunslinger, Wells is cocky, but levelheaded and capable. As he approaches the building where his meeting takes place, he is thinking of security, floorplans, entrances, and exits. He smugly gleans that the building has more floors than the elevator does. He accounts for everything except for the unaccountable, symbolized by the 'missing floor' beneath his feet. This is almost certainly the building's thirteenth floor; to "skip it" for superstitious reasons is a common tradition, especially in the American West. Wells is not "unprepared" in a mundane way; he is remarkably careful and perceptive. Instead, superstition seems to be something Wells hasn't even heard of; it never crossed his mind the way it has the humble civilian. By placing so much trust in his own skill and preparation, Wells appears completely ignorant of chaos as a principle, and the force with which raw misfortune can sweep him off the table. Wells has a deterministic worldview—and he can determine it. This makes him easy prey for Chigurh (hand-of-fate, par excellence).

Compare this with the attitude of our villain, who famously flips coins to decide whether those he encounters live or die:

"You know what the date is on this coin?

No.

It's nineteen fifty-eight. It's been traveling twenty-two years to get here. And now it's here. And I'm here. And I've got my hand over it. And it's either heads or tails. And you have to say. Call it.

I don't know what it is I stand to win.

In the blue light the man's face was beaded thinly with sweat. He licked his upper lip.

You stand to win everything, Chigurh said. Everything."

McCarthy uses the character of Carson Wells against a villain to contrast approaches to fate and chance. Like Chigurh, he is a seasoned killer; but unlike him, Wells believes in the predictability of fate, and the triumph of human order. Later in the novel, Chigurh makes short work of him, posing as a civilian for an excruciating ambush:

"Everything that Wells had ever known or thought or loved drained slowly down the wall behind him. His mother's face, his First Communion, women he had known. The faces of men as they died on their knees

before him.”

Carson Wells dies in fear, ferocious prose emphasizing the futility of his self-assuredness and reason. He is overwhelmed and under-equipped for Chigurh, the archon of this world, a world of Heraclitean fire. Change and oblivion loom over it, the only earthly certainties. It shares the trancelike savagery that immortalizes *Daniel* and *Revelation*. Even Chigurh is later maimed completely at random, when intoxicated teenagers run a stop sign. It's an effective reminder of nature's authority over her own enforcers.

Overall, primitivism in form and content makes McCarthy resonate with the right across its many fringes. His composition is archaic and terrifying. The men are rugged, the villains ruthless, the conflicts brutal and direct. The proud are brought low, and princes made to wander in a trackless waste. Mankind is portrayed as weary and troubled, causing many to accuse the provincial writer of nihilism. This doesn't square with an unmistakable sense of the sublime, something that causes more sophisticated critics to compare his work to the Old Testament. Humans are presented through their most basic elements, and without God. The stages he sets are desperate and cruel, but also rostrums from which to plead forgiveness.

This was the style of “America's Prophet,” her last great writer, who reanimated the forgotten provinces. Across twelve novels, Cormac McCarthy decorated the crumbling South and windswept West with sleek and original characters, who embody the spirit of these territories without resorting to revanchism or hokey nostalgia. His gaze draws across these landscapes with love, spotting ospreys and limping steppewolves, humming with space and the thrill of providential conquest. Underneath it all, nature is our central character; in his few interviews, he could not help but rove about the native flora. The outrageous poverty he conducted, such as washing in rivers or sleeping in stone hovels and old barns, was more than a practice of discipline, but in context, was a way to rest closer to the heart of his beloved America.

McCarthy was not only good, but *great*, and delivered aesthetic marvels to his jaded modern country. They are as sinister as they are glorious. He contributes positively to the Western canon when it is under duress, and is a bridge to the highest hope.

Capital Impressions

Emil Pitkin '09

Rabbit Hunting

The riders in front of me were treated to a piercing, reverberating, existential yawp. We were inside the tunnel of the Arlington Memorial Bridge, midway through the bicycle leg of a triathlon, and I had taken account of how many miles I had to go before I could sleep. Compounding the suffering was a curious sight: hundreds of riders on high-performance, titanium space-age machines, and one eccentric fellow on a City Bike accessorized with iron cage for the bicycle lock, pedaling uphill the whole race.

Stalin and Prokofiev died on the same day in 1953. There were no wreaths or flowers at Prokofiev's funeral because everything floral in Moscow was commandeered for ex-Comrade Stalin's obsequies. So too, the bike shops of DC had no bikes for me to rent the morning of the largest race in town. You might ask why I hadn't attended to securing the only piece of equipment one needs to complete a triathlon, say, the day before. I would answer that if Tanya had told me before Friday at 5pm that there was a triathlon on Saturday at 8am, and that she was competing in it, I would have.

That Friday, I had just finished giving a sales demonstration to Tanya, a policy specialist at the National Governors Association. The NGA, unlike its partisan cousins, the Republican and Democratic Governors Associations, exists to support the governors of all 50 states. To have NGA as a client conferred legitimacy in a town with a nose for pretenders. I would have this quarry.

We got to talking about weekend plans. She went first, and volunteered that she'd been training for a couple months for tomorrow's DC tri. Thus I was informed about my weekend plans. "What a coincidence!" I said. "I'll see you there." I went home that evening and signed up for the DC triathlon.

As soon as I heaved across the finish line, jelly-legged, I took a Gatorade and jumped into the fan section to be ready to clap loudly for Tanya when she crossed the line. I had expected to finish well before her and have a few minutes to recover myself. I was surprised when she tapped me on the shoulder in two or three minutes, already changed into street clothes, fresh, and smelling of shampoo.

"Good morning!" she beamed. "Have a nice race?"

"Not bad. Really impressed by your time though."

"Don't be. I didn't feel like racing today. Just came by to cheer on my friends."

As I rode back to Union Station on my City Bike to drop it off, I remembered the best laid plans of mice and men and cracked my first smile of the day.

This was the first time that I'd gone "rabbit hunting." The term originated with my friend Tory, who lent a hand of friendship when I told him we were trying to do business with a three-letter government agency. We were building a product that we thought they would need, but they wouldn't disclose in writing what they actually needed—understandably, they didn't want to tip their hand about the ways and means of their investigations. I needed to speak to a senior at the agency. Tory was professionally acquainted with their Senior Counsel, and invited him to a coffee in the Hart Senate Office Building. My job was to arrive five minutes after their coffee date started, recognize Tory, feign surprise, and introduce myself to the Senior Counsel, Mr. Devon Rabbit.

Nothing came of the fortuitous meeting with Mr. Rabbit, but a few months after the triathlon the NGA accepted our proposal to become a client, the first time we had bested our competitors head-to-head. When I got the call with the news, I put the phone on mute and let out a rapturous primal scream. I'd hunted my first rabbit.

My Favorite Painting

On the second floor of the National Gallery of Art, the Old Dutch and Flemish Masters murmur in their native tongues. You walk up to the fountain underneath the rotunda, you turn left, and in the corridor you pass two galleries without looking in. At the third, you glance inside to see if anybody is walking toward you, you let them pass, and then you close your eyes and take some measured steps, aiming directly at the back wall and one painting to the left.

You're inside the Rembrandt gallery, where you are surrounded by 12 of the only 300 Rembrandt paintings extant in the whole world. But today you've come for only one. You stand before it with your eyes closed, remembering the uplift of the last time. You breathe in very deeply because you want every sense taut, and then you open your eyes and feel restored.

The Mill is my favorite painting at the National Gallery of Art in DC. Gunmetal gray cloud in the top-left corner, thick. A few small incidental figures at the bottom of the frame: a mother or a governess walking a small child down a sloping path; a young woman crouched over with her washing in the river. In the bottom right-hand corner, the stern of a rowboat, a rower, and two oars; two more strokes and he'll make landfall beside the washing girl. You don't notice any of this until you tell yourself "I will notice everything about this painting." Because what you see first, and continue to see long after you have left the gallery, is a harsh brown cliff, the river curling round it, and atop the cliff, like a statue atop a pedestal, a proud and solitary Dutch windmill.

The foreboding cloud behind it has made way for a clearing sky, some almost-open sky above the windmill's blades, innocent white clouds filtering clean light over the wood across the river. But the opposite may hold too. Like Benjamin Franklin who was asked whether the sun's half disk over the horizon in Independence Hall represented the rising or the setting sun, it is fair to ask whether the storm has given way to the clearing or whether the calm must give way to thunder.

Unapproached and unapproachable, alone against the elements, monumental, the mill dominates the painting. It is no wonder. While the governess walks her charge to the river, the man rows, and the lady washes, they owe their afternoon to the windmill that has kept the river's waters from rising high and drowning all of Amsterdam, governess, child, rower, washer, and the rest. From their lowly vantage point, they can't even see it, maybe forget it, but woe to them if the blades stop spinning. The windmill stands, heralded and unheralded, harnessing nature's winds to beat back nature's currents, doing what it must, doing all it knows.

Chicken and Piano

Whenever the Washington cutthroat of *House of Cards* renown, Frank Underwood, needed to recede from the world, he traded the crisp linens of elite DC and stepped over the threshold of Freddy's BBQ Joint to roll up his sleeves and gorge on ribs. Secluded in his booth, he enjoyed the double incognito protection from the simple fact that nobody would ever think to look there for him.

I had a Freddy's of my own. Whenever I felt the world was too much with me, I walked up Rhode Island Avenue, turned onto the 14th St. corridor and just after S street, ducked my head and walked into *Chicken and Whiskey*, a refreshingly descriptive name for a joint bisected by a heavy steel door: chicken in the front, whis-

key in the back.

Always “half a *pollo, por favor*” to which the Incan-looking chicken cutter always smiled and cut a little more than half of the *pollo* with his chicken-cutting scissors. Some sweet fried plantains, rice and beans, mounds of yellow sauce and orange sauce (they were unmarked, unnamed), all piled on a greasy sheet, a can of guarana, what the Brazilians call the drink of happiness—the antipode of my sociable club dinners—and I’d settle apart from the other people, along the rail that ran the whole perimeter of the joint. I’d take a fork and knife (a civilized instinct always gripped me for a moment in front of the silverware cups), lay them aside, and maul the chicken, alone, apart, silent, and happy. I wonder what Epicurus would have thought.

Other times I followed in the steps I had serendipitously first taken in 2008, a 20-year-old summer intern. Out and across Key Bridge into Georgetown, up the slope until the gothic spires of the university, like spectral stalagmites against the night, signaled that I had almost come to where I needed most to be: Up the entrance into Healey Hall, up three flights (“walk in like you own the place,” as the Social Security actuary once taught me, whenever I stepped into places not my own), open the heavy wooden doors into the hall announced with a “Gaston Hall” plaque, remark on how the stained-glass ecclesiastical hall reminds you of Sanders Theater in Harvard, and that when you returned from DC for your senior year of college and you went to Sanders Theater for your roommate’s a cappella concert, it made you think of Gaston Hall here (but ten years have passed) hop onto the stage, settle onto the black leather bench, lightly pull up your trousers and flip the tails of your blazer over the back, as my mother had taught me, and get up two hours later, after bringing Chopin and Rachmaninoff, Liszt and Scarlatti and Schubert to sit with you, not alone, though apart, silent, moved, and happy.

Drawn to Faces

Catherine Ezell

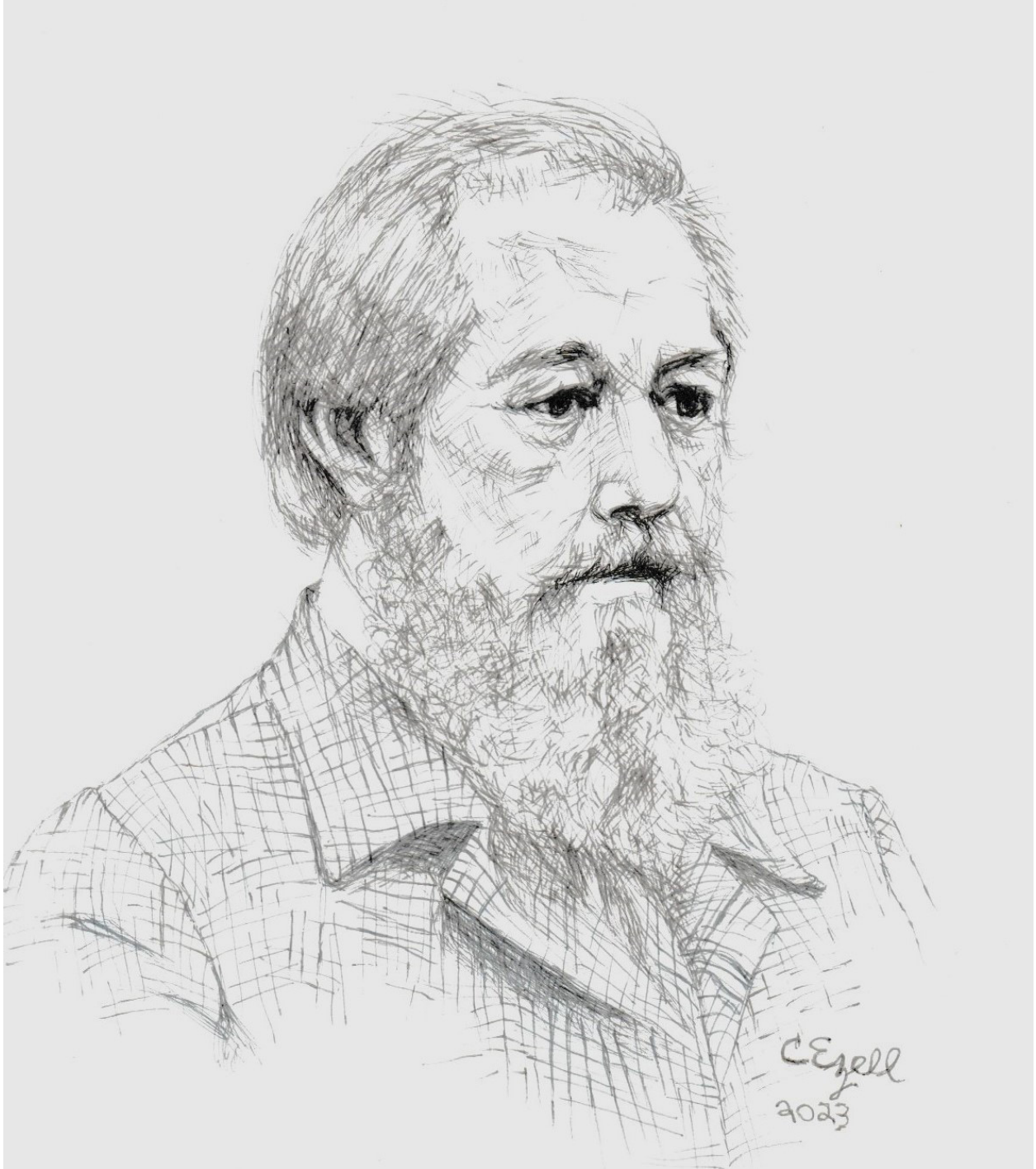
John Singer Sargent defined a portrait as “a likeness of someone with something slightly wrong about the mouth.” Before photography, portraits were important for identification records and displaying one’s class station in life, with jewelry and finery included. Modern artists create portraits in abstraction or as self-expression. Combining my love of literature and a compulsion toward drawing and painting, I find myself challenged to convey the characters and personalities of authors from how I read their works. By studying words on a page, I imagine what an author is thinking in his writing, and attempt to show on his face the motions of the mind as they flow from one emotion or idea to another.

In a museum, the most compelling portraits, those that I want to revisit many times, are the ones that reveal in the expression a momentary thought or emotion and suggest another to follow momentarily. Narrative paintings do this by depicting actions and scenes of a fleeting moment while anticipating the next action to come. Titian’s “Rape of Europa” narrates the terror of abduction, then softens it with humorous hints of imminent sexual pleasure. The enigmatic smile of Leonardo da Vinci’s “Mona Lisa” puzzles and fascinates viewers with its changeable nuances. The penetrating eyes of Edouard Manet’s self-portrait intrigue viewers and pique curiosity about his impressionistic, painterly departure from realism.

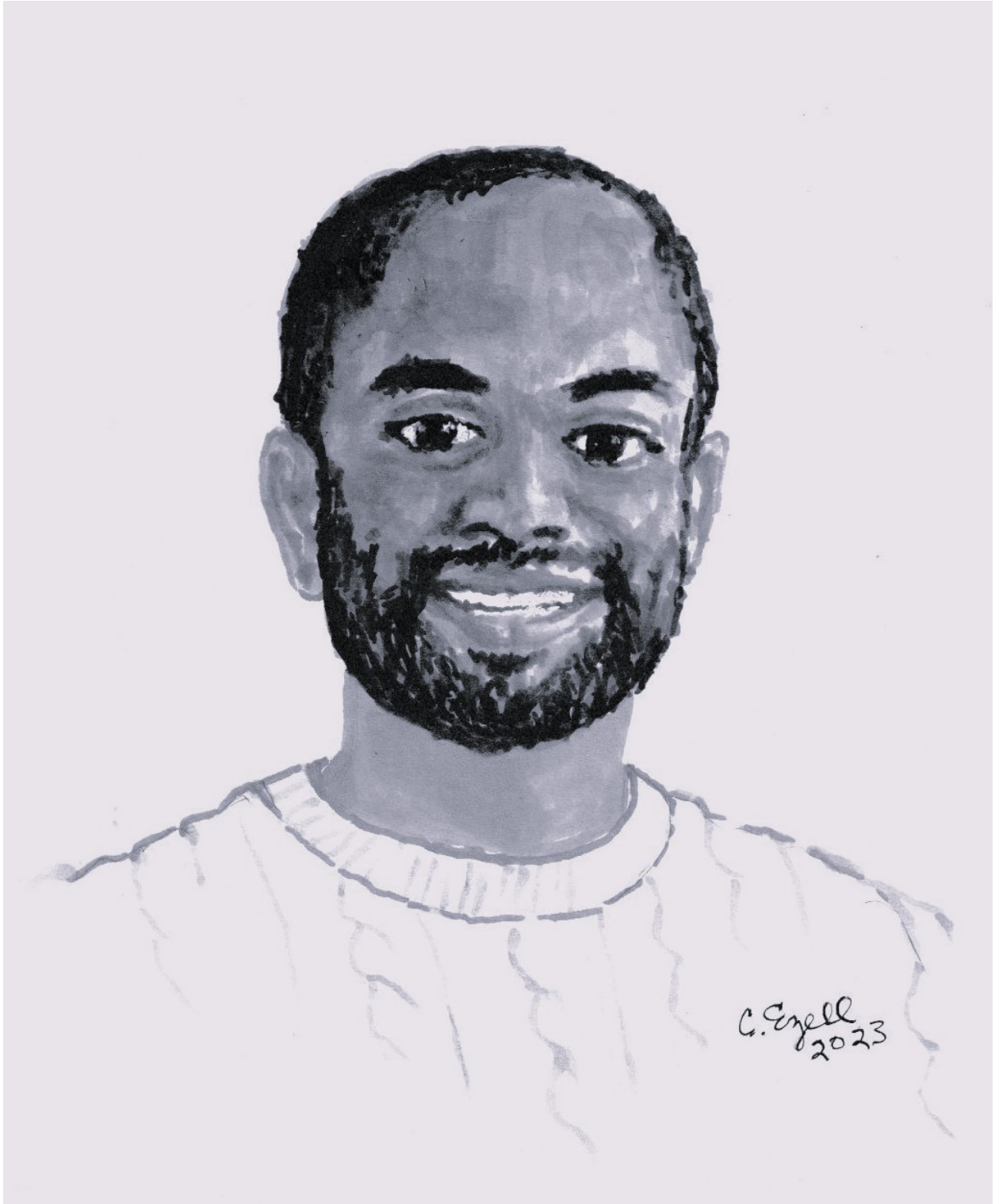
Good writers are contemplative, cerebral, and profound in the pursuit of truth about the human condition. By examining the faces and the writings of a unique, creative intelligence, I endeavor to interpret my perceptions visually. In a triptych drawing, “Southern Writers,” for example, gray graphite seems the appropriate medium to portray the wistful wisdom and genteel endurance prevalent in Eudora Welty’s work. Black charcoal pencil suits the bold, shocking, and confusing narration of William Faulkner’s stories. Softer vine charcoal lends Tennessee Williams a beguiling effect, echoing his romantically gentle plays that hide a disturbing underbelly of sex and violence.



Southern Writers: Eudora Welty, William Faulkner, and Tennessee Williams



Alexander Solzhenitsyn



Darshan Kalola



Mohammed Said Albalimi



Henry Stratakis-Allen



Cindy Chopoidaló

The Women of Homer

Eirene Allen

The Greek text we know in English as the *Odyssey* famously begins with the word *andra* (ἄνδρα). From George Chapman's 1615 translation up to Emily Wilson's 2017 version, this word has commonly been translated into English as *man*. It announces that the *Odyssey* is the story of a man, and encourages us to anticipate a biographical narrative of *his* journey. But if this is the story of a man and his personal journey, why does the narrative spend so much time away from Odysseus in Ithaca with his wife and son?

An answer can be found by returning to the first word of the epic, *andra*, which in both ancient and modern Greek can mean either *man* or *husband*:

A husband, a versatile man with many plots and schemes,
relate to me, Muse, of him who very much
Was made to wander, after sacking the sacred citadel of Troy.

The word's dual meaning signifies that Odysseus' identity as *andra* is shaped by his relationship with a woman, his wife Penelope. When we restore the dual meaning of *andra*, we restore the essentially social nature of Odysseus' subjectivity: He is not an 'I' but a 'we.' The story of Odysseus, then, is not the story of a man, but the story of a marriage, a family, and a community.

Our first glimpse of Penelope comes three-quarters of the way into the *Odyssey*'s first book. From the women's quarters, she hears the bard, Phemius, singing about the failed homecomings of the Achaeans. Troubled by the song's content, she descends to confront Phemius and, in a much-discussed passage, is told by Telemachus to return to her own rooms and her own work:

But going into the house, take care of your own works,
The loom and the distaff, and urge your handmaidens
To go to their work. For speech is the concern of men
Alone, and me most of all. For might in the house is mine.

Read in modern English, Telemachus' imperative can sound uncomfortably like a scolding, but in ancient Greek, the terminology of weaving and the terminology of shipbuilding flow from a related lexical network that is invisible in English. The word for *loom* (*bistos*) shares a root with those for *mast* (*histon*) and *sail* (*bistion*). In Book Five, when we finally meet Odysseus on Calypso's island, he crafts a raft with which to escape, and this raft is fitted with an *histon* (*mast*) and an *bistion* (*sail*). In Book Eight, Odysseus is tied to the mast's feet, *histopedes*, also the word for the feet of a loom. Both nouns are related to the verb *histemi*, meaning 'to make something stand upright' or 'to set up', the verb used to describe Penelope when she arrives in the hall and stations herself beside one of the posts that hold up the roof.

These complex associations, which are woven tightly together in the Greek language in ways that cannot be reproduced in English, suggest that the loom and the ship coexist as complementary spheres of authority, equally essential for the productive functioning of an island-dwelling family and community. Telemachus' instruction to his mother to "take care of your own works, / The loom and the distaff" urge her to shape the song of the hero's homecoming herself by returning to the media of her authority and cunning, her loom and her distaff.

In Book Nineteen, Penelope describes to a disguised Odysseus the ruse she had used to hold off the suitors:

While *the suitors* urge for a wedding feast, I spin schemes to trap them.
My first, which a superhuman force breathed into my consciousness,

was a large cloth,
Setting it up on a great loom, to weave in the large room,
A subtle and well-fitted thing. Straightaway, I spoke among *the suitors*.

The ‘web’ Penelope spun is not metaphoric. Her ruse was the funeral shroud that she claimed she needed to weave for Laertes, her father-in-law. As long as the shroud was in progress, she could forestall choosing a future husband from among the suitors besieging her. In this way, she prevents events at Ithaca from moving forward, holding Odysseus’ place and buying him time to return.

Women are described weaving in the *Iliad* twice, and at equidistant points. The first instance comes three books into the epic, the second three books from the end. Both occur at pivotal moments in the narrative when events are in the midst of a cosmic turn. Identical phrases, which appear only in these two places, describe the object of each woman’s labor: *diplaka porphyrein*, a dark, gleaming, double-folded mantle.

The first weaver described is Helen, the daughter of Zeus, whose removal from Sparta brought the Achaeans to the gates of Troy. When the bard turns his attention to Helen, the war over possession of her has been halted. Instead, a duel will be held between her first husband, Menelaos of Sparta, and her current one, Trojan prince Paris. Both sides have agreed to abide by the results of the duel, whose winner will claim Helen and her treasure.

The messenger goddess Iris has been sent to fetch Helen and bring her to the Trojan walls to watch the contest between her past and current (and hence future) husbands:

Iris found *Helen* in a large room weaving on a great loom,
A dark, gleaming, double-folded mantle. She was sprinkling into it the many contests
Of the Trojans, tamers of horses, and the Achaeans, clad in bronze,
Who on account of her were suffering at the hands of Ares.

The vision of Helen here portrays her telling the story of the Trojan war. As a bard does with song and a potter with clay, Helen instantiates the story. Her medium is thread and cloth. In this way, women could record events, convey messages to each other, and express entreaties to superhuman forces. In one sense, then, Helen is the passive object of the contest; simultaneously, her weaving the war story suggests her agency to participate in the creation of that story, as Penelope uses her weaving to shape the story at Ithaca.

Andromache, wife of the Trojan prince Hector, is the second weaver described in the *Iliad*. Her husband has been killed, but no messenger has yet arrived to bring her the news. She continues at her work, unaware that the best defender of Troy has fallen, sealing the fate of the city and with it the fate of her son and herself:

But in an inner room of the high house, she was weaving at her loom
A dark, gleaming, double-folded mantle. She was sprinkling into it
patterns of dappled flowers.

Unlike Helen, Andromache is not weaving a story but creating flower patterns, which may have been connected to weaving prayers for protection.

English translations vary in their renderings of the phrase *diplaka porphyrein*. Some translators opt to retain the repetition, using identical language in both Books Three and Twenty-Two. Others choose to vary the phrase according to their own metrical needs. Noticing the repetition within the variation, however, invites us to perceive a textual relationship between these women, both hoping to survive in a city under siege.

Both women have husbands on the field of battle. Both are weaving *a large, gleaming double-folded mantle*. Both are communicating with superhuman forces, Helen with Iris and Andromache (potentially) through prayer. Where Helen weaves in a large room, Andromache weaves in an inner room. Where Helen tells the story of the war, in which she herself lies at the center, Andromache is at the fringes praying for deliverance. Where

Helen is the cause of the war and will survive the fall of Troy, returning to her former role as queen of Sparta, Andromache will experience a reversal of fortune, from being the wife of the most revered Trojan prince to being enslaved by the Achaeans. When she is depicted weaving, this reversal has already occurred, with the death of Hector sealing her fate and rendering her woven prayers futile.

Both women echo in Penelope. Though far from the field of battle, Penelope feels its effects. Like Andromache, she prays for the protection and safe return home of her husband, whose fate at times remains hidden from her. Like Helen, Penelope is both an agent who weaves a story with a great loom in a large room and an object who the suitors fight to possess. And like both women, Penelope's fate emerges in communion with the gods with whom she communicates.

The challenge of interpreting Homer is entangled with the challenge of translating Homer, and it is here that Homer's women have gotten lost.

What Hath Athens to Do with Jerusalem? The Homeric Centos of Aelia Eudocia

Lauren Heilman

Tertullian posed the question *What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?* in fear of pagan influence on Christian thought. Of the many possible responses to Tertullian's question, perhaps the best answer lies not in rhetorical rebuttal, but in a biography. Aelia Eudocia Augusta, née Athenais in honor of her native Athens, is known as the pagan who converted to Christianity upon her marriage to the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius II. Her travels spanned from Athens to Constantinople to Jerusalem; born in the birthplace of Greek philosophy, she finished her life in the birthplace of Christianity. Thus, geography and her lifespan linked the two cities Tertullian felt to be in conflict. But more importantly, her religious, literary, and philosophical ideas brought Athens and Jerusalem into even closer conversation.

Eudocia's father was a philosopher, Leontios, who had given her a brilliant education. In addition to studying philosophy, she was brought up on the verses of Homer and Pindar and knew large portions by heart. Her father prophesied that she had a great destiny, so he left her little in his will. This, coupled with her brothers leaving her nearly destitute, propelled her to seek redress at the court of Pulcheria, sister to the emperor Theodosius II. Impressed by her courage and rhetorical abilities, Pulcheria, a vowed virgin who had been on a bride hunt for her less politically adept brother, introduced Eudocia to both Theodosius and the Christian faith. Eudocia's conversion, marriage, and new political power seemed to fulfill the great destiny her father prophesied. But popularity combined with politics can prove a double-edged sword. Jealousy and rivalry led to exile for Eudocia.

Yet, throughout her life, she straddled the milieux of Athens and Jerusalem, of pagans and Christians, with seemingly effortless grace. She never relinquished her faith or her Greek literary heritage. Her separation from Theodosius did not reverse her conversion, just as her conversion had not altered her profound love of Homer. During her time in Constantinople, she had already begun composing verses. In Antioch, where she had supervised building projects, she addressed the crowds professing to be "of their birth and blood," a citation from Homer linking her with their Greek tradition. But it was during her exile in Jerusalem that she composed her greatest surviving work—and the greatest proof of a harmony between pagan and Christian traditions—her Homeric centos:

Hear, innumerable tribes of dwellers among men,
as many mortals as now eat bread upon the earth
and as many as dwell near both the dawn and the sun
and as many as dwell behind the murky gloom of the underworld
so that I may say the things that my soul in my breast urges me
that you may recognize a God as well as a Man.

Each line in the above passage was taken from either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, stitched together into a seamless whole—a new story woven out of the old. That is the *cento* genre, which complemented the "patchwork" of Eudocia's own life. It is a Christian epic focusing on the miracles and passion of Christ as found in the Gospels, drawn entirely from Homeric lines. Eudocia took inspiration from an unfinished cento poem by a bishop named Patricius, which she revised and completed, creating the lengthiest and most artistically dazzling Christian cento ever composed. Without compromising either the beauty of Homer's verse or the eternal truths of the Gospel, Eudocia allowed the flavor of the former to spill into the latter. As lines taken from Homer inevitably conjure images of their original scenes for the reader, a particularly adept centonist makes the most of the analogies. For example, to portray Christ as the sacrificial ram, Eudocia pulls two lines from

the *Iliad* and one from the *Odyssey*. In each, Christ is associated with Odysseus: first in Odysseus' likeness to a ram noticed by Priam from the walls of Troy (*Iliad* 3.197-98) and then as the ram Odysseus uses for cover to escape the Cyclops in *Odyssey* 9.432. The man/ram duality found in the Homeric texts cloaks the God/Man duality of the Christian *cento*. In fact, the *Odyssey* 9.432 line may be intended as an indirect reference to the Incarnation: as Odysseus hid himself under the ram, so God was enveloped in the body of a man. Even the last line of the poem cited above, "that you may recognize a God as well as a Man" (*Iliad* 5.128), has been variously translated as "a man and a God" (Rey 1998) and "him who is God and man" (Sowers 2020) to reflect the duality of Christ. The Homeric line refers to the supernatural ability Athena has just bestowed upon Diomedes to discern the presence of immortals on the field from mere men. In any case, it seems that Eudocia had such a duality in mind, especially given the then-current Monophysite controversy, the belief that Christ's humanity was fully deified. It is noteworthy that Eudocia herself wrestled with Monophysite ideas in her own faith before ultimately dismissing them. Thus, Eudocia's *cento* blends not only the layers of duality present in the Homeric epics, but also in Christian belief. Each thread is seamlessly interwoven, recognizable to each of the "innumerable tribes" she addresses, yet enjoyable even to the lay reader as a compelling poetic narrative of Christ. This is the beauty and complexity of the *cento*.

The *cento* genre itself receives its name from the Greek word κέντρον, represented variously as *a needle* or *prick*, thus tying textiles to the art of stitching texts. The word κέντρον also appears in the Koine of the New Testament in the conversion of Paul. The freeborn Roman citizen, student of Greek, Pharisee of Pharisees, and then persecutor of Christians was blinded by a heavenly light and heard the voice of God saying, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is* hard for thee to kick against the *pricks* (κέντρα)" (Acts 9:5). Thus, it is a splendid linguistic *tour de force* that the "pricks" (κέντρα) that pushed Paul, who was cosmopolitan and highly educated, into conversion and a prolific theological career should also be, in Greek, the name of the genre (κέντρον) used in the prolific career of the cosmopolitan and highly educated Eudocia. As the student of Gamaliel could beckon to the acolytes of the "unknown God" or quote "what our own poets say," so Leontios' student Eudocia could depict her God in the language of the old poets being of their race and blood, whether in Athens or Jerusalem.

The Problem of Justice in Homer and Plato

In the Fall 2023 term, the Abigail Adams Institute (AAI) organized a ten-part series on ancient Greek political thought centering on the central question or problem of justice in human and divine relations. Cognizant of the need to pose big and basic questions to our students, we chose to go back to the beginnings of Western civilization and look there for inspiration and wisdom.

Our journey started with the cold military-political calculus of peoples at war, vividly captured in what is referred to as the Melian Dialogue in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*: "The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." Is this to be our guide for practicing international relations? After this initial foray into the problems of collective justice, we encountered examples of a different kind of justice, manifested in the souls of Homer's exceptional individuals. Our first case study was the shrewd and calculating eponymous survivor-hero of the *Odyssey*, and his complicated relationship with men and Gods alike. The second case study featured the more traditional ancient Greek hero, Achilles, and the struggle in his soul between honor, glory, *philia*, and justice, memorably dramatized in his encounter with the Trojan King Priam near the end of the *Iliad*.

The second half of the seminar turned to the most famous Platonic dialogue, the *Republic*. The shift from the poetic to philosophical mode of thought was striking as we were removed from the enchanted world of dactylic hexameter and thrown into the rationalist grind of the famous Socratic dialectic. As our instructor kept reminding us, the dialogue form that Plato used did not do away completely with poetry, so we had to keep an eye out on the literary dimension of the action. Nevertheless, the texture of our conversation had changed as we were carefully dissecting critical turning points in Socrates' dialogues with Polemarchus and Thrasymachus, in particular. Professor Mariana Beatriz Noe from Harvard's Philosophy Department graced us with a special talk on the notion of angry justice, skillfully captured in Book I of the *Republic*. Can a philosopher be rightfully angry? Or is anger incompatible with a philosophical nature?

After a fast and shallow dive into the Platonic cave—we dedicated only one session to this most significant allegory—we fittingly concluded the seminar by returning to the question of justice in the regime. The Athenian democracy, seen in the beginning of this seminar as a merciless imperial force, comes to be dissected masterfully from within by a peculiar new hero of the *Republic*, the always probing Socrates.

I am personally grateful to everyone who made the Homer and Plato seminar an intellectually intense and wholesome learning experience: our competent and engaging staff at the Abigail Adams Institute, the young people who keep returning to seek wisdom in and from classic works, various professors and scholars at Harvard who occasionally take part in our philosophical adventures, and above all our Senior Fellow, Manuel Lopez, for his determination to make these books come alive and to immerse us into the strange and wonderful world of the Achaeans.

Danilo Petranovich
Director, The Abigail Adams Institute

Liberal education today is usually taken to mean learning about diverse cultures, faiths, worldviews, and ways of life, with the hope that this will make us more tolerant and compassionate, and perhaps more sensitive to the injustices of our own society. And liberal education, so understood, still does make students less narrow and parochial in certain ways. But if there is even the slightest challenge to our own existing beliefs in this sort of education, it is only in the direction of political and moral views *already* dominant in our society. For example, no major liberal arts college offers a course in say, Islam, with the demand, or even the expectation, that students should openly and seriously consider traditional Islamic teachings concerning the relations of the sexes. On the contrary, all manner of questions relating to sexual equality and the family that were matters of serious discussion in Western thought from Aristotle to Rousseau, are now shut down, even in classes by professors of philosophy on these very philosophers, as “toxic.”

We turn to Homer and Plato in our seminar to find the education that we so sorely lack: the original or most demanding meaning of *liberal* education, education that *liberates* us from the *cave* of our society’s prejudices and blinkers, so that we might come to see ourselves as we really are. But *what* are these prejudices and blinkers, such that the greatest and most distinctive achievement of the West should be precisely this liberal education? Why is this education so difficult and rare, such as to be the primary legacy of the philosophers to us? I believe the answer is Justice. Our prejudices run so deep because they have their root in our attachment to justice; and the hopes arising from that same attachment prevent us from seeing justice itself, and morality generally, with the clarity with which we see, say, rocks and trees. The book that guides our seminar is the most careful examination of *justice*, and is, therefore, also even more fundamentally the book on genuine *education*, education that frees us from the cave: Plato’s *Republic*.

We start with a very accessible presentation of the question, a section of Thucydides called the Melian Dialogue. The situation is extreme and clear: The Athenians have landed a vastly superior military force on a small, weak island nation, Melos, and tell the inhabitants to submit to them—*or else!* They say to them, don’t you talk about justice—you should be thinking only about saving your necks. But *even in this case*, where you would think justice is at its weakest, Thucydides makes us wonder whether the Athenians are as beyond considerations of justice as they think. For he also takes great care to show us their belief in the nobility of their empire, their pride in their own manliness, bravery, and worthiness, and their contempt for Spartan caution and selfishness. Perhaps even the (imprudent) frankness of the Athenians about their own injustice is a kind of attachment to justice. (But the Melians are slaughtered.)

This demand for a deep psychological analysis of our attachment to justice, that we see so clearly in the Melian dialogue, runs throughout Homer and Plato. In our examination of Homer’s *Iliad*, we focus on Achilles. Why is he so angry at being dishonored? What does he—and what do we—hope for from receiving justice, and a just recognition, for what we do? Isn’t virtue its own reward (“be good for goodness’ sake”)? Homer presents not only the doubts of an Achilles about justice, with his lion-hearted and self-sacrificial devotion, but also those of an Odysseus, with his cunning tricks to get ahead, even by “playing” the gods. Homer invites us to travel down both high road and low in our search for justice.

This dual psychological examination of justice reaches its culmination in our examination of Plato’s *Republic*, with which we close the seminar. By showing us Socrates’ examination of the beliefs in justice held by the earnest Polemarchus (the high road) and the “amoral” sophist Thrasymachus (the low road), by showing us justice in the law-abiding and moderate man, in the erotic and lawless man, and even in the tyrant, he brings to the surface our buried opinions about justice and by doing so, shows how surprisingly radical and extreme our expectations from it are—that at bottom we are, most of all, believers and creatures of hope. In this sense, Plato liberates us by showing us the “god” Homer taught us was concealed in the heart of each man; liberal education, in its truest sense, is very different from today’s merely secular education.

Manuel Lopez '90

In the minds of most Americans, the pursuit of justice is at the core of our politics and the way we structure our society. But do we really know what justice is, or what we are aiming to achieve when we set out to shape and maintain a “just” society? In our recent ten-week AAI seminar, “The Problem of Justice in Homer and Plato,” we dove into the world of Ancient Greece to dissect the meaning and value of justice on individual and societal levels.

In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Homer examines justice through the medium of poetic narrative. Full of mythical and religious themes and subjects, Homer’s epics paint a vivid landscape of a warrior society that values *kleos* and honor as integral components of justice. In the context of a post-Christian world that discourages martial virtues, many of us in the seminar struggled to understand how *kleos* and justice could be so intertwined in the minds of Homer and his contemporaries. However, our discussions led us to realize that ideas of honor and glory still linger beneath the surface of how we perceive individuals to be “just” in the present day.

Plato’s exploration of justice in the *Republic* proceeds through dialectics. From the idea that justice punishes enemies and rewards friends to a “might makes right” theory, Socrates rigorously questions the underlying assumptions of his challengers in Plato’s most influential work. Rather than laying out his own comprehensive theory of justice, Socrates uses the dialectical (or “Socratic”) method to force his listeners (and modern-day readers) to assess the logical conclusions of their own conceptions of justice. His conversations with Polemarchus and Thrasymachus indicate that justice, while difficult to define, is perhaps an art—the art of being a good human being.

At the end of the seminar, I was left to grapple with complex questions instead of embracing simple answers. Is honor truly still a necessary component of justice? Does justice have a fixed value, or does it change with the ages and the needs of the people? What does it mean to excel at being human, both as an individual and as a leader or member of society? But, as Socrates shows us, the beginning of wisdom is acknowledging how few answers you really have. In the allegory of the cave, Plato lays out a schema of hidden truths that we are only able to reach with great difficulty as we claw our way up out of a dark, firelit ignorance. Throughout the course of this ten-week seminar, we were privileged to have Manuel as our instructor and guide. Instead of grasping at shadows, we were able to begin the ascent towards the light. No matter how arduous the journey, our deep dive into Homer and Plato brought us a few steps closer to the unsullied realities and truths beyond the Cave.

Maura Cabill

Beyond the famed and debated—and certainly worthwhile—project of defining justice in itself, perhaps the greatest challenge justice poses is determining how to apply that definition, that principle, to particular circumstances. Justice is a moral virtue, not merely an abstract principle, so questions of justice are ultimately questions of how to act. Literature, history, spoken tales—stories of any kind—are fertile ground sprouting with questions of how somebody ought to act, of what is the just thing to do. The *Iliad*, one of the oldest and most influential stories of the West, is worth considering through the lens of justice.

In the opening book, we find ourselves party to an argument between Agamemnon and Achilles. Their comrades are suffering a plague sent by Apollo in recompense for Agamemnon’s dishonor of Chryses, a priest of Apollo who sought the ransom of his daughter, Chryseis, whom Agamemnon took as spoils of war. Calchas explained to Agamemnon, Achilles, and the rest of the Danaans that Agamemnon’s mistreatment of Chryses was the reason for the plague, and Achilles demanded that Agamemnon return Chryseis. Agamemnon resisted, but ultimately conceded, though only after threatening, and eventually deciding, to take Briseis, whom Achilles himself had taken as spoils of war, as a replacement. Read it for yourself; Homer is a far better storyteller than I am. I only summarize to scrape together the clay out of which we’ll try to craft models of justice for us to emulate.

Is Chryseis due her freedom here? If so, is this on account of her personhood, or on account of her father's demand? If she's due her freedom on account of her personhood, is Achilles worthy of our support, seeing as he argues so primarily, and maybe only, to stop the suffering of his men rather than for her own sake? Is he worthy of our support, seeing as he himself seeks to keep Briseis, who he seized just as Agamemnon seized Chryseis? Do the injustice of a leader's actions, the imperfection of his intention, and his hypocrisy in a related case make him unworthy of obedience? If so, is it better to refuse our support to Achilles if in so doing we guarantee Agamemnon will have his way?

There are numerous other questions to ask, and clarifying the right thing to do, if not easy to determine, would almost certainly be difficult to live out if we stood alongside as soldiers of Achilles and Agamemnon rather than as imagined spectators. I won't say here which course is just. I don't stay silent on account of the inability to determine what's just. Rather, I hope to point out that, if we believe speech and persuasion are an important part of our politics, and if justice is a matter on which to speak and persuade, then these are the kinds of questions we need to answer to decide how to act, and we can only answer them if we're willing to ask them in the first place.

Mathieu Ronayne

Ironically enough, the first session of the Abigail Adams Institute's seminar on "Justice in Homer and Plato" did not focus on a reading from either Homer or Plato. Rather, we discussed the Melian Dialogue from Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, looking at the question of justice between unequal parties. The dialogue between the Athenians and the Melians focused on the power imbalance between the two parties, with the Athenians, by far the stronger of the two parties, alleging that in such matters, "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." To the Athenians, justice as a concept belonged solely in discourse between equal powers, which they and the Melians most certainly were not.

Having never read, or even heard of, the Melian Dialogue before, I found myself struck by the relevance of such claims to modern times. Interestingly, though, modern thinkers seem to invert the Athenians' conception of justice, creating a new system in which historically oppressed groups are elevated through the abandonment of genuine moral justice while historically stronger groups "suffer what they must." Of course, the Athenian system has not truly been inverted, for the enforcement of the policies that create such a system is done by the most powerful institutions in the country, including, at times, the government itself. To both the Athenians and to many political theorists nowadays, it seems as if morality is not an objective, universal truth, but rather one that is constructed solely for the intercourse of perfectly equal parties, and which is to be forsaken should any imbalance exist.

The historical outcome of the interaction between the Melians and the Athenians speaks volumes about how such a system ultimately fails, as the Athenians, unable to convince the Melians to surrender, perpetrated a horrific genocide against them. While they were successful in military terms, they were driven by their distaste for universal conceptions of justice to such an immoral act, and it seems that this is where any abandonment of objective morality will inevitably lead. It is certainly the case that any group asked to "suffer what" it "must" will either silently accept gross injustices, or else resist them and be destroyed.

Overall, every session of the seminar, beginning with this first one, forced us to consider some of the most important questions in ethical and political philosophy, and our discussions all feel extremely pertinent in the modern world.

Gabriel Margolies

I think that the Abigail Adams Institute fulfills a very decent task: it gives a free opportunity for everyone to learn and to be introduced to a great selection of important philosophical and political texts. Yesterday, even if I did not participate actively in the discussion on Plato, I enjoyed watching how people gathered together in the evening simply to discuss Plato's *Republic*. And Manuel was speaking so passionately about Plato! I find fascinating that, in the twenty-first century, there is a community of, predominantly, young people who simply want to read and discuss philosophy for personal development and education. And it is wonderful that the Institute gives them this opportunity. I am happy I came to the Abigail Adams Institute half a year ago.

Dr. Iryna Mykhalova

This seminar allowed us to wrestle with what some would call “natural justice,” or the idea that the strong not only can, but *should* dominate the weak.

We first encountered the idea in Thucydides' Melian dialogue. The exchange between the Athenian empire and the island of Melos is often presented as a classic case of *realpolitik*. Unbothered by morality or justice, the Athenians simply claim that “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must”—or so conventional readers tell us. Beneath the surface, however, the Athenians are not cold-blooded realists; they believe that they *deserve* to rule because they are superior not merely in might, but in everything that matters: in science, in philosophy, in the arts, and in politics. Their military superiority justifies their rule because it *reflects* their superiority in other, more fundamental realms. Seen through this lens, “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must” no longer seems like a banal, if memorable formulation of realism. Rather, the Athenians stand for a substantive conception of justice: excellence requires rule by the strong, while conventional justice, which masquerades as morality, denies the truth of nature by empowering the weak. This thought, which we now associate with Nietzsche, is a momentous challenge to more familiar conceptions of justice.

We encountered natural justice again in the *Iliad*. The fundamental issue of Achilles, whose anger structures the epic, lies in the simple fact that Agamemnon rules despite being the weaker soldier. As Achilles knows, and as the others come to learn, the Greeks cannot win the war without Achilles. He far surpasses all others on the battlefield. Why would a society of soldiers at war, then, refuse to give him the supreme honour? Odysseus attempts to convince Achilles to tame his fury by offering him prizes and apologies. Yet he fails, mostly because he embodies everything that Achilles detests: Odysseus is an unexceptional soldier who wields words to trick others into submission. He personifies the artifice of convention, which Achilles disdains. Worse still, Odysseus offers a *material* remedy, mere prizes, as compensation for dishonour, as if money, not glory, mattered most to Achilles. The scene captures the dichotomy between conventional justice—a society of words, lies, and material interests—and natural justice—a world of deeds, raw power, and *kleos*. At war, more than in any other context, the appeal of natural justice is evident.

Plato's *Republic*, our final encounter, offers the best response to those tempted by natural justice. First, Socrates shows that the thirst for tyrannical control is futile: attempting to charm their way to power, wannabe heroes turn into orators who submit themselves to the whims of the *demos*. In the end, far from absolute rulers who dominate the masses, they become the servants of the populace, modelling their desires after those of the many, forgetting their higher aspirations. Put simply, Socrates teaches that politics corrupts. Second, no one can stand above convention in the way that Achilles or Nietzsche envision. The character of Thrasymachus believes that he stands above convention, but is shown to care more about the opinion of others than anyone else in the dialogue. Plato shows us that the Nietzschean life is an *inhuman* life, one that makes a mockery of our natural orientation towards the good. Virtue, and virtue alone, brings happiness. The tyrant might relish in his power, wandering in his palace, entertaining himself with jesters, but he cannot, no matter how strong his army, no matter how absolute his power, be happy.

In this respect, and in many others, this seminar forced us to wrestle with some of the most important and neglected questions of philosophy.

Mathis Bitton

Biographies

Editors



Cindy Chopoidal is the Production Assistant of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* and a member of Editors Canada. Her publications include *Shakespeare's First Tetralogy, Epic Poetry, and Historiography: How a Dramatist Creates a Fictional World* (2014) and *Shakespeare's Possible Worlds* (2018), and she also contributed to *The Definitive Shakespeare Companion: Overviews, Documents, and Analysis* (2017).



Catherine Ezell has an advanced education in English literature and is a self-taught artist. She has experience in scholarly editing and writing and has devoted her life to drawing and painting. Combining her passion for good writing and art, Catherine creates portraits of authors that are meant to reflect the tone of their works.



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Jonathan Locke Hart (Associate, Harvard University Herbaria) is Chair Professor, School of Translation, Shandong University, has held two Fulbrights at Harvard and visiting appointments in English and in Comparative Literature at Harvard as well as having various affiliations with Kirkland House, Harvard over 35 years, and is a poet, literary scholar, and historian who has published widely and also taught at Toronto, Cambridge, Princeton, the Sorbonne Nouvelle, Peking University, and elsewhere.



Danilo Petranovich '00 is the Director of the Abigail Adams Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Institute provides supplementary humanistic education to the Harvard intellectual community by exploring questions of deep human concern that cut across the boundaries of academic disciplines. Previously, Dr. Petranovich taught political science at Duke University and Yale University. He is frequently seen in Harvard's Kirkland House, where he is a dedicated member of the Senior Common Room.



Henry Stratakis-Allen is a first-year PhD student in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. His previous research has studied the political and social environment of eleventh-century Baghdad during the Seljuq period.

Contributors

Mohammed Said Alhalimi is an undergraduate at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) majoring in pure mathematics. Having studied Middle Eastern history and literature growing up, he is presently most interested in learning about Western philosophy and European history.

Eirene Allen holds a PhD from New York University and is the director of The Institute for Classics Education, a US-based 501(c)3 non-profit supporting the teaching of ancient Greek classics in English translation. Her publications include study guides for the epics *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Argonautica*; numerous plays by Sophocles and Euripides and dialogues of Plato, and Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*.

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Jacinta Hogan spent the summer as an intern at the Abigail Adams Institute after graduating from Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts in May 2023. She now works as the Administrative Assistant to the Academic Dean at her alma mater.

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Manuel Lopez '90 has taught political philosophy at the University of Chicago, after receiving his undergraduate and law degrees from Harvard. His academic research has centered on Plato and his understanding of the relation between justice and eros. He currently serves as senior fellow at the Abigail Adams Institute.

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Emil Pitkin '09, born in the USSR and raised in Boston, is an award winning educator, entrepreneur, and writer of poetry and prose.

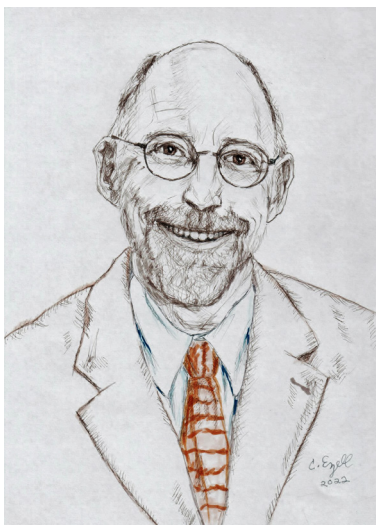
Xavier Symons is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Human Flourishing Program in the Institute for Quantitative Social Science, Harvard University. He is a philosopher by training, and specializes in bioethics, moral philosophy, and the philosophy of wellbeing.

Constantin Waldschmidt studied mathematics, biochemistry, and poetry at Virginia Tech. He works in software, and in his spare time writes film reviews.

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Donald Pfister is the Asa Gray Research Professor of Systematic Botany at the Harvard University Herbaria & Libraries. He studies fungi, particularly ascomycetes. In his studies he uses molecular, morphological, and life history information to understand the relationships among these fungi and their activities in nature. He also uses archives and museum specimens to document collections and their origins.