Leading Ladies: Sarah Bernhardt, Eleonora Duse, Ellen Terry

In the latter half of the 19th Century three actresses ruled supreme in the hearts of theatre-goers: the French Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923), the Italian Eleonora Duse (1858-1924), and the English Ellen Terry (1847-1928). They played all parts: from the classics of Shakespeare and Racine, through the romantics such as Dumas and d'Annunzio, to the new naturalists such as Ibsen. They toured the world but acted only in their mother tongue. Their emotional intensity and stage presence communicated with their audiences even when their words were not understood. They were the first superstars: idolized by their public, celebrated by artists, and honored by poets.

Beginnings

Both Ellen Terry and Eleonora Duse were born to parents who were travelling players, and both began acting in childhood. Eleonora Duse and her father continued acting after the death of Eleonora's mother in 1875. In 1879, Eleonora received her first rave reviews for her performances as Ophelia in *Hamlet* and Elettra in *Oreste* at the *Teatro dei Fiorentini* in Naples. She married a fellow actor in 1881 and had a daughter Enrichetta before the two separated.

Although five of her siblings became professional actors, Ellen Terry was initially disillusioned with the theater. At the age of 16 years, she married the painter George Watts who was 30 years her senior. The marriage was unhappy, and Ellen left after a year to live with the architect Edward Godwin,

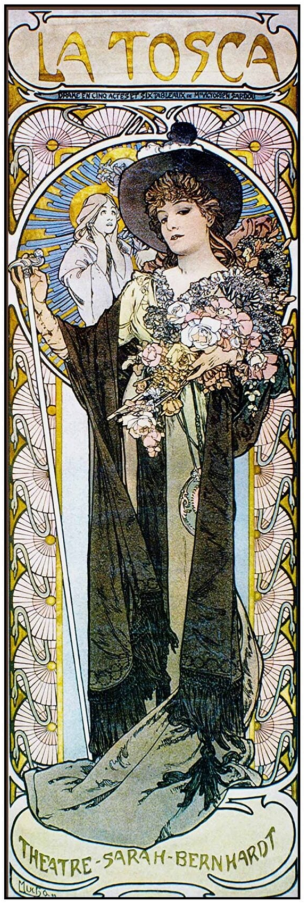
with whom she had two children, Edith and Edward, who later used the fictitious surname, Craig, and who both became renowned theater-directors. Godwin encouraged Terry to act again and she was acclaimed as Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* in 1875, a role that she reprised many times over her career (Holyroyd, 2008, p 102).

Sarah Bernhardt was the illegitimate daughter of a Jewish courtesan, and only came to the theater after finishing her education at a convent school. The Duc de Mornay, the half-brother of Napoleoon III and a patron of her mother, suggested that she audition for *Le Conservatoire national de musique et de declamation*. With his influence she was accepted, and studied there between 1860 and 1862. After leaving the conservatoire she acted at the *Odéon* theater but her initial roles were not successful. Though she continued to act, her main support over the next decade came from her life as a courtesan. She counted among her many lovers a Marshall of the French army, a Spanish banker, and a Turkish ambassador (Gottlieb, 2010, p 44). She likely had an affair with Victor Hugo when he directed his play *Ruy Blas* at the Comédie Française in 1872 (Gottleib, 2010, p 61). Though some 40 years her senior Hugo was still susceptible to female charms. Bernhardt had her first major triumph as Maria, Queen of Spain in *Ruy Blas,* and followed this by an acclaimed Phèdre in Racine' tragedy in 1874.

The Acting Companies

Bernhardt's subsequent successes at the *Comédie Française* allowed her to obtain backers for her own company in 1880. She put on *La dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas fils, and then took her company on tour to London and the United States. She had affairs with her leading actors and was briefly married to a Greek diplomat. She attracted the attention of Victorien Sardou who wrote several plays for her, notably *Fédora* (1882),

Théodora (1884), *La Tosca* (1887) and *Cléopâtre* (1890). She arranged with Alphonse Mucha to produce magnificent art-deco posters for her shows:

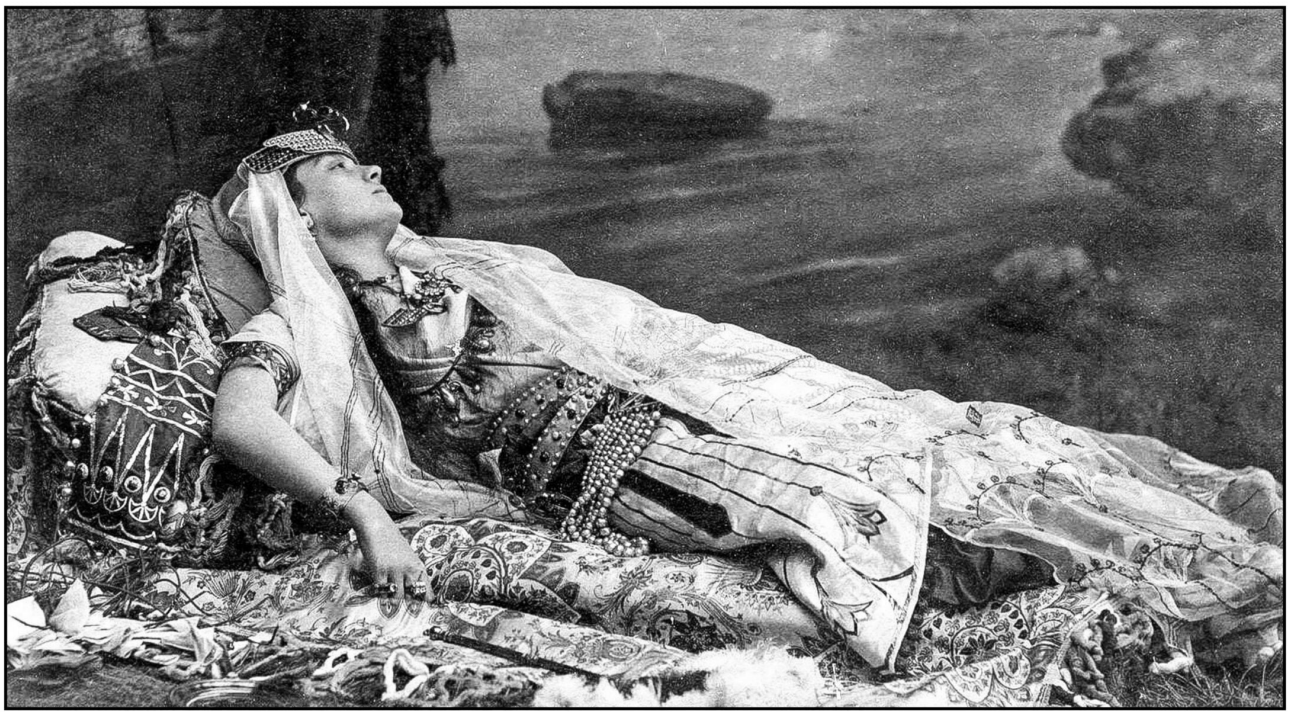


Bernhardt became friends with artists and celebrities: Gustave Doré, the illustrator of Dante, the portraitist Georges Clairin, Edward VII of England when he was Prince of Wales, and Louise Abbéma, an impressionist painter and prominent lesbian. It is unclear how many of her friends were also lovers.

In 1899, the theater built by Baron Haussmann on the Place du Châtelet in Paris was renovated and renamed the *Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt*, a name it retained until the German occupation in 1941 when it was called the *Théâtre de la Cité* because of Bernhardt's Jewish ancestry (Gottlieb, 2010, p 139).

Duse formed her own acting company in 1885. She had a prolonged affair with Arrigo Boito, who was later to serve as

Verdi's librettist for *Otello* and *Falstaff*. Boito provided her with the play *Cleopatre*, a translation of Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* in 1887. The illustration below shows the competing Cleopatras of Duse and Bernhardt (Rader, 2018, pp 83-84):



In 1895 Duse had an affair with the poet and playwright Gabriele d'Annunzio. He wrote the play *La Gioconda* (1899) for

her. However, later in 1899 when he sent his masterpiece *La città morta,* based on Ancient Greek tragedies, to her rival Sarah Bernhardt, Duse ended their affair. Nevertheless, she later performed in both this play and in d'Annunzio's *Francesca da Rimini* (1901) about the tragic love affair between Francesca and her brother-in-law Paolo Malatesta, as told in Canto 5 of Dante's *Inferno*.

When Duse toured Russia in 1891, she impressed the young Anton Chekhov. Duse was to become the model for Irina Arkadina in *The Seagull* (1895). During her tour of Russia, Duse presented Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. She was particularly fond of the role: Nora, the name of the heroine, is a diminutive of her own name (Rader, 2018, p 103). She later included other Ibsen plays in her repertoire, and visited the playwright in Oslo in 1904. After 1910, Duse had a long relationship with Lina Poletti, a poet, playwright and open Lesbian, but this was likely no more than friendship (Weaver, 1984, pp 286-290).

In 1878 Henry Irving and Ellen Terry formed a partnership to reopen the Lyceum Theatre in London. For the next 20 years, they acted together to great acclaim. Their repertoire centered on Shakespeare – *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice, Rome and Juliet, Macbeth,* and *Much Ado about Nothing* – but they also presented other plays – *Becket* by Tennyson, *Olivia* by W. G. Wills derived from *The Vicar of Wakefield,* and *King Charles I* by William Havard. It is not known whether their relationship extended beyond the theater. Below are woodcuts of Irving and Terry by Terry's son Edward Craig from about 1895.

Terry kept up a long epistolary relationship with Bernard Shaw, who found her an intelligent and witty correspondent. Despite the many letters, however, they only met occasionally. Terry played Lady Cicely Waynefleete in Shaw's *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* in 1906, one of her last important roles. In 1958 a set of eighteen unsigned love poems to Ellen Terry went on auction. Though attributed to Shaw (Werner, 1980), these poems were probably written by Christabel Marshall, who was Terry's secretary for several years. Christabel ultimately changed her name to Christopher Marie St John, and became the romantic partner of Terry's daughter Edy Craig (Holroyd, 2008, pp 321-330).

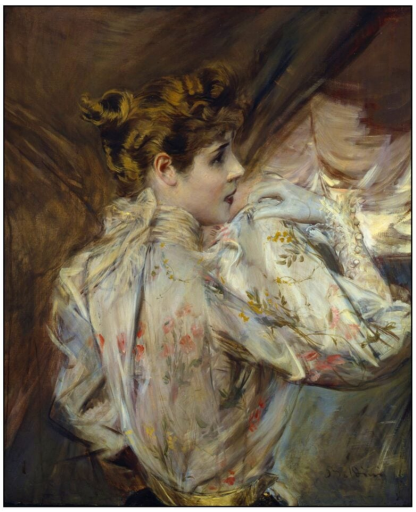
Portraits

Bernhardt, Duse and Terry were the beauties of their day. They

were the subject of glamorous portraits such as Michele Gordigiani’s 1896 portrait of Duse and Georges Clairin’s 1876 portrait of Bernhardt:

The following are portraits of Sarah Bernhardt as Cleopatra by Georges Rochegrosse (1890), of the young Ellen Terry by her husband George Watts (1864) and of Eleonora Duse by Giovanni Boldini (1895):





Ilya Repin made a striking charcoal sketch of Duse during her tour of Russia in 1891:

Photographs

Nicéphore Niéce took the first photograph in 1822. By the middle of the 19th Century photography had become widespread. Felix Nadar, the first genius of photographic portraiture, produced several images of the young Sarah Bernhardt in the early 1860s.

The following is Adam Begley's description of the portraits:

> Loosely wrapped in a white burnoose, or in a shiny black velvet cloak, both garments voluminous, their folds teasingly suggestive, she leans on a truncated fluted column—a vulgar prop Nadar would have laughed at a decade earlier. It doesn't matter: the eyes are otherwise occupied, caressing her flawless skin, her calm pensive face, her untamed hair. It's not just that she appears to be naked

> under her wrap—the portraits carry an erotic charge that's complicated and enhanced by the withdrawn, private expression and a whisper of melancholy. The air of mystery is especially strong when she's wearing the black velvet and looking off to her right, almost in profile; the focus is slightly blurred, her bright eyes distant and enigmatic. Her sole ornament, a cameo earring, less a decoration than an echo in miniature, draws attention to her elfin ear, deliberately exposed and adding to the impression of nakedness. (Begley 2017, p 110)

Richard Howard's poem *Hommage to Nadar — Sarah Bernhardt* (2004) celebrates both the photographer and his subject:

> Often enough you were naked under the cloak
> in those days; gentlemen drank
> and waited, murmuring deprecations
>
> till the cloak dropped and your arms
> which would dishevel the world — those white serpents,
> Hugo called them — were exposed,
>
> thin as your legs, thin and white, but rusted here,
> then here, the rest white and hard . . .
> Not yet: you have not yet had success on the stage,
>
> and if you were a mother two
> years back, Maurice never knew his father —
> did you? A nun, you wanted
>
> to be a nun, and became a sculptor, one
> craning female torso sent
> each year to the Salon, ardent clay ladies
>
> in postures of possession.
> Mortal will is already your mode, undressed,
> uncombed, probably unwashed —
>
> you are the child he wrote in French for, Oscar

who understood your crying
need and overheard, just thirty years too late,

the voice of Salome, pure
gold bangles on a tin wire pulled to breaking,
and of course the wire did break.

You seem to be regarding, on cue but still
offstage, in the studio,
the resonant hells your talent sanctified

for decades of unbelievers.
and taught your century its lesson, dying
in *La Gloire*, your last *relâche*

attended by a house of fifty thousand:
dazed Paris, unforgiving,
relented for your farewell tour of duty

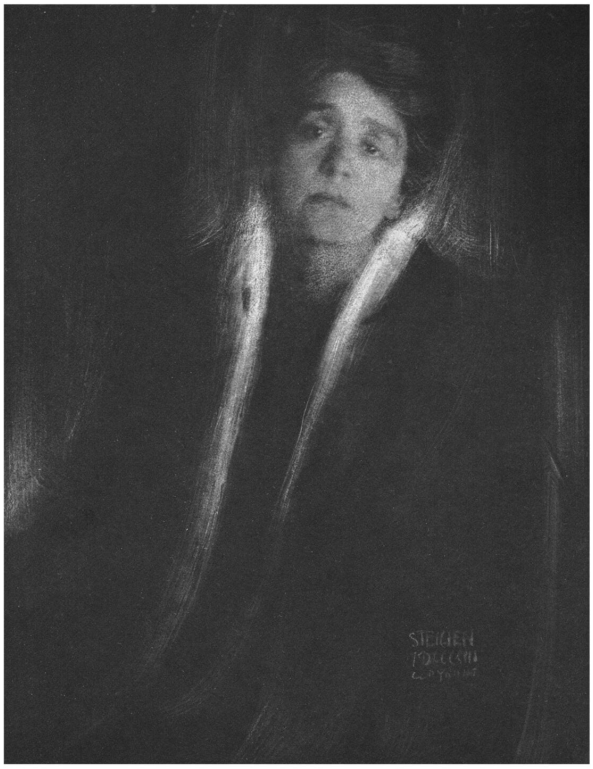
which was to doubt if either
the Heavenly City or that wan shade of it
our dreams have perpetuated

can function, flourish or even form unless
it include its opposite,
unless in heaven there is hell. Divine Sarah.

The poem mentions that Bernhardt was also a competent sculptor. Oscar Wilde wrote *Salomé* in French expressly for Bernhardt although she never played the role. *La Gloire* is likely a late performance in d'Annunzio's *La gloria* which had been translated into French. The theatrical term *en relâche* is used to describe the days when a play is not performed so that the actors can rest. The English idiom is that the theater is "dark." Bernhardt continued working until a few days before her death. "Fifty thousand" is the estimated number who attended her funeral in 1923.

Terry and Duse were also photographed extensively. The

following illustration shows a portrait of Ellen Terry by Julia Margaret Cameron taken in 1864, and a portrait of Eleonora Duse by Edward Steichen taken in 1903. The latter was taken using a soft focus, a style popular at the beginning of the 20th Century but eschewed by later photographers.



Costumes

Bernhardt, Terry and Duse all revelled in their costumes. Those of Ellen Terry were particularly striking. Edward Burne-Jones designed her outfits for Guinevere and Lawrence Alma-Tadema for Imogen. The most memorable of her costumes was the "beetle-dress" that she wore as Lady Macbeth. The gown, designed by Alice Laura Comyns-Carr and made by Ada Cort Nettleship, is embellished with green iridescent beetle wing-cases that shimmer under stage lighting. The dress has recently been restored. The illustration below shows the dress

and a painting of Terry as Lady Macbeth by John Singer Sargeant (1888).

Lithographs

Lithography was invented in 1796 and come to prominence over the following century as a means for producing inexpensive color prints. William Nicholson published a set of *Twelve Portraits* in 1899: lithographic reproductions of hand-coloured woodcuts. Among those represented was Sarah Bernhardt. Eleonora Duse was included in a second set of portraits which

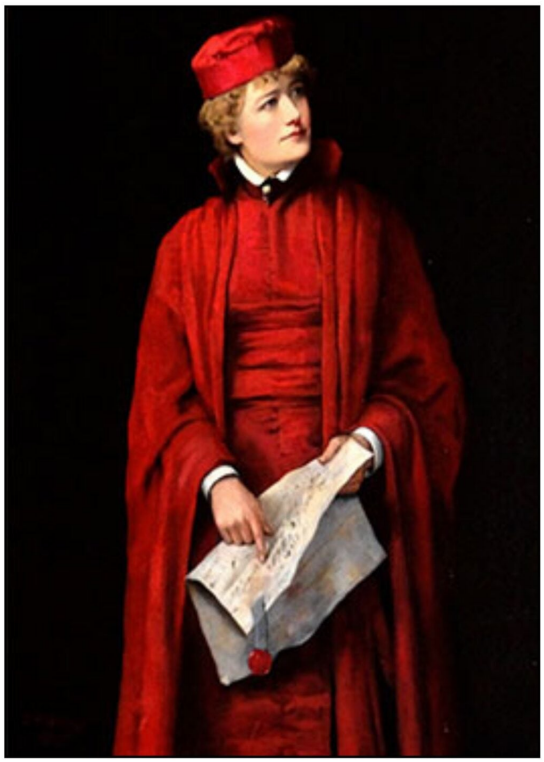
came out in 1902.These portraits are shown below. In 1906 Nicholson produced for the Ellen Terry Jubilee Banquet a lithographic scroll showing all the major roles from her career. The middle section shows Ellen Terry as Lady Teazle from *The School for Scandal* (1877), Olivia from *Olivia* (1878), Ophelia from *Hamlet* (1878), Queen Henrietta Maria from *King Charles I* by William Havard (1879), and Portia from *The Merchant of Venice:*

Audio Recordings

In the early years of the 20th Century, it became possible to record the sounds of voices. Both Ellen Terry and Sarah Bernhardt were recorded. Although the recordings are noisy and the studio recordings very different from an actual performance, the listener can get some sense of how they sounded on the stage.

The recording of Ellen Terry giving Portia's speech about mercy was taken in 1911. The words of the speech follow together with a painting by George Baldry of Terry as Portia in an 1895 production. Terry's presentation is restrained but convincing:

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/terry-quality-of-mercy-1911.mp3



Ellen Terry as Portia
George Baldry, 1885

The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
'T is mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown:
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.

Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* IV:1

I could not find any audio recordings of Eleonora Duse. We must content herself with a description by Arthur Symons, the British critic and poet who lived for a while in Italy and who translated several of d'Annunzio's works:

> And then that voice of hers! It can be sweet or harsh, it can laugh or cry, can be menacing or caressing. And how every word tells! Every word comes to you clearly, carrying exactly its meaning: and, somehow along with the words, an emotion, which you may resolve to ignore, but which will seize on you, which will go through and through you. Trick or instinct, there it is, the power to make you feel intensely; and that is precisely the final test of a great dramatic artist. (Symons, 1926, p 99)

The following is an excerpt from a 1910 recording of Sarah Bernhardt in the role of Phèdre. Phèdre the wife of Theseus has fallen passionately in love with her stepson Hippolytus. She confesses her shame and asks him to punish her with death.

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/bernhardt-phedre-1910.mp3

Que dis-je? Cet aveu que je viens de te faire, Cet aveu si honteux, le crois-tu volontaire? Tremblante pour un fils que je n'osais trahir, Je te venais prier de ne le point haïr. Faibles projets d'un coeur trop plein de ce qu'il aime! Hélas! je ne t'ai pu parler que de toi-même. Venge-toi, punis-moi d'un odieux amour. Digne fils du héros qui t'a donné le jour, Délivre l'univers d'un monstre qui t'irrite. La veuve de Thésée ose aimer Hippolyte! Crois-moi, ce monstre affreux ne doit point t'échapper. Voilà mon coeur. C'est là que ta main doit frapper. Impatient déjà d'expier son offense, Au-devant de ton bras je le sens qui s'avance. Frappe. Ou si tu le crois indigne de tes coups, Si ta haine m'envie un supplice si doux, Ou si d'un sang trop vil ta main serait trempée, Au défaut de ton bras prête-moi ton épée. Donne!	What is't I say? Think you this vile confession That I have made is what I meant to utter? Not daring to betray a son for whom I trembled, 'twas to beg you not to hate him I came. Weak purpose of a heart too full Of love for you to speak of aught besides! Take your revenge, punish my odious passion; Prove yourself worthy of your valiant sire, And rid the world of an offensive monster! Does Theseus' widow dare to love his son? The frightful monster! Let her not escape you! Here is my heart. This is the place to strike. Already prompt to expiate its guilt, I feel it leap impatiently to meet Your arm. Strike home. Or, if it would disgrace you To steep your hand in such polluted blood, If that were punishment too mild to slake Your hatred, lend me then your sword, if not Your arm. Quick, give't.

Racine, *Phèdre*, II:5

In the Words of the Poets.

The young Oscar Wilde was quite taken by Terry's performance of Portia. The following is his sonnet to the actress. Since I could not find any image of the golden dress, I have paired the sonnet with a portrait of Terry by Forbes-Robertson from about the same time:

Portia (To Ellen Terry)

I marvel not Bassanio was so bold
To peril all he had upon the lead,
Or that proud Aragon bent low his head
Or that Morocco's fiery heart grew cold:
For in that gorgeous dress of beaten gold
Which is more golden than the golden sun
No woman Veronese looked upon
Was half so fair as thou whom I behold.
Yet fairer when with wisdom as your shield
The sober-suited lawyer's gown you donned,
And would not let the laws of Venice yield
Antonio's heart to that accursed Jew
O Portia! take my heart: it is thy due:
I think I will not quarrel with the Bond.

Oscar Wilde, 1879

Ellen Terry, 1875
Johnston Forbes-Robertson

Wilde was perhaps even more impressed by Sarah Bernhardt in *Phèdre*. The accompanying photograph was taken by Felix Nadar's son Paul:

Sarah Bernhardt as Phèdre
Paul Nadar, 1893

Phèdre (for Sarah Bernhardt)

How vain and dull this common world must seem
To such a One as thou, who should'st have talked
At Florence with Mirandola, or walked
Through the cool olives of the Academe:
Thou should'st have gathered reeds from a green stream
For Goat-foot Pan's shrill piping, and have played
With the white girls in that Phæacian glade
Where grave Odysseus wakened from his dream.

Ah! surely once some urn of Attic clay
Held thy wan dust, and thou hast come again
Back to this common world so dull and vain,
For thou wert weary of the sunless day,
The heavy fields of scentless asphodel,
The loveless lips with which men kiss in Hell.

Oscar Wilde, 1885

The young playwright Edmond Rostand, author of the wildly successful Cyrano de Bergerac (1897) wrote several plays for Sarah Bernhardt, among them *La Samaritaine* (1897), about the Samaritan women who gave up a life of sin to follow Christ, and *l'Aiglon* (Eaglet, 1900) about the Napoleon's son. At a celebratory dinner in 1896 he presented a sonnet in praise of Sarah:

A Sarah Bernhardt

En ce temps sans beauté, seule encore tu nous restes
Sachant descendre, pâle, un grand escalier clair,
Ceindre un bandeau, porter un lis, brandir un fer,
Reine de l'Attitude et Princesse des Gestes!
En ce temps sans folie, ardente, tu protestes!
Tu dis des vers. Tu meurs d'amour. Ton vol se perd.
Tu tends des bras de rêve, et puis des bras de chair,
Et quand Phèdre paraît, nous sommes tous incestes.
Avide de souffrir, tu t'ajoutas des coeurs:
Nous avons vu couler— car ils coulent, tes pleurs!
Toutes les larmes de nos âmes sur tes joues.
Mais aussi tu sais bien, Sarah, que quelquefois
Tu sens furtivement se poser, quand tu joues,
Les lèvres de Shakespeare aux bagues de tes doigts

Edmond Rostand, 1896

To Sarah Bernhardt

In this age without beauty, you alone remain:
You who know how to descend an open staircase
Gird your headband, carry a lily or brandish a sword,
Queen of the Pose and Princess of the Gesture
In this age without passion, you protest with fire!
You declaim your words. You die of love. You fly beyond.
Your arms hold both eternal dreams and mortal flesh,
And when Phèdre appears, we feel her incestuous desire.
Unafraid to suffer, you conquer our hearts:
We have seen you weep – and have felt
Our own grief in the tears on your cheeks.
But you also know, Sarah, how sometimes,
When you play your part, to bring
The lips of Shakespeare to your fingertips.

The sonnet is mainly remembered for the line *Reine de l'Attitude ed Princesse des Gestes.* No one could strike a pose as well as Sarah. The following is the death of *La Dame aux Camélias*, probably from a production in the early 1900s:

In 1907, the American poet Sara Teasdale published four sonnets in honor of Eleonora Duse. The following sonnet about her performance in Francesca da Rimini was set to music by Robert Owen. Below is a performance by soprano Jamie Reimer and pianist Stacie Haneline:

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Sonnets-to-Duse-Op.-102_-No.-4.mp3

To a picture of Eleonora Duse as
"Francesca da Rimini"

Oh flower-sweet face and bended flower-like head!
Oh violet whose purple cannot pale,
Or forest fragrance ever faint or fail,
Or breath and beauty pass among the dead!
Yea, very truly has the poet said,
No mist of years or might of death avail
To darken beauty – brighter thro' the veil
We see the glimmer of its-wings outspread.
Oh face embowered and shadowed by thy hair,
Some lotus blossom on a darkened stream!
If ever I have pictured in a dream
My guardian angel, she is like to this,
Her eyes know joy, yet sorrow lingers there,
And on her lips the shadow of a kiss.

Sara Teasdale, 1907

Imaginings

It is difficult for us to understand the effect these actresses had on their audiences. We have some general idea:

> Ellen Terry lives on as the eternal girl actress, the symbol of health, youth, and energy, in contrast with Duse, the suffering, mature woman. Between them stands Bernhardt, the creature of passion and power, larger than life and dangerously unpredictable. (Stokes et al, 1988, p 10).

And yet

> Whatever audiences perceived in the work of Bernhardt, Terry and Duse, it was clearly something that took them beyond the immediate and into wider, deeper areas of themselves. This special quality is forever inaccessible to us now, since it died with them and with the time in which they lived. It is also something that challenges historical analysis, just as

> it challenged description by those contemporaries who struggled to express the inexpressible in the restricting language of their reviews and articles. (Stokes et al., 1988, p 11).

So to conclude, I would like to imagine them when they played roles that to me are special. I shall do this in the order of performance. First would be Ellen Terry as Beatrice in the early 1880s. It must have been marvelous to watch her spar with Henry Irving in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Much Ado About Nothing

BEATRICE
I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick: nobody marks you.

BENEDICK
What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living?

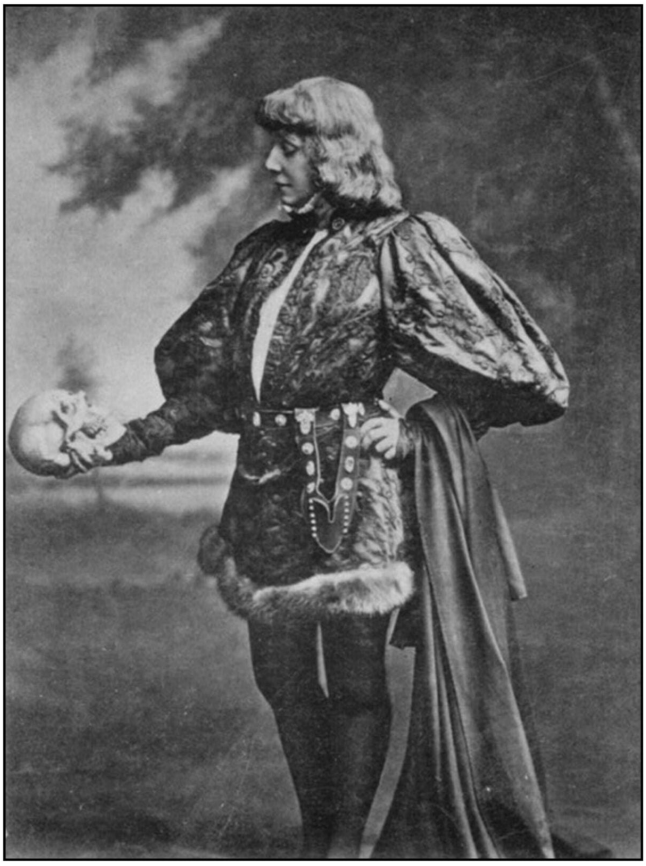
BEATRICE
Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signior Benedick? Courtesy itself must convert to disdain, if you come in her presence.

Ellen Terry

And then I would have found myself enthralled by the performance of Sarah Bernhardt as Hamlet in the 1890s. She thought of Hamlet much as I do: as a man who is determined to do the right thing, who hesitates not from a weakness of will, but because he needs to be certain before he acts. This is completely different from the idea that Hamlet was someone who just could not make up his mind.

Sarah Bernhardt on Hamlet

I think his character … a perfectly simple one. He is brought face to face with a duty, and he determines to carry it out. All his philosophizing and temporary hesitation does not alter the basis of his character. His resolution swerves, but immediately returns to the channel he has marked out for it. I know this view is quite heterodox, but I maintain it … That there may or may not be something of the woman about Hamlet, is a question which might give rise to a great deal of argument, but I think his character is essentially masculine, and I have endeavoured to represent it as such. (quoted by Huret, 1899, pp 189-190)



And finally, I would have been transfixed by Eleonora Duse as Hedda Gabler in the first few years of the 20th Century.

Hedda Gabler

HEDDA: At ten o'clock—he will be here. I can see him already—with vine-leaves in his hair—flushed and fearless—

THEA: Oh, I hope he may.

HEDDA: And then, you see—then he will have regained control over himself. Then he will be a free man for all his days.

THEA: Oh God!—if he would only come as you see him now!

HEDDA: He will come as I see him—so, and not otherwise! You may doubt him as long as you please; *I* believe in him. And now we will try—

THEA: You have some hidden motive in this, Hedda!

HEDDA: Yes, I have. I want for once in my life to have power to mould a human destiny.

Eleonora Duse as Hedda

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Ely Cathedral: The Ship of the Fens

Ely Cathedral was originally situated on a low island in the middle of the Fens, a region of marshland in eastern England lying inland of the Wash. Because of the flatness of the surrounding land the cathedral could be seen from great distances, appearing as the “Ship of the Fens.” The marshes were drained in the 17th Century, but it is still easy to imagine the building floating above the waters: the embodiment of Auden’s image of the English cathedrals:

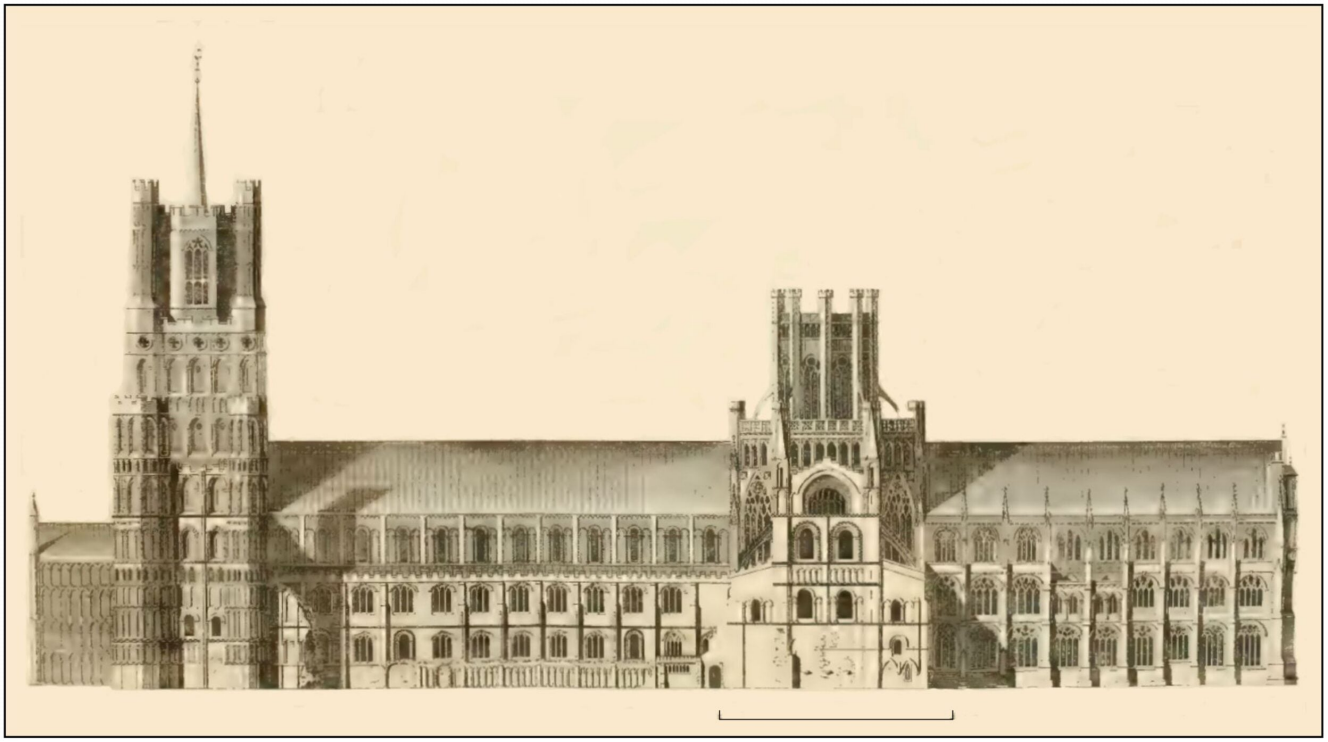
> Luxury liners laden with souls,
> Holding to the east their hulls of stone.
> (Auden, 1936, p 43; also McDiarmid, 1978, p 292)

The Present Cathedral

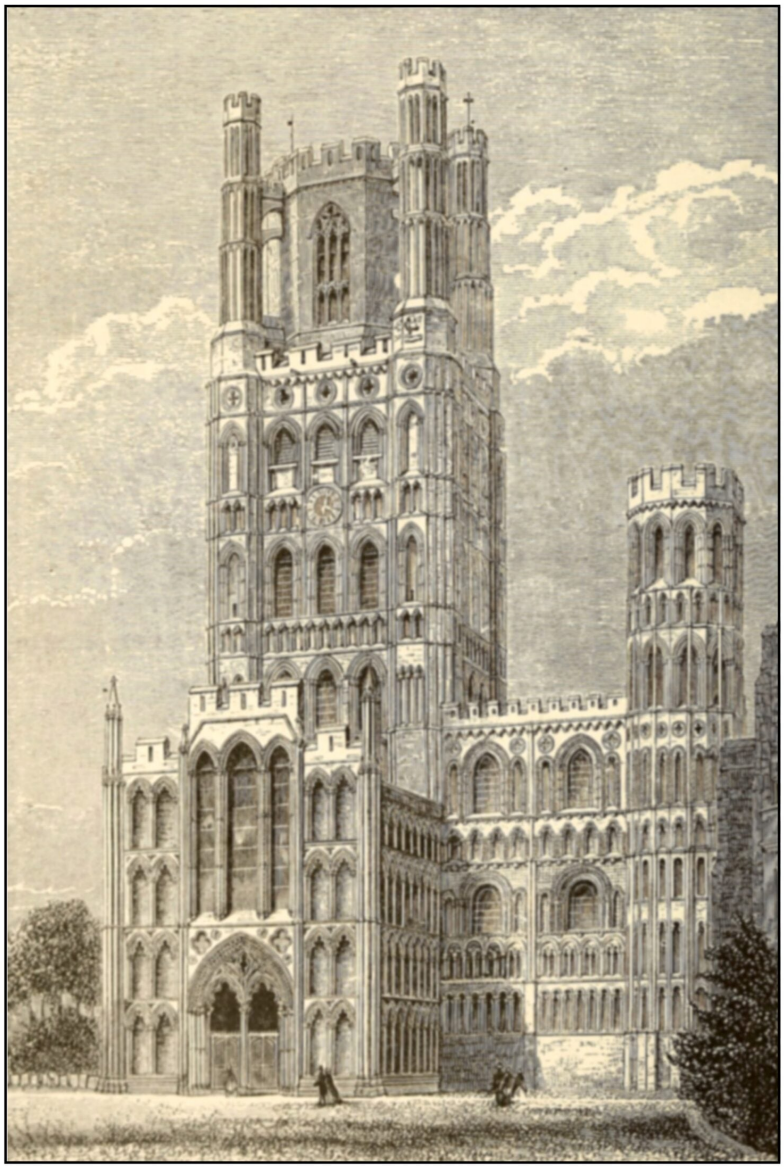
The following illustration shows the cathedral as viewed from the southeast.

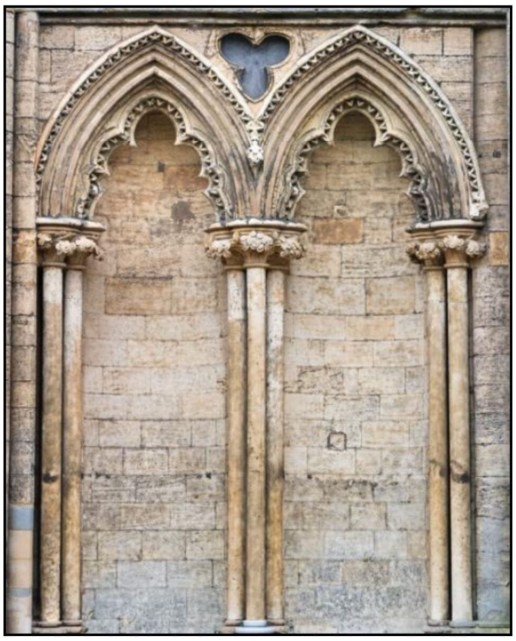
The present building was begun in 1083 by the Normans soon after their conquest of England. They bought with them a style of architecture known as “Romanesque” on the continent but considered “Norman” in England. The style was characterized by large weight-bearing columns surmounted by semi-circular arches. As the years passed, additions, collapses and renovations to the original building left it with a blend of styles that still somehow achieve harmony rather than incoherence.

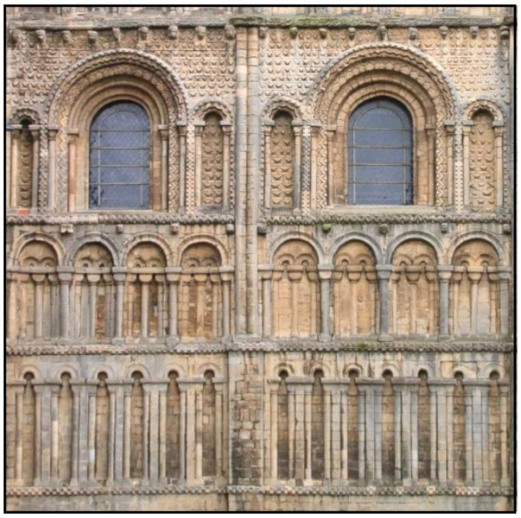
The following is the view of the cathedral from the south from Bentham (1771, Plate 42, scale 100 ft):



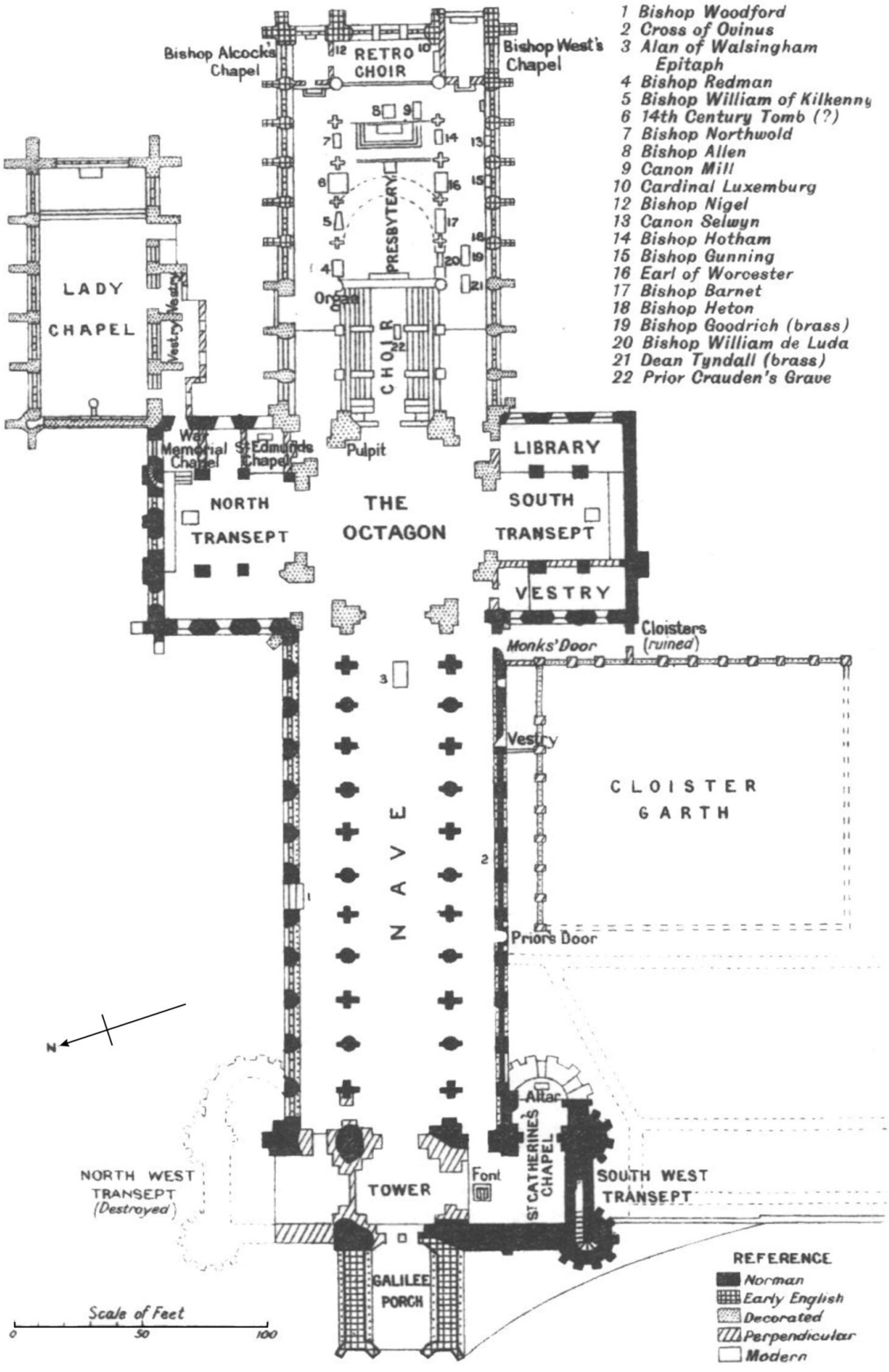
The West end of the cathedral shows its mixture of styles. The following illustration shows a engraving from King (1881, plate XII) as well as two modern photographs showing the Gothic arches on the Galilee Porch and the Norman arches on the south west transepts







The following is a floor plan of the cathedral:


1 Bishop Woodford
2 Cross of Ovinus
3 Alan of Walsingham Epitaph
4 Bishop Redman
5 Bishop William of Kilkenny
6 14th Century Tomb (?)
7 Bishop Northwold
8 Bishop Allen
9 Canon Mill
10 Cardinal Luxemburg
12 Bishop Nigel
13 Canon Selwyn
14 Bishop Hotham
15 Bishop Gunning
16 Earl of Worcester
17 Bishop Barnet
18 Bishop Heton
19 Bishop Goodrich (brass)
20 Bishop William de Luda
21 Dean Tyndall (brass)
22 Prior Crauden's Grave
Bishop Alcock's Chapel
RETRO CHOIR
Bishop West's Chapel
PRESBYTERY
LADY CHAPEL
Vestry
Vestry
Organ
CHOIR
War Memorial Chapel
St Edmunds Chapel
Pulpit
LIBRARY
NORTH TRANSEPT
THE OCTAGON
SOUTH TRANSEPT
VESTRY
Cloisters (ruined)
Monks' Door
Vestry
CLOISTER GARTH
NAVE
Priors Door
N
Altar
St CATHERINE'S CHAPEL
NORTH WEST TRANSEPT (Destroyed)
TOWER
Font
SOUTH WEST TRANSEPT
GALILEE PORCH
Scale of Feet
0
50
100
REFERENCE
Norman
Early English
Decorated
Perpendicular
Modern

The dashed semicircular lines in the Presbytery show the eastern extent of the original Norman cathedral.

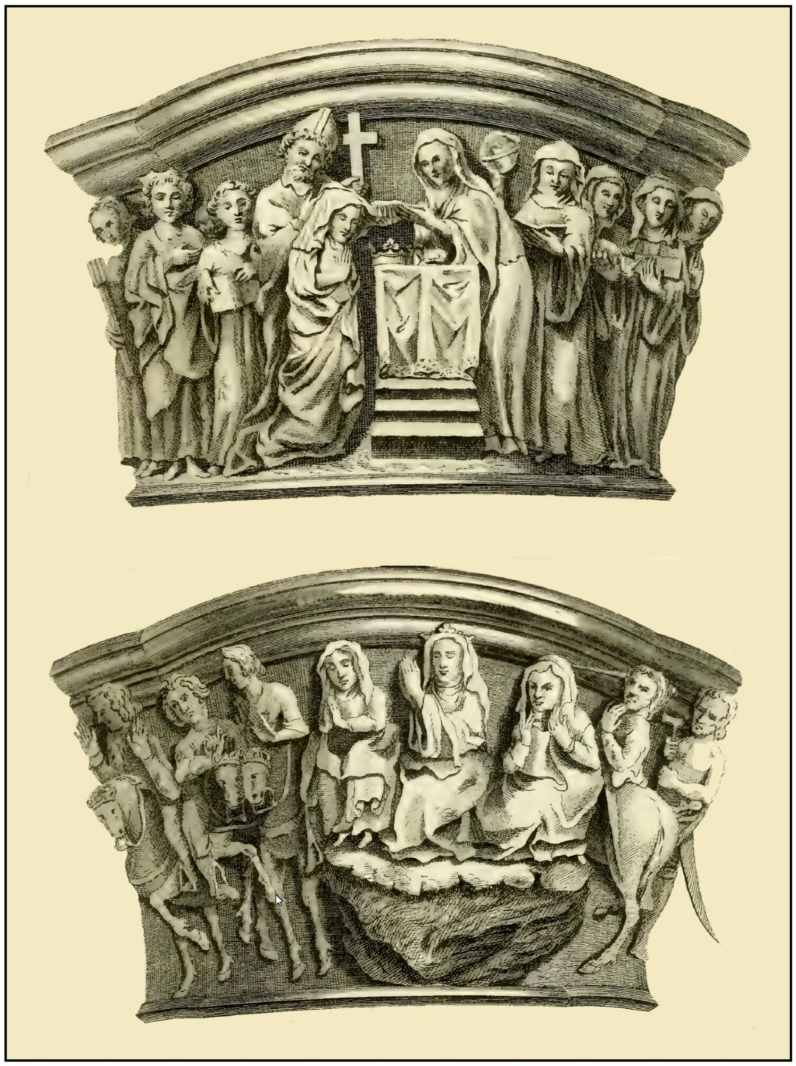
Saxon Beginnings

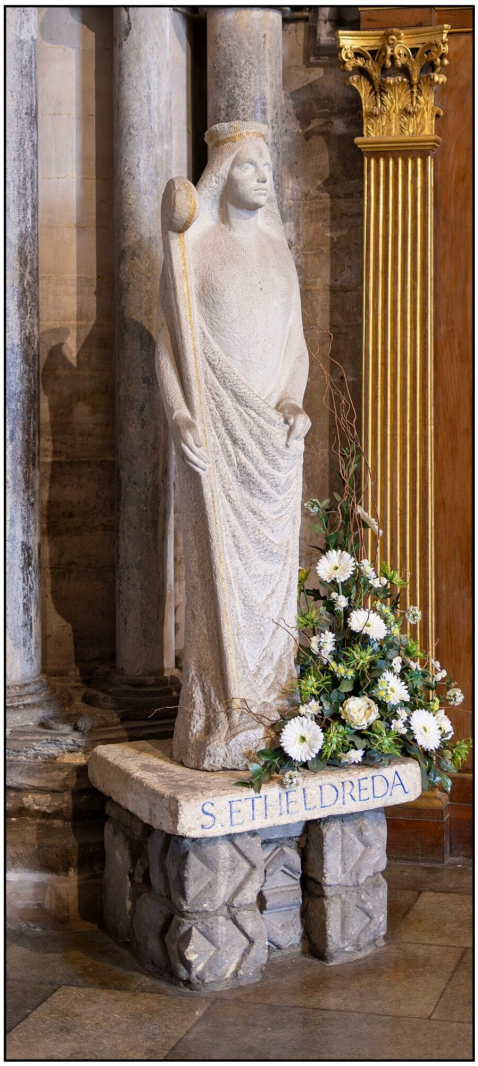
The region of England northeast of London – comprising the present counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex – was settled by Angles and Saxons in the 5th and 6th Centuries CE. Multiple kingdoms were set up on the island of Britain: East Anglia, Northumbria, Mercia, Essex, Sussex, Wessex, and Kent. Augustine of Canterbury arrived in England in 597 CE; and the various Saxon kingdoms in England soon converted to Christianity.

Anna, the king of East Anglia (reigned 636-654 CE), a devout Christian, probably reigned in Exning – just east of present-day Cambridge. A large ancient earthen wall, known today as the Devil's Dyke, stretching from the southern end of the Fens to the River Stour, appears to have built as a defense against the Mercian kingdom to the west. The following map shows the kingdom of East Anglia at the time of Anna:

Anna's daughter Æthelthryth (or Etheldreda) was born in 636 CE (Keynes, 2003). In 652, at the age of 16, she was married to Tondberct, a prince who ruled over part of the Fens. This was a political marriage, designed to extend Anna's domain, and Æthelthryth insisted on maintaining her virginity. As a wedding gift she was given the Isle of Ely in the Fens. The name "Ely" probable comes from the Old English *elge* meaning "region of eels." Tonberct died in 655, and Æthelthryth retired to live in Ely.

After Anna died fighting against the Mercians at the battle of Bulcamp in 654, Æthelthryth was married in 660 for a second time to Ecgfrith, a 16-year-old prince of Northumbria. Once again, she insisted on maintaining her virginity. In 670, she formally took the veil as a nun and lived in the double monastery (for both monks and nuns) at Coldingham, in what is now southeast Scotland. In 672, in need of an heir, Ecgfrith decided that he wished to consummate his marriage, and sent armed men to apprehend his wife. She and her attendants fled to Ely; Ecgfrith's men were prevented from capturing her by the tidal waters of the Fens. Æthelthryth then founded a new monastery at Ely, where she presided as abbess until her death in 679. The following illustration shows two of the capitals on the octagon pillars in Ely cathedral (from Bentham, 1771, plates 9 and 10): Æthelthryth's taking of the veil, and her miraculous salvation by the rising waters of the Fens. On the right is a 1960 statue of Æthelthryth by Phillip Turner.





Little is known of the abbey at Ely after its founding. In 869 the Vikings conquered the kingdom of East Anglia and much of Northumbria and Mercia. Alfred the Great (849-899) ultimately prevented the Vikings from further expansion, but allowed the continuation of Danelaw in the eastern parts of England from 886 to 1066. The original abbey of Æthelthryth may have been destroyed or may have simply fallen into disuse during the early Viking period. However, Ely Abbey was re-founded toward the end of the 10th Century as a monastery for monks alone. As his boat approached Ely, King Cnut (reign 1016-1035) was impressed by the music of the monks and wrote a poem, a fragment (perhaps the refrain) of which survives (Parker, 2018):

Merie sungen ðe muneches binnen Ely

ða Cnut ching reu ðer by.
Roweþ cnites noer the lant
and here we þes muneches sæng.

[Sweetly sang the monks in Ely
When Cnut the king rowed by;
'Row, men, nearer to the land
So we can hear the friars' song.']

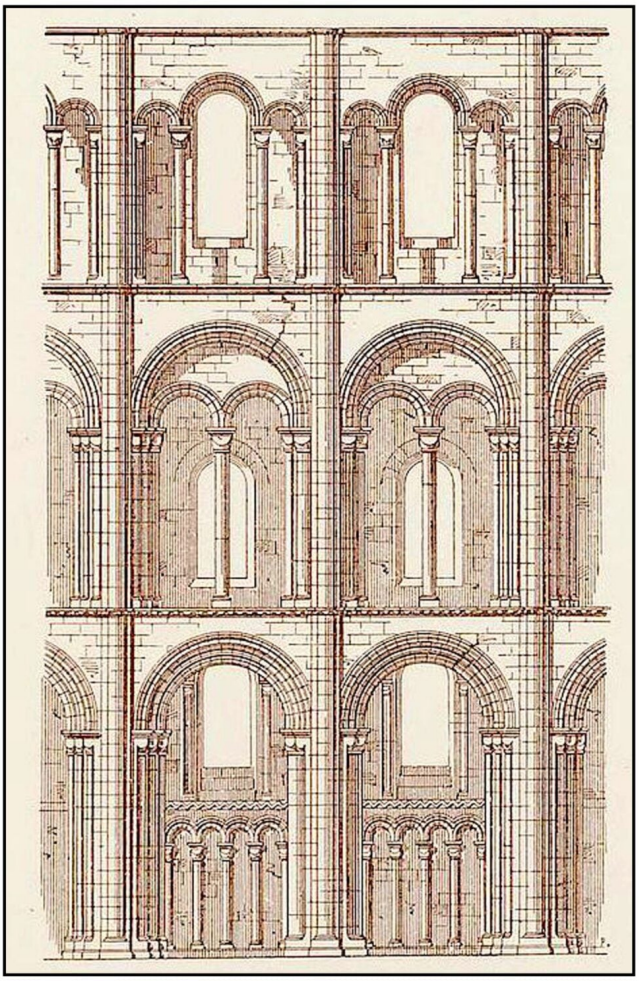
The Norman Cathedral

Under the direction of Abbot Simeon, the Normans initiated the construction of a large abbey church in Ely in 1083. The remains of Saint Æthelthryth were moved from the old church to the new in 1106. Her marble tomb was placed in a shrine bedecked by gold and jewels behind the high altar. The building was granted cathedral status by Henry I 1109. The nave, central tower and transepts were completed by about 1140, and the western transepts and tower were finally finished by about 1190.

The nave is 72 meters long and 22 meters high. There are three levels: the arcade, gallery (or tribune) and clerestory, the last containing large windows for light (clerestory means "clear storey"). The proportions for these levels are 6:5:4 (Clifton-Taylor, 1986, p 36). The arcades of the gallery are divided into two and those of the clerestory into three. The columns alternate between piers with multiple shafts and piers with large cylindrical columns, providing a gentle visual rhythm. The aisles on either side of the main nave are each one half the width of the nave (Fernie, 2003). The roof was made of the same timbers that were used to provide the scaffolding when constructing the nave.

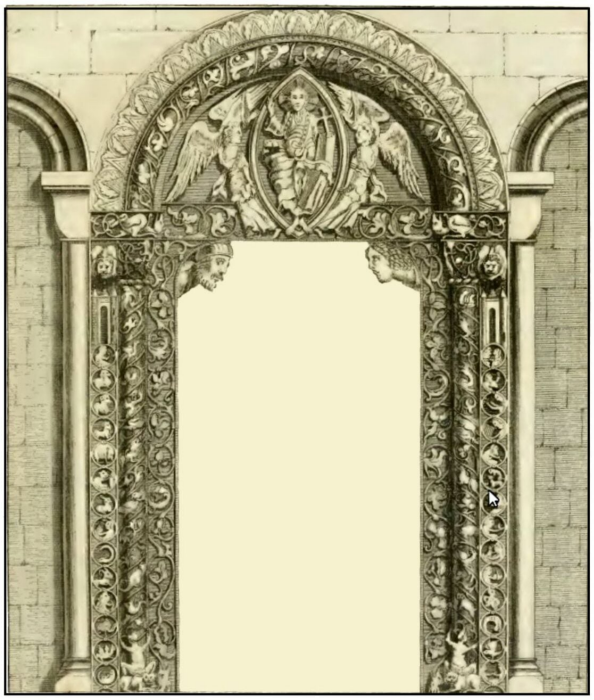
The following illustration shows on the left a diagram of the nave (Dehio & Bezold, 1887, plate 88), On the right is a modern photograph that shows its three levels, and at the

bottom a photograph that illustrates the alternation of the main columns.



The monk’s door and the prior’s door from the cloisters into the nave were likely built and decorated in the 1130s. Both

are intricately sculpted. The prior's door (shown below in a plate from Bentham, 1771, and in a modern photograph) is surmounted by a tympanum containing Christ in Majesty surrounded by two angels. Though far less accomplished than the Romanesque sculptures in France, it has its own charm.



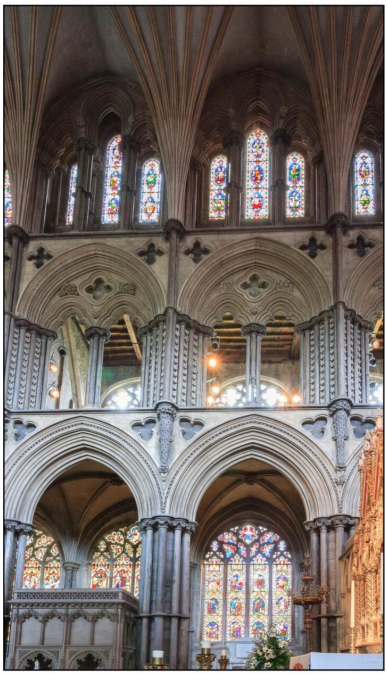
The Gothic Cathedral

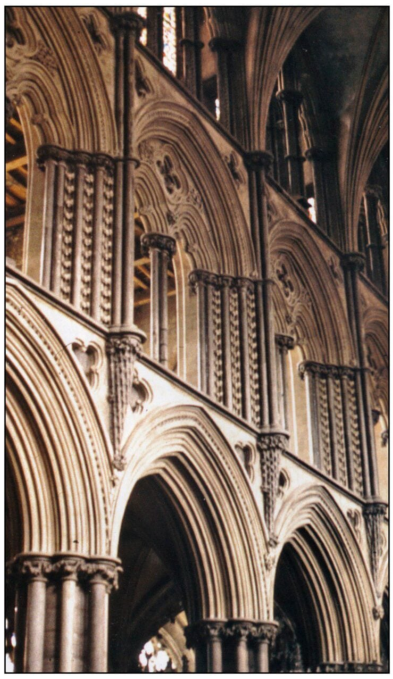
The Galillee Porch was added to the west front of the cathedral in the first two decades of the 13th Century. As we have already noted the style is early Gothic: the blind arcades decorating the façade have pointed arches, narrow columns, and trefoil openings.

A little later, the east end of the Cathedral was extended to form a Presbytery: a space for the monks to worship separate from the choir and the nave. This extension in a richly decorated Gothic style was completed in 1252 (Maddison, 2003). The large columns of the arcade are divided into multiple smaller columns and the pointed arches are geometrically ornamented. The tribune gallery has twin trefoiled openings beneath a large pointed arch. The clerestory has lancet windows with an inner row of cinquefoil arches. The stone

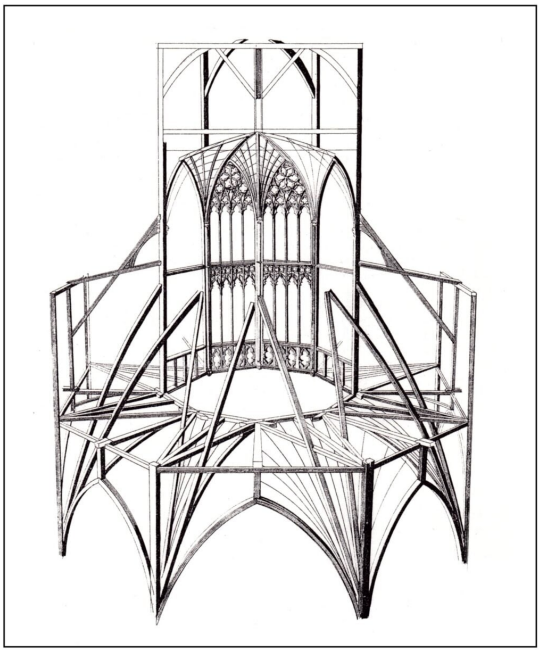
vault is supported by tierceron ribs.

The following illustration shows a view of the choir and presbytery toward the east by John Eaton (2016) surrounded by two views of the north wall, the left by Arthur de Smet (1972) and the right from Broughton (2008):

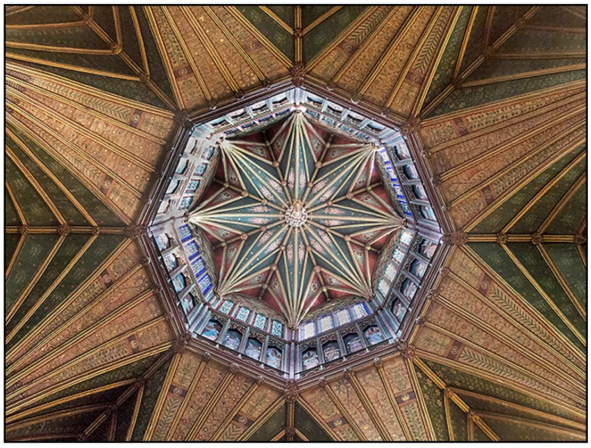


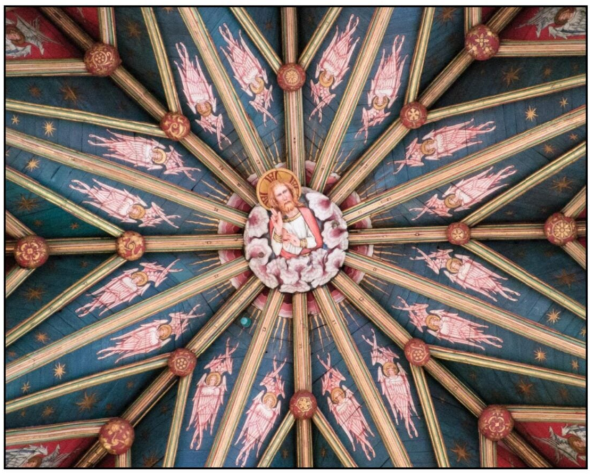


In 1321, work began on a large separate Lady Chapel north of the choir and presbytery. Constructing the foundations for this new building led to the central section of the cathedral being undermined by water. The central bell tower of the cathedral collapsed in 1322, damaging parts of the north transept and the choir. Under the direction of Alan of Walsingham a new octagonal tower was built, with the stonework completed by 1328 (Maddison, 2003). The crowning glory of the tower was a magnificent “lantern” built of timber that allowed light to descend into the cathedral (completed in about 1340). The following illustration shows the octagon viewed from the western tower and a diagram of the carpentry underlying the lantern from Hewett (1974, plate 76):



The following illustration shows views of the lantern from the interior of the cathedral:

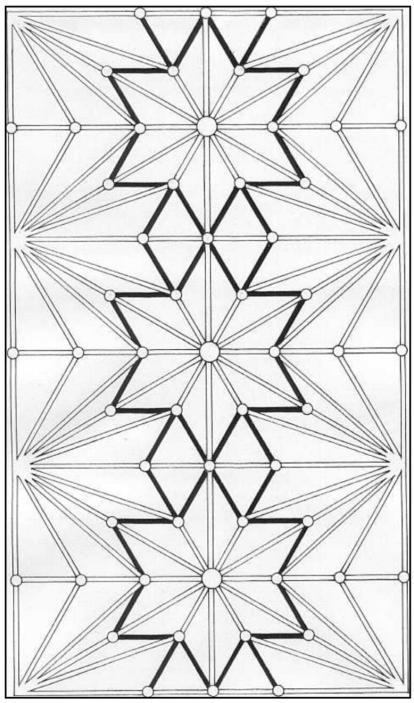




Because of the lantern, Ely cathedral provides a marvelous

interplay of light and shadow. Frederick Evans took many photographs in 1897 and published these in *Camera Work* in 1903 (Lyden, 2020). Two of his images are below:

After the stonework of the octagon was completed Bishop Hotham and Akan of Walsingham then returned to complete the lady chapel – a wonder of Decorated English Gothic. The vault is supported by interconnecting ribs forming star shapes (*lierne,* from French *lier*, to tie, or stellar vaulting). This approach supports a wider vault than the simple tierceron ribbing. The large windows are supported by thin vertical columns that extend outward to provide a buttressing effect. The following illustration shows a photograph of the chapel and a diagram of the lierne vaulting.



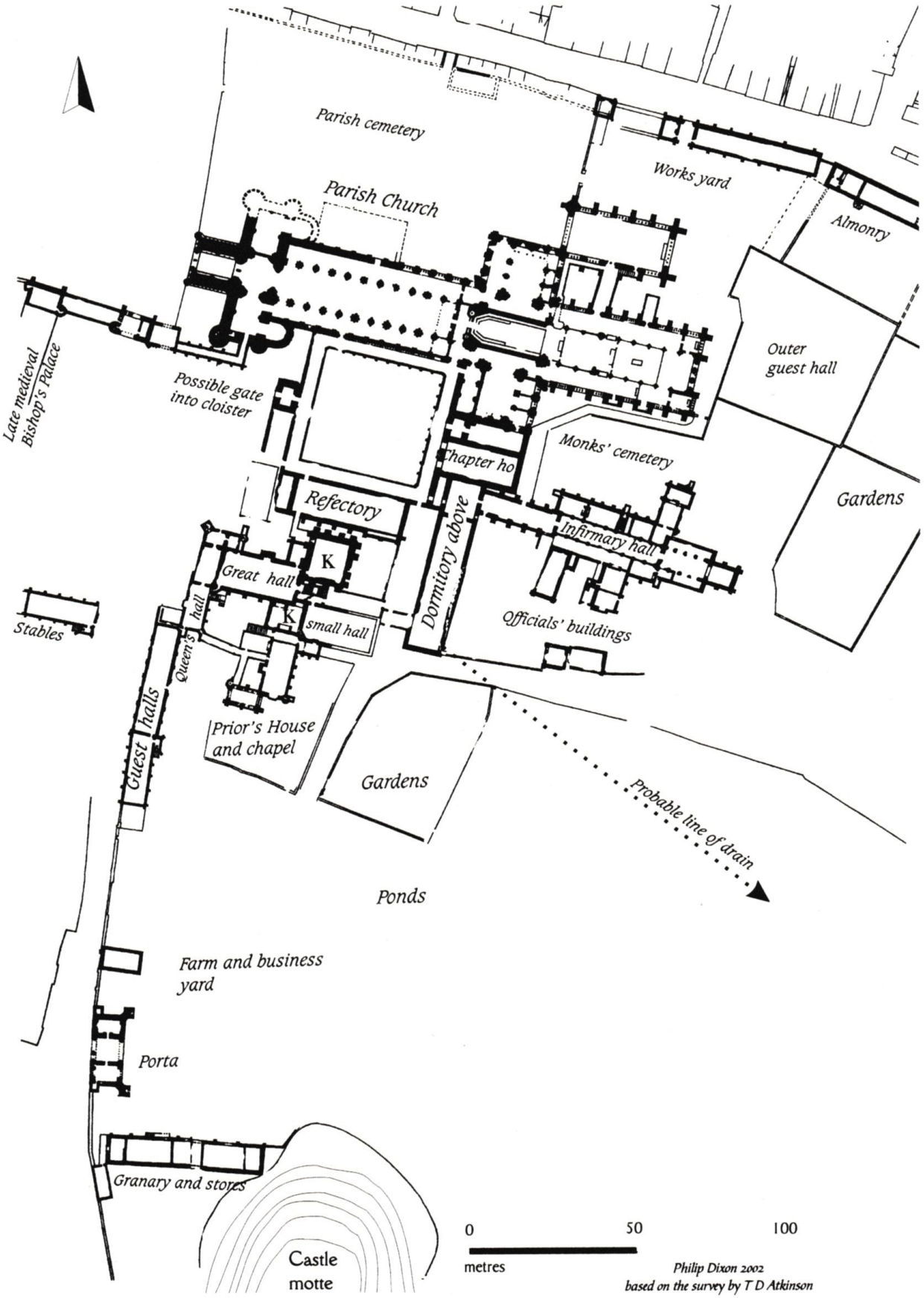
The chapel was completed in the 1340s. The lower sections of the walls are decorated with vegetal patterns, giving the visitor a sense of being in a garden (Broughton, 2008). The present chapel is very different from the way it was in the 14th and 15th Centuries. At that time, numerous painted sculptures existed in the niches, and the windows were made of stained glass.

The Monastery

Ely Cathedral, like Canterbury, Durham, and Norwich, was a monastic cathedral. The monks at these cathedrals followed the Benedictine order. The bishop of a monastic cathedral was the titular abbot of the monastery, but the monks were essentially led by the prior. Although most of the old cathedrals in England were monastic, some cathedrals, such as Lincoln and Hereford were secular and had no associated monastery.

The monastery (or priory) at Ely was prosperous. Many of the medieval buildings of the monastery still stand. Some are used by King's Ely School. The following plan shows the probable layout of the monastery (Dixon, 2003). The castle motte is the

site of a fortress in Norman times.



The Reformation

As the years wore on the monastery at Ely became rich. The sale of indulgences brought in much money. Death acted like the church's tax-collector, as those in need of heaven left their land and possessions to the church rather than to their children. Pilgrims to the shrine of Æthelthryth/Etheldreda were expected to make significant donations to the church. Æthelthryth was also called Saint Audrey. Ribbons bought at her shrine were called "St Audrey's lace," whence comes the word "tawdry" for overpriced finery. Some Bishops at Ely made special ornate chapels for themselves: Bishop Alcock (1486-1500) at the end of the north aisle and Bishop West (1515-33) at the end of the south aisle. It was easy to accuse the church of luxury and greed.

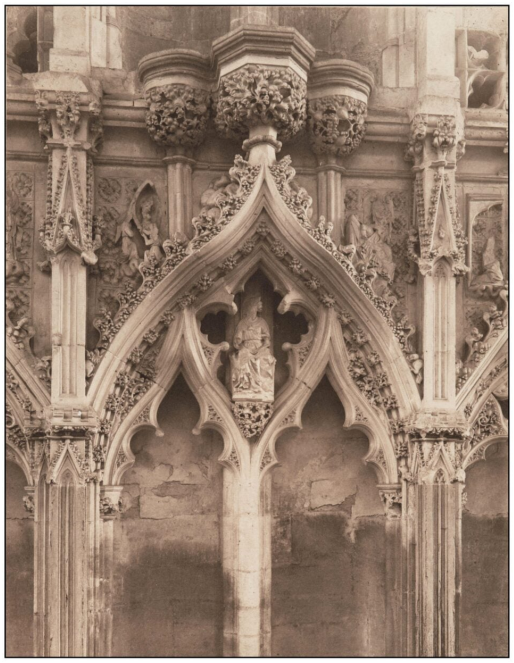
As the 16th Century progressed, Henry VIII came to need both a new wife and a source of gold. In 1533 Henry appointed Thomas Cranmer as Archbishop of Canterbury. Cranmer allowed him to marry Anne Boleyn. In 1534, Thomas Cromwell, the king's chancellor, arranged for Parliament to pass the Act of Supremacy declaring the king to be the head of the English Church. In 1537, Cromwell convened a synod of British bishops who produce a book *The Institution of the Christian Man,* espousing many of the principles proposed by Martin Luther. In 1839 Parliament passed a bill to allow the Dissolution of the Monasteries. All of the small monasteries were to be closed, their monks let go, and their assets expropriated by the king. The monasteries associated with the cathedrals were also to be closed, although some of their monks could remain as officers in the newly secularized cathedrals.

On 18 November, 1539, Prior Robert Seward and 23 other monks signed a deed of surrender of the monastery of Ely to Henry VIII (Duffy, 2020, pp 31-45). There was not much else they could do. The abbots of Gastonbury and Reading had been executed on November 13 for refusing to dissolve their houses.

The monastery and cathedral were held at the pleasure of the monarch and its riches were duly plundered. In 1541 the cathedral was given a royal charter as a secular cathedral. The church which had been devoted to Saint Etheldreda and Saint Peter, was renamed “The Cathedral Church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity of Ely.”

The bishop during this time was Thomas Goodrich, a colleague of Thomas Cranmer. Trained in theology at Cambridge University, he was appointed Bishop of Ely in 1534 and remained bishop until his death in 1554. After the dissolution of the monastery, he ordered the destruction of the shrine of Ethelreda, the defacement of the statues in the Lady Chapel, and the removal of the statues in the chapels of Bishop’s Alcock and West. Every one of the 147 statues of Mary and the other saints in the Lady Chapel was beheaded. Goodrich continued as bishop after the death of Henry in 1547; during the reign of Edward VI (1547-53), he was also appointed Lord Chancellor (1552). He died in 1554, before Mary (reign 1553-8) had time to pursue her vengeance.

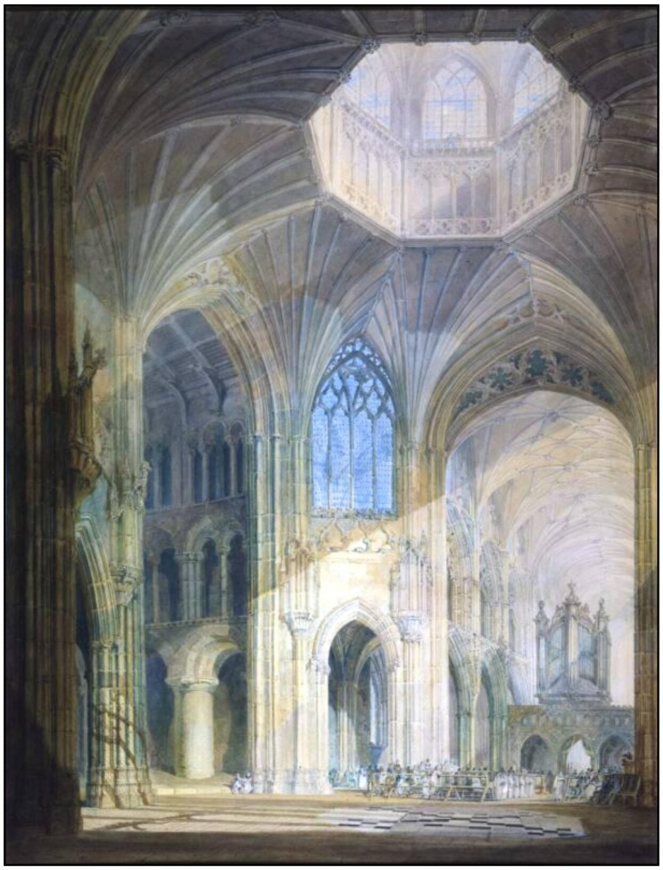
The following illustration shows two photographs from the 1890s by Frederick Evans showing the mutilation of the statues in the Lady Chapel and the empty plinths on the gateway to Bishop West’s chapel. Also shown is the memorial brass to Thomas Goodrich, located on the floor of the south presbytery. The bishop holds in his right hand both a bible and the seal of England, emblematic of his chancellorship.



After the Reformation the cathedrals of England fell into disrepair. The architecture was contemptuously referred to as “Gothic” or barbaric (see Clifton-Taylor, 1986, pp 9-12). In 1699, the north west transept of Ely Cathedral collapsed (Fernie, 2003, p 96). There was no money to rebuild:

> To this day, Ely looks like the wounded veteran of some forgotten war. (Jenkins, 2016, pp 91-2)

Watercolors by J. M. W. Turner from the 1790s show the cathedral octagon and the dilapidated Galilee Porch.



Repair

The cathedral was extensively restored during the 19th Century: The roof of the nave was retimbered and painted; the windows were provided with stained glass; the choir was provided with new stalls and a beautifully carved choir screen; the high altar received an intricate reredos (from French *arere*, behind, *dos*, back).

The following illustration shows some of the carvings above the choir stalls. These depict episodes in the life of Jesus: the supper at Emmaus, the appearance of the risen Jesus to Thomas, and the ascension:

Ely in the Present

Most people in England no longer attend church, and those who believe that there is a God are equaled by those who believe that there is not. What should be the place of the church in modern society?

Intriguing to me are the modern statues that now adorn the cathedral. Below are illustrations of four of these works. Clockwise from the upper left are the Virgin Mary in the Lady Chapel urging us to exultation by David Wynne (2000), Christ and Mary Magdalene wondering at the mystery of the resurrection by David Wynne (1967), Christ in Majesty above the pulpit by Peter Ball (2000), and half-life-size statues by Sean Henry on the empty plinths in Bishop West's chapel, part of an installation entitled *Am I My Brothers Keeper?* in 2024.

An optimistic view of the future is from Nicholas Orme (2017, p 262):

> The most astonishing feature of cathedral history, when one has journeyed through its seventeen hundred years, is its immense and varied creativity. If we take buildings, there is the evolving history of their plans and construction, the sourcing of the materials, the labours of craftsmen, the elaboration of the decoration, and the successive layers of repair and restoration. There is the worship, complex in its calendar, its liturgical texts, the ways in which it is done, and the application of the worship to God, saints, or popular, needs. There is the vast range of arts involved in producing worship and its setting: sculpture, painting, stained glass, metalwork, fabrics, singing, instrumental music, and chorography. There is the written and spoken word in prayer- and hymn-books, preaching, inscriptions, archives, libraries, guide-books, and service-sheets.

A more restrained understanding of what it is like to visit a church when faith has passed away can be found in a 1954 poem by Philip Larkin entitled *Church Going*, the last verse of which reads:

> A serious house on serious earth it is,
> In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
> Are recognised, and robed as destinies.
> And that much never can be obsolete,
> Since someone will forever be surprising
> A hunger in himself to be more serious,
> And gravitating with it to this ground,
> Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
> If only that so many dead lie round.

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In Search of Form: The Sculpture of Henry Moore

Henry Moore (1898-1986), one of the greatest sculptors of the 20th Century, created striking three-dimensional forms using many different techniques – carving, casting, modelling – and many different materials – stone, bronze, iron, wood, concrete, polystyrene. In the words of Herbert Read (1965, p 259)

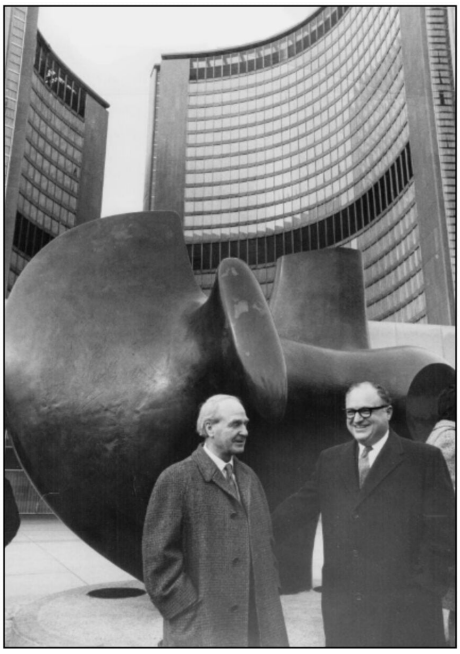
> He is a maker of images – or, as I prefer to call them because they have material existence – of icons, and he is impelled to make these icons by his sense of the forms that are vital to the life of mankind.

Each of Moore's works was derived from nature, but Moore simplified and abstracted the experience to provide an emotional understanding rather than a sensory representation

This essay comments on the nature of form and considers some of Moore's works.

Personal History

In 1966 a sculpture by Moore entitled *Three Way Piece Number 2*, but generally known as *The Archer* was erected in the square in front of Toronto's new City Hall, designed by the modernist Finnish architect Viljo Revell (1910-1964). Revell had asked Moore to design a sculpture to complement the new building. Unfortunately, the city council refused to finance the sculpture. Undaunted, the mayor Philip Givens arranged to pay for it through private donations. Despite the misgivings of some, the sculpture and the city hall have become immensely popular. Below are two photographs from 1966, the one of the right showing Henry Moore and Philip Givens.



I was intrigued by Toronto's controversial sculpture, and in 1968 on a trip to London, I was able to see a large exhibit of Moore's work at the Tate (Sylvester, 1968). His work affected me deeply: the forms he presented resonated in my mind.

In the early 1970s, Moore donated a large collection of his work to the Art Gallery of Toronto, and in 1974 the gallery

opened its Henry Moore Sculpture Centre (Wilkinson, 1987). The focus of the centre is a large room containing many plaster maquettes used by Moore for casting in bronze.

In 2014, to celebrate its 40th anniversary, the centre arranged for Geoffrey Farmer to illuminate these maquettes with changing lights and to provide a sonic accompaniment for the forms (Whyte, 2014). He called the experience *Every day needs an urgent whistle blown into it*. It demanded your attention and I was completely fascinated by the play of light and sound on the forms. Several of the illustrations that follow are photographs taken during my visits to this particular exhibition.

Some Comments on Form

Form is a word of many meanings. The first four meanings given by Wiktionary for the noun "form" in the sense of physical objects are:

1. the shape or visible structure of a thing or person
2. a thing that gives shape to other things as in a mold.
3. regularity, beauty or elegance.
4. the inherent nature of an object; that which the mind itself contributes as the condition of knowing; that in which the essence of a thing consists.

Ancient Greek philosophy had much to say about form (see recent commentaries by Ainsworth, 2024; Fine, 2023; Koslicki, 2018; Koslicki & Raven, 2024; and Silverman, 2014). A "Theory of Forms" is attributed to Plato and Socrates, although this theory is not clearly delineated in the dialogues of Plato. The basic concept holds that an object that we perceive through our senses is but a poor and transitory example of a perfect and eternal form (*eidos*) that exists in some domain separate from everyday reality. However, the true form of

something can be grasped through the exercise of reason. For example (from Book X of *The Republic,* circe 375 BCE), though we may experience many different versions of a table, we can discern an idea of a table to which all these versions conform.

Socrates' *Allegory of the Cave* (from Book VII of *The Republic*) is often understood as explaining the nature of forms. Socrates asks us to imagine that we are imprisoned deep in a cave. All we can see are shadows on the wall of the cave. These shadows are cast by various objects held in front a great fire by a group of puppeteers. The puppeteers themselves do not cast shadows since they are behind a wall, above which they hold their objects. Now, suppose one of the prisoners were to escape and to climb back past the puppeteers and the fire to the entrance of the cave. She would at first be dazzled and confused by the light of the sun. But after a while she would be able to see the real world. And if she were then to return to the cave and try to convince the other prisoners of what she had discovered, they would consider her crazy.

Socrates (or Plato) is proposing that what we normally perceive is an illusion. Reality can only be attained by leaving behind our preconceptions and grasping the true nature of the world. This is similar to the Apostle Paul's comment (Tyson, 2024)

> For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (*I Corinthians* 13:12)

Indeed, Plato actually used the same metaphor in the *Phaedrus* (circe 370 BCE)

> For there is no light of justice or temperance or any of the higher ideas which are precious to souls in the earthly copies of them: they are seen through a glass dimly; and

> there are few who, going to the images, behold in them the realities, and these only with difficulty. (Jowett translation)

Socrates' allegory has been interpreted in different ways. An epistemological interpretation is that we cannot know the true reality through what we perceive, but can only discover it if we reason beyond appearances. An ethical interpretation is that we cannot know how to be good by observing the world but only by understanding the ultimate nature of goodness. Whatever the interpretation, the allegory gets lost in its details (e.g. Wilberding, 2004). Who or what are the puppeteers? What are the objects they use to cast the shadows? What is the fire in the cave that causes the shadows? It might have been simpler for the sun to cast shadows of objects in the outside world onto the wall of the cave.

We are left with the simple idea that what we perceive as good or true may not be so. The good or the true may need some deeper understanding. The religious will claim that this understanding comes by faith; the scientific will claim that it comes by reason.

Aristotle had completely different ideas about form from Plato (Fine, 2003; Ainsworth, 2024). For him, form was what gave objects their individuality. Any thing was a combination of substance (*hule*) and form (*morphe*): a theory that goes by the name of "hylomorphism." In this approach form is not the universal and general idea of which a particular object was a poor copy, but rather that which made that particular object itself. Form was one of the four types of cause: material, formal, efficient, and final.

The Young Moore

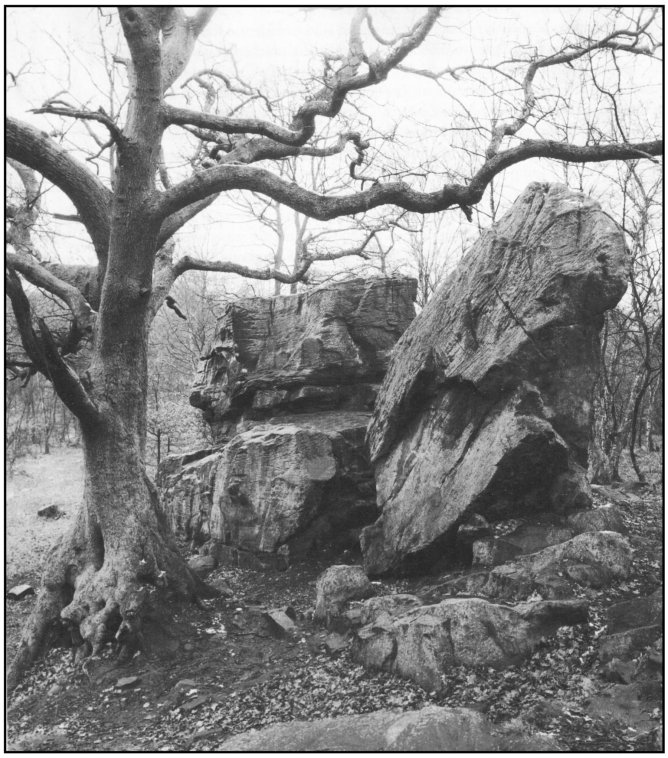
Henry Moore was born in 1898 in Castleford, near Leeds, Yorkshire, where his father worked as a supervisor in one of

the coal mines. Having heard about Michelangelo in school, he decided at the age of 11 years that he would be a sculptor (Barassi et al, 2017, p 11).

The rolling hills of Yorkshire are a result of glacial erosion. As the glaciers retreated, they left behind “erratic” rocks that remain scattered across the landscape. The young Moore was impressed by one such erratic, Adel Rock:

> For me it was the first big, bleak lump of stone set in the landscape and surrounded by marvelous gnarled prehistoric trees. It had no feature of recognition, no element of copying of naturalism, just a bleak powerful form, very impressive. (quoted in Moore &Hedgecoe, 1986, p 35)

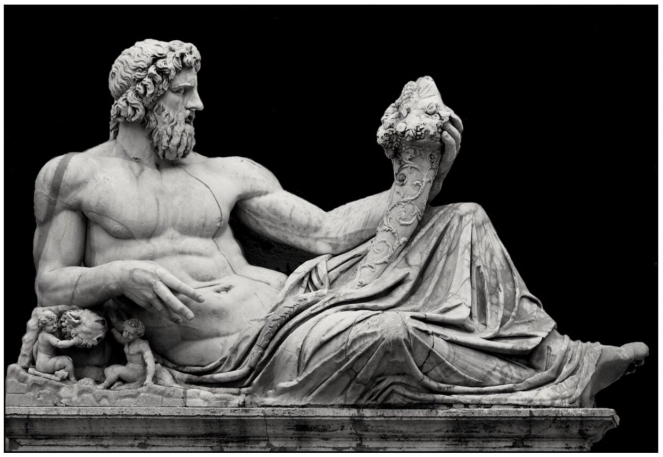
The following photograph is by John Hedgecoe (copied from Moore & Wilkinson, 2002, p 30)

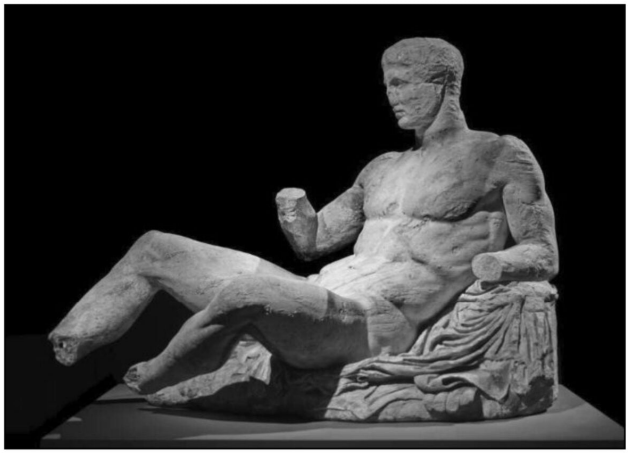


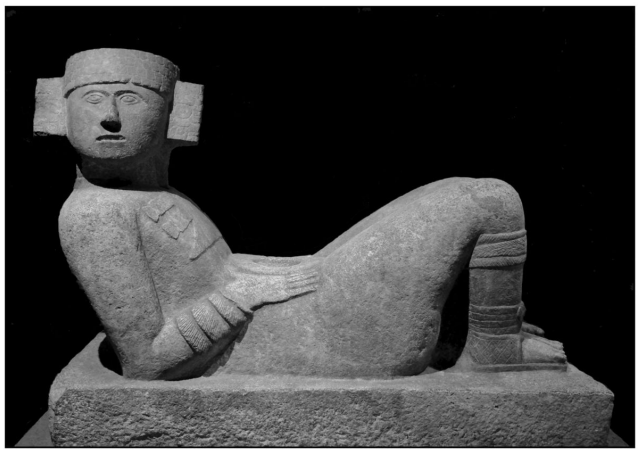
Moore served in France with the Prince of Wales Own Civil Service Rifles and was injured by gas in 1917. After the war he obtained a veteran’s educational grant and attended Leeds School of Art from 1919-21. He then won a scholarship to the

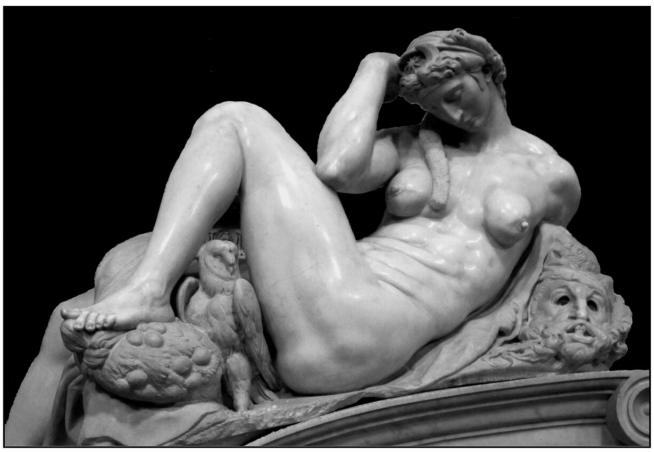
Royal College of Art in London from 1921-24. Upon graduating, he became an instructor at the college.

In London, Moore became familiar with the sculptures and the plaster casts held by the many museums in the city. A travelling fellowship also gave him an opportunity to study works in France and Italy. Moore became especially intrigued by the long history of reclining figures in sculpture. The illustration on the following page shows some historical reclining figures: the *Tiberinus*, a Roman sculpture from the 2nd Century CE representing the God of the River Tiber with his horn of plenty, the *Dionysios* from the Parthenon (5th Century BCE), the Chichen Itza *Chacmool* from the 9th Century CE, and *Night* by Michelangelo (1531).









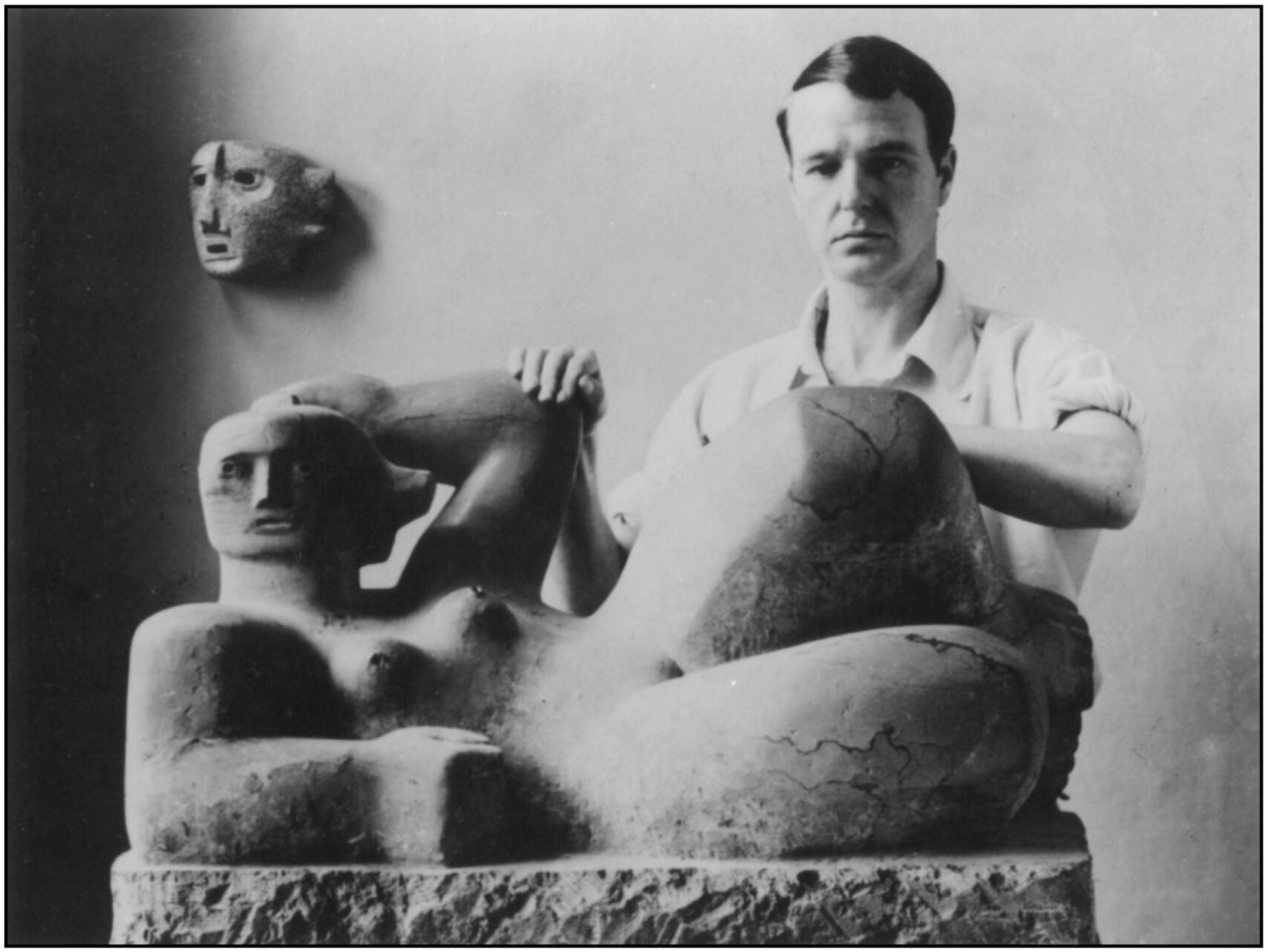
Moore was particularly fascinated by the power of the pre-Columbian Mexican *Chacmool* figures, some of which he saw in

the British Museum and others he read about. No one knows what these sculptures represented, nor what they were actually called. The name *Chacmool,* meaning “jaguar” in the Mayan language, was invented by an archeologist. The bowl on the stomach may have held offerings to the gods. In some places and at some times such offerings may have been related to human sacrifice.

Moore’s first major work *Reclining Figure* (1929) carved out of Hornton stone paid homage to the *Chacmool* sculptures of Mexico.

> It has a definite influence from Mexican sculpture, from that particular figure, the *Chacmool* figure! Now except for the turn in the head of the *Chacmool*, which I think is a wonderful sculpture, you get a side view of the body, and the legs are both doing the same thing, both sides are both doing the same thing, that is it’s a symmetrical pose, and although I wasn’t consciously trying to compete with this figure in the brown Hornton one, perhaps my desire to get more three dimensions into sculpture made me use a pose in which the top leg comes over and the body is twisted, the arm is up and the other arm is down, that is, I was using a much less symmetrical pose. (quoted in Moore & Wilkinon, 2002, pp 253-4)

The following illustration shows the 1929 sculpture as well as an anonymous photograph of Moore with the sculpture in his studio in 1930:



One of Moore’s colleagues in Leeds and in London was Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975). Hepworth was likely the first modern sculptor to use the hole as an essential part of her creations (Vertu, 2021). The illustration on the right shows *Pierced Form* (1931), a carving in pink alabaster, that was destroyed by bombing during World War II, and only exists in this photograph. Hepworth’s creations hearken back to the *gongshi* or “Scholar’s Rocks,” naturally weathered stones, strangely shaped and often containing holes, that have been used as objects of contemplation in the East.

Moore began to use holes in his sculpture soon after. In a BBC program in 1937 he remarked

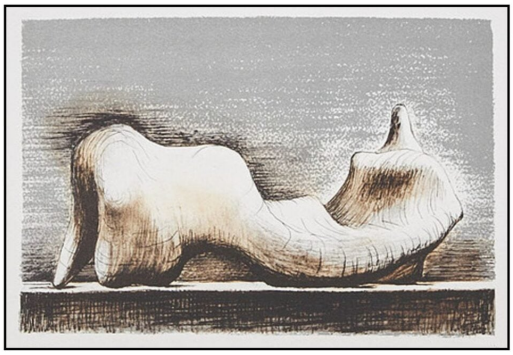
> A piece of stone can have a hole through it and not be weakened – if the hole is of a studied size, shape and direction. On the principle of the arch, it can remain just as strong. The first hole made through a piece of stone is a revelation. The hole connects one side to the other, making it immediately more three-dimensional. A hole can itself

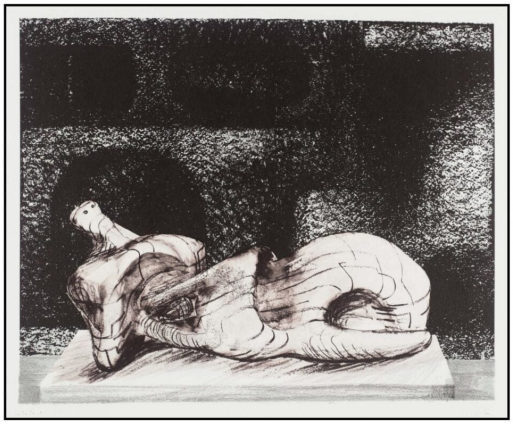
> have as much shape-meaning as a solid mass. Sculpture in air is possible, where the stone contains only the hole, which is the intended and considered form. (quoted in Moore & Wilkinson, 2002, pp 95-96)

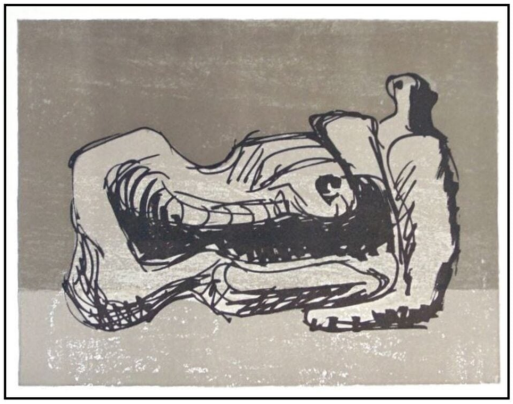
The following is a reclining figure carved in elmwood from 1939:

Reclining Figures

The reclining figure became Moore's most common theme. Almost all of his reclining figures are women. The following illustration shows on the left a page of sketches from 1934. Moore reworked the page into a presentation copy in 1954 using watercolor and crayon to unify and highlight the drawings. On the right are some of his many lithographs showing reclining figures from the 1970s.







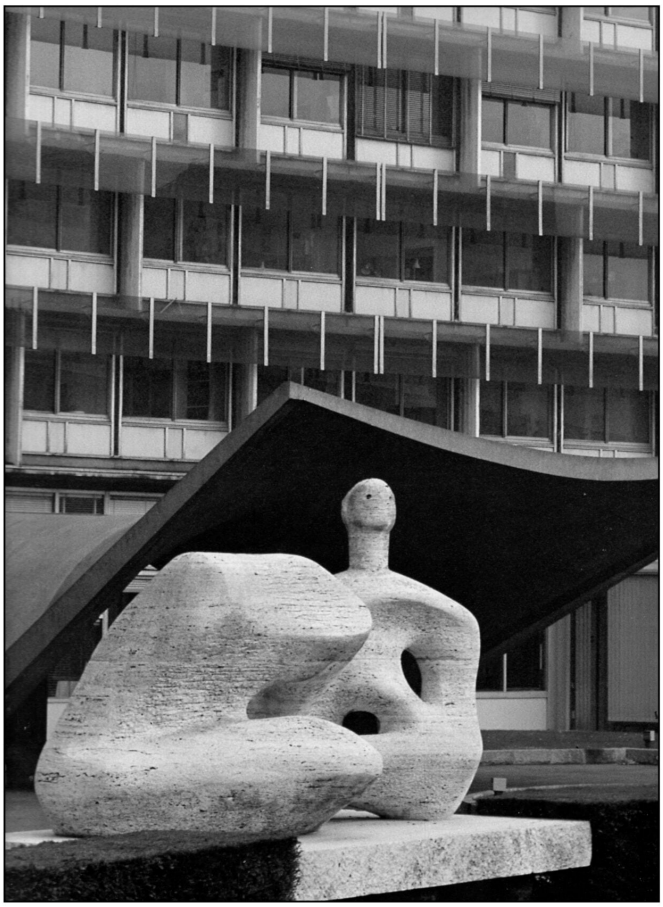
The reclining figure can convey many meanings. In its relation with the ground, it combines aspects of both the human figure and the natural landscape. Sylvester (1968, p 5) remarks

> But the primary intention is ‘energy and power’: Moore’s reclining figures are not supine; they prop themselves up, are potentially active. Hence the affinity with river-gods: the idea is not simply that of a body subjected to the flow of nature’s forces but of one in which these forces are harnessed.

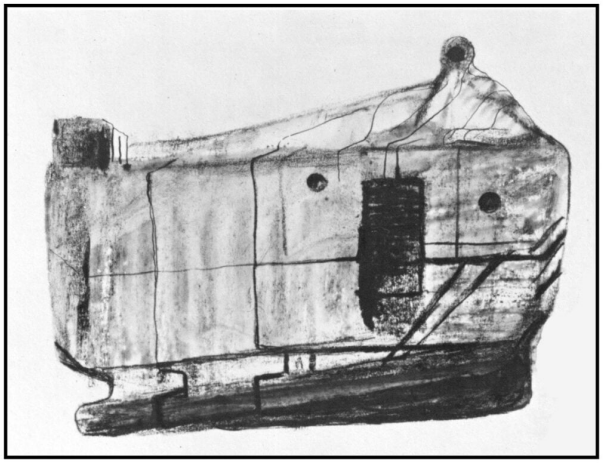
To my thinking Moore’s reclining figures appear to be waking up. They may thus embody the idea of matter becoming

conscious. In this respect, it is appropriate that one of Moore’s most impressive reclining figures was commissioned in 1955 for the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in Paris. The sculpture could serve to illustrate the awakening of collaboration between nations.

Moore initially made a plaster maquette which was 2.35 meters long. From this, seven bronze versions were cast. Since he thought that the bronze version was too dark and too small to be placed in front of the UNESCO building, Moore carved a larger (5.08 meters long) version in travertine stone, the same as used for the building. Moore often scaled his creations to fit the location. The following illustration shows the stone sculpture, the sculpture in place in Paris in a photograph by John Hedgecoe (1998, p 136), and the plaster maquette under the lights of Geoffrey Farmer in Toronto.



Moore’s reclining figures came in many forms. An interesting version shows a relining figure on a pedestal (1960). This may relate to the 3rd-Century BCE Etruscan sarcophagi in Tuscania. The following illustration shows one such sarcophagus, a drawing from 1936 (from Clark, 1974, Figure 85), and the plaster maquette in Toronto under the lights and shadows of Geoffrey Farmer.



Relations between the Pieces

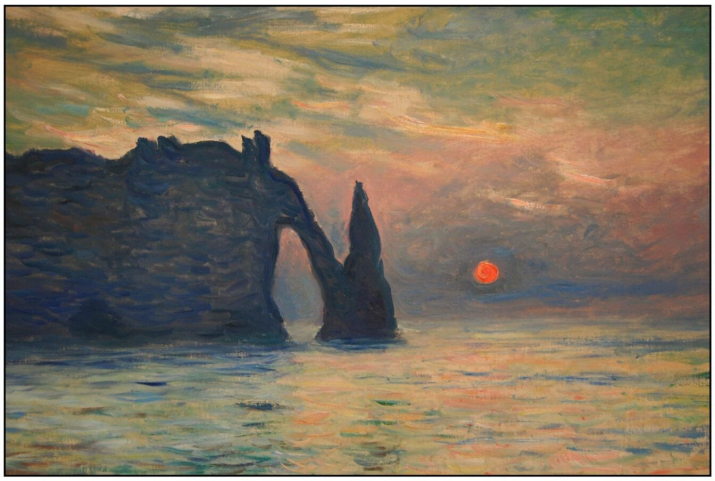
In the late 1950s Moore began to consider the idea of creating reclining figures composed of two parts. In conversation with John Hedgecoe (Moore & Hedgecoe, 1986, p 112) he remarked

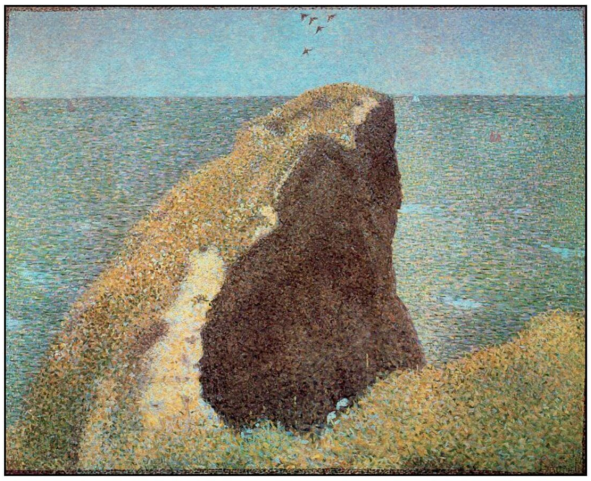
> Making a sculpture in two pieces means that, as you walk around it, one form gets in front of the other in ways that you cannot foresee, and you get a more surprising number of different views than when looking at a monolithic piece. … If you are doing a reclining figure, you just do the head and the legs. You leave space for the body, imagining that other part even though it isn't there. The space then becomes very expressive.

He also related the new sculpture to childhood memories of Adel Rock:

> While I was making it my *Two Piece Reclining Fig*ure recalled for me Adel Rock and the *Rock at Etratat* by Seurat. This particular sculpture is a mixture of the human form and the landscape, a metaphor of the relationship of humanity with the earth.

Moore is likely conflating Seurat's *Le Bec du Hoc at Grandcamp* (1985), illustrated below on the right, which was at one time owned by his friend Kenneth Clark, with one of Monet's many paintings of the *Cliff at Etratat* (left).





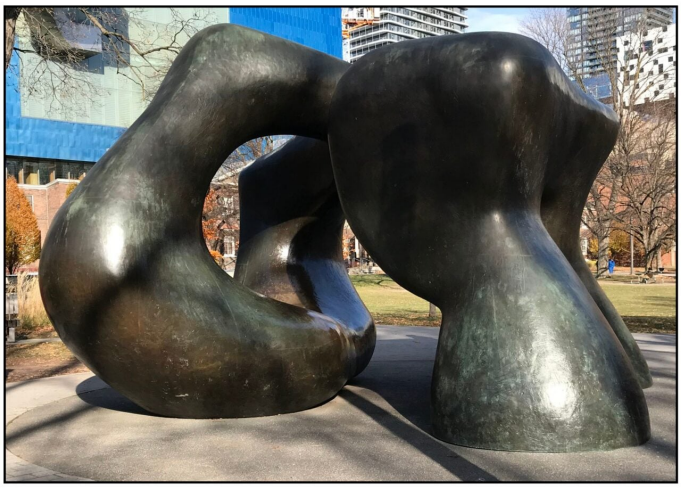
The following illustration shows a recent photograph of Adel Rock:

And finally, the *Two Piece Reclining Figure 2* (1960) as a plaster maquette in Toronto and as a bronze casting in the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (viewed from the other side):

Moore soon began to experiment with more abstract forms placed in relation to each other. His *Large Two Forms* (1969) brings

two shapes that might derive from pelvic bones into a close and possibly sexual relationship. The sculpture began as a small plaster maquette (16 cm) and then was carved in red Soraya marble (length 2 meters): The following illustration shows some black and white photographs by Moore (Sylvester, 1968) and a more recent color photograph:

Moore scaled the forms up using polystyrene (length 6 meters) and cast them in bronze. One of the castings was initially installed outside the Art Gallery or Ontario in 1973. In 2017 it was moved to the nearby Grange Park, where it can be more easily viewed from all directions:



Pointing

In 1940 Moore made a small (length 19 cm) sculpture in steel entitled *Three Points*.

He remarked that

> this pointing has an emotional or physical action in it where things are just about to touch but don’t. There is some anticipation of this action. Michelangelo used the same theme in his fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, of God creating Adam, in which the forefinger of God’s hand is just about to touch and give life to Adam. It is also like the points in the sparking plug of a car, where the spark has to jump across the gap between the points.

There is a very beautiful early French painting (*Gabrielle d’Estrées with her Sister in the Bath*), where one sister is just about to touch the nipple of the other. I used this sense of anticipation first in the *Three Points* of 1940, but there

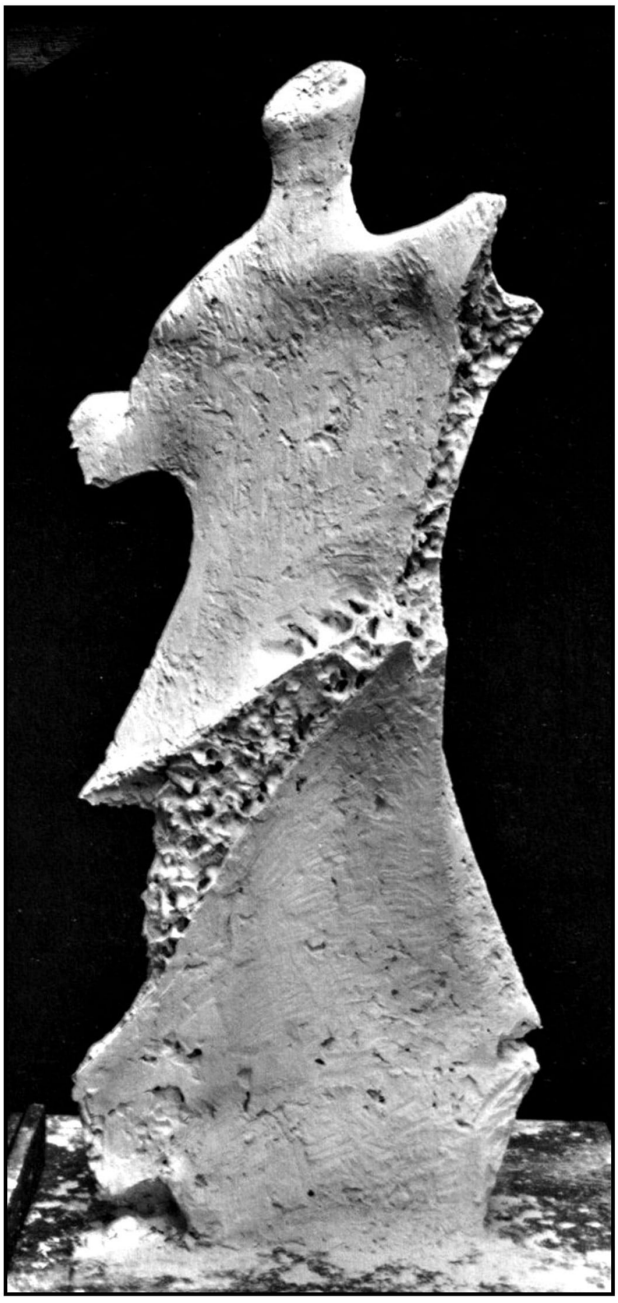
are other, later works where one form is nearly making contact with the other. It is very important that the points do not actually touch. There has to be a gap. (quoted in Moore & Wilkinson, 2002, p 260-1)

Probably the most famous of Moore's pointed sculptures is the *Oval with Points* (1960). This began as a small plaster model (height 16 cm). Based on this Moore made a plaster maquette (height 110 cm) from which bronze versions were cast. Finally, he made a larger version in bronze with a height of 332 cm. the following illustration shows the original plaster model in the Art Gallery of Ontario, the large bronze version in the sculpture park run by the Henry Moore Foundation in Perry Green, Hertfordshire, and the medium-size plaster maquette under the lights of Geoffrey Farmer at the Art Gallery of Ontario:

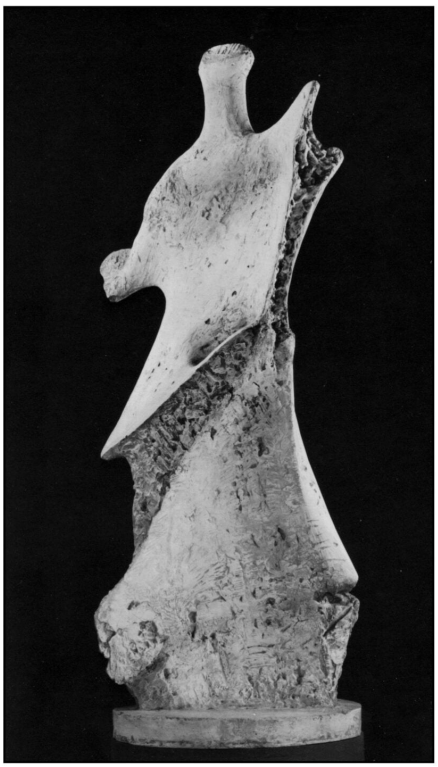
The sculptures have a clear focus where the two points come close together. The points divide the hole in the center into two parts, which make their own form out of the emptiness. The eye wanders from the structure of the oval to the focus, then through to holes to what is beyond.

Standing Figure: Knife Edge

In 1961 Moore created a small figure (about 25 cm tall) by adding modelling clay to a fragment of a bird's breastbone. The figure no longer exists except in a photograph by John Hedgecoe (1968, p 360). Using this as a model, Moore then made a plaster maquette that was 163 cm tall. The following illustration shows two views of the plaster maquette:



Using this maquette, Moore cast several versions of the figure in bronze and one in fibreglass. An even taller version (2.8 meters) was then cast in bronze. The following illustration shows the original model, the fibreglass casting (now in the Art Gallery of Ontario) and a bronze casting of the taller version placed as a memorial to W. B. Yeats in St Stephen's Green in Dublin


In 1976, Moore arranged for a further enlargement – *Large Standing Figure: Knife Edge*. The following figure shows multiple views of one o the castings of this sculpture, now in Greenwich:

From the “front” the statue resembles a human figure with arms indicating the way to go, or an angel with wings opening to begin flight. At one time Moore called it *Winged Figure*, a name appropriate to its origin in the breast bone of a bird. From the “side” it does appear as a cutting edge. The form brings many ideas to mind.

The following illustration shows the fibreglass version at the Art Gallery of Ontario as experienced under the lights of Geoffrey Farmer. To me it was a little like watching the shadows on the wall of Plato’s cave.

A Maker of Forms

This essay has only mentioned a few of the themes in Moore's sculptures. Over his long and productive life, he considered many others: among them the mother and child, the family, seated figures, warriors, energy, and heads of various kinds. His forms were occasionally naturalistic but more often abstract. He commented on the process of abstraction:

> People say 'Are you trying to be abstract?' thinking then that they know what you are doing though, of course, they don't understand what the devil it is all about. They think that abstraction means getting away from reality and it often means precisely the opposite – that you are getting closer to it, away from a visual interpretation but nearer to an emotional understanding. When I say that I am being abstract, I mean that I am trying to consider but not simply

> copy nature, and that I am taking account of the material I am using and the idea that I wish to release from that material. (quoted in Moore & Hedgecoe, 1986, p 87).

Moore always insisted that his work must come from nature.

> One doesn't quite know how ideas have been generated or where thy come from. Sometimes one is influenced by a particular pebble or other natural form, but it's equally possible to sit down with a blank sheet of paper and a pencil and a scribble will turn into something which is worth developing. It depends on how much background you have to draw on. The older you are, the more observant you are of the world, of nature, and forms, and the more easily you can invent. But it has to come from somewhere in the beginning, from reality, nature. (quoted in Moore & Hedgecoe, 1986, p 122)

How do Moore's forms relate to the ancient philosophical ideas of form? At times he seemed to be seeking the essence or perfect form of something. Some have considered his work in relation to the archetypes that underlie human thought (Neumann, 1959), but this does not help me understand the sculptures.

More often than not, Moore was creating forms rather than portraying them. He was more Aristotelian than Platonic. He followed Aristotle's four causes: material, formal, efficient, and final. He worked with many different materials, he conceived of forms, he arranged for the material to be made into these forms to be made from the materials, and he did this to help us to understand the world and ourselves.

Final Statement

We can let Moore have the final word on his work. The following is from a 1930 article (quoted in Moore and

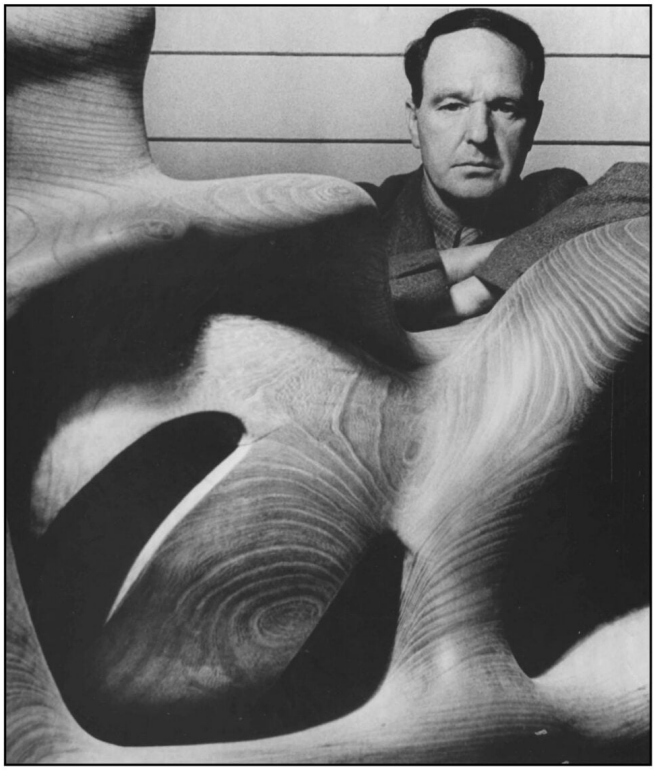
Wilkinson, 2002, p 188)

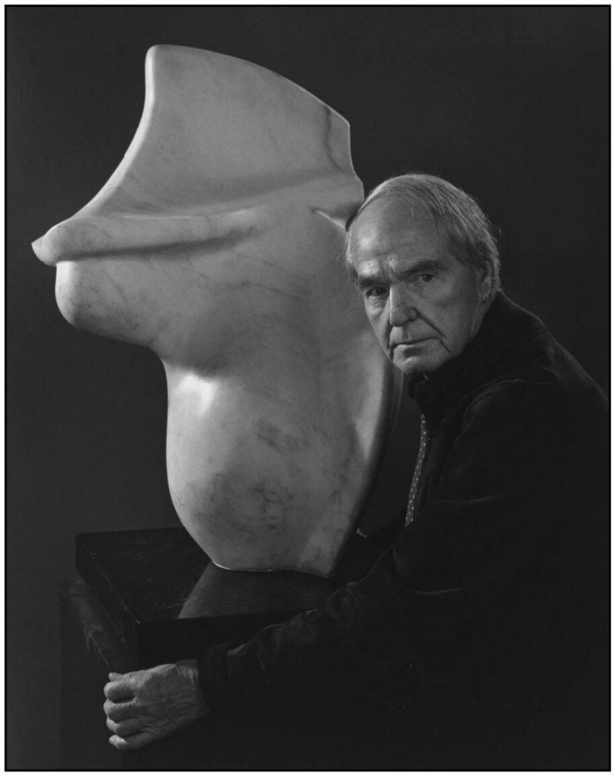
> Each sculptor differs in his aims and ideals according to his different character, personality and his point of development. The sculpture which moves me most is full blooded and self-supporting, fully in the round, that is, its component forms are completely realised and work as masses in opposition, not being merely indicated by surface cutting in relief; it is not perfectly symmetrical, it is static and it is strong and vital, giving out something of the energy and power of great mountains. It has a life of its own, independent of the object it represents.

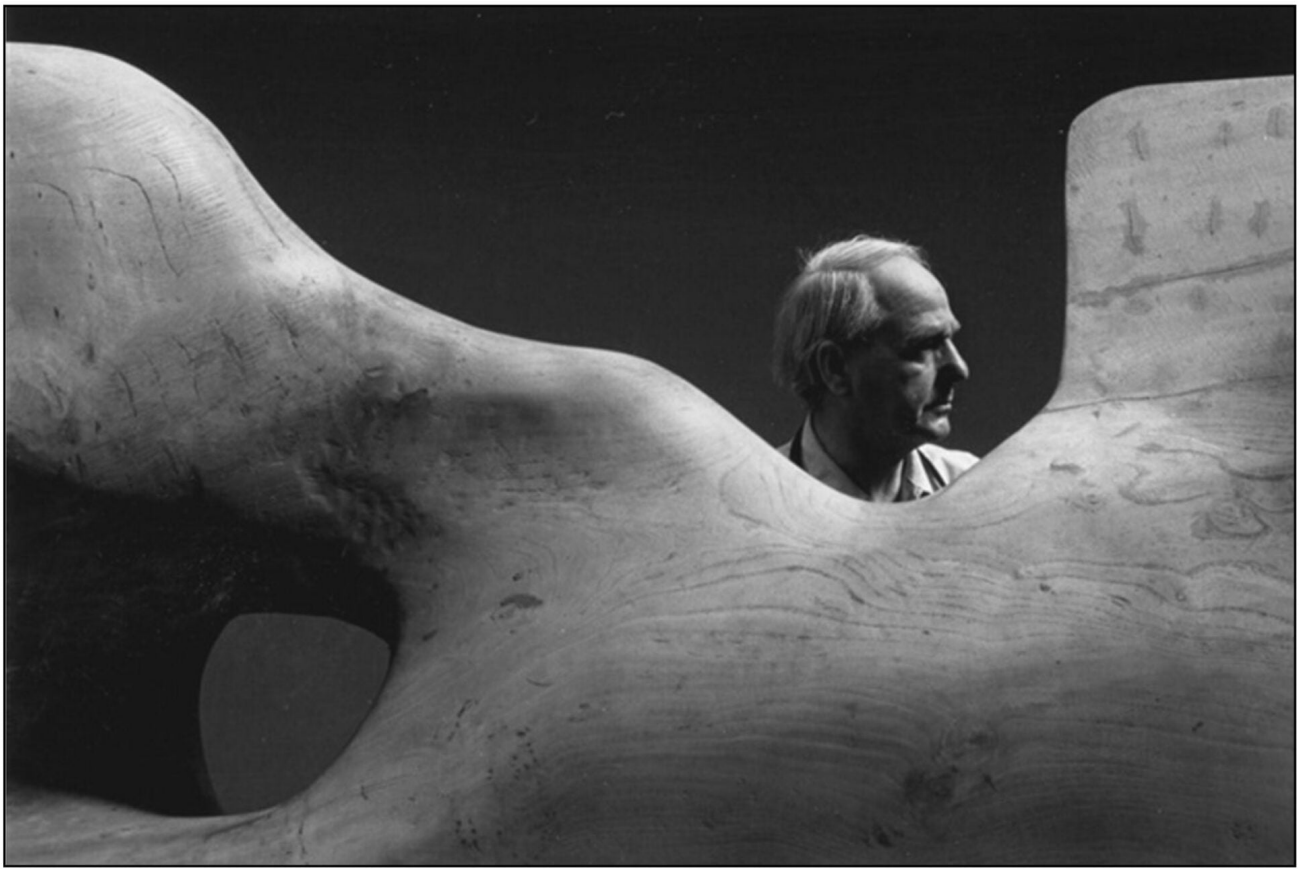
Moore likely derived the idea of the energy and power of great mountains from reading Ezra Pound's 1916 memoir of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891-1915), a young French sculptor who died in the trenches of World War I. His wrote in the journal *Vortex* (quoted in Pound, 1916, p 9)

> Sculptural energy is the mountain.
> Sculptural feeling is the appreciation of masses in relation.
> Sculptural ability is the defining of these masses by planes.

Below are some photographs of Moore with his sculptures: by Bill Brandt (1946), by Yousuf Karsh (1972) and by Arnold Newman (1966).







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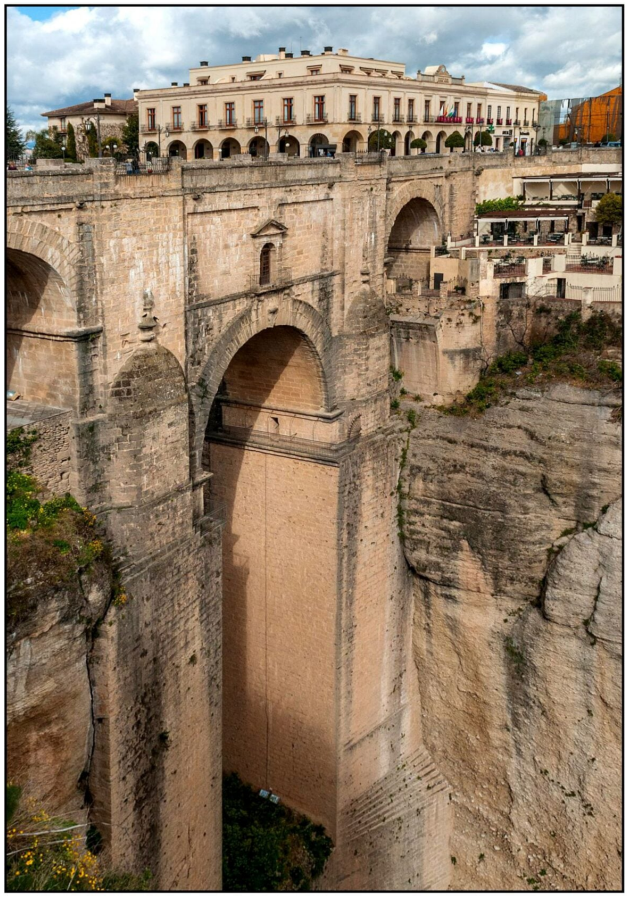
History, Myth and Fiction

This post describes some of the events that occurred in Ronda, a town in southern Spain, during the summer of 1936. After the Spanish Civil War broke out, Anarchists quickly took control of the town, and murdered many supporters of the Nationalist cause. Two months later, advancing Nationalist forces captured Ronda, and drove most of its people from their homes. Those that refused to leave suffered bloody reprisals. These events quickly became mythic rather than historic. In one story, the Anarchists had murdered the town’s Falangists by having them beaten to death in the town’s plaza and then thrown into the canyon that cuts through the center of the town. Ernest

Hemingway recounted this version in his 1940 novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. However, most historians now agree that this never happened.

Ronda

Ronda is one of the most beautiful of the *pueblos blancos* ("white towns") perched on the inland hills of Andalusia. The name comes from the buildings that were white-washed to protect them from the heat of the sun. Through the center of Ronda runs the Guadalevin River, which has carved through the limestone cliffs a steep-walled canyon, *el tajo*, reaching depths of more than 100 meters. The most striking bridge over the river is the *Puente Nuevo* constructed in 1793 at the point where the canyon opens into the huge valley know as *la caldera* (cauldron) The following illustration shows the bridge viewed from the West (left) and from the Southeast (right).



The large building just to the north of the bridge used to be

Ronda's *casa consistorial* (town hall) where the *ayuntamiento* or local council met. In the 1990s this was converted into a *parador* (state-owned luxury hotel). The following illustration shows the old city hall with its arcades facing the large town square. On the far left can be seen a low wall looking over the canyon.

Ronda has many other luxury hotels. The Hotel Reina Victoria, a summer resort for the English stationed in Gibraltar, was built on the cliff overlooking *la caldera* in 1906. The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke stayed there for several months in the winter of 1912-1913. The gardens beside the hotel have a commemorative statue of Rilke gazing out over valley (shown below in a photograph by Bryan Appleyard).

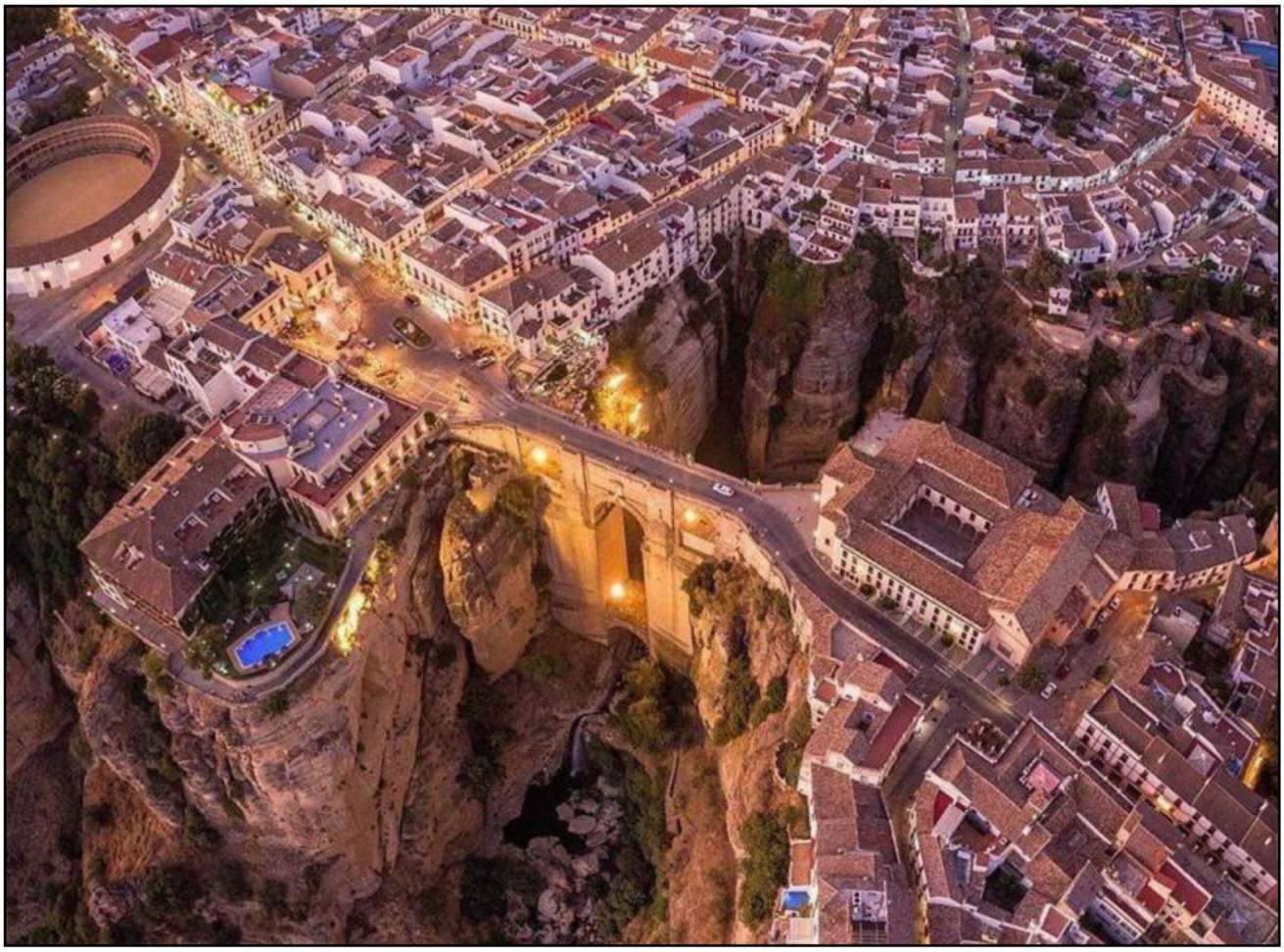
In Ronda, Rilke continued working on a set of poems that would not be complete until ten more years had passed – the *Duino Elegies*. He was also able to compose several poems about Spain. In the third part of a poem called *The Spanish Trilogy* he praised the peasants he could see in the valley, hoping that he might become as attuned to the universe as a simple shepherd:

> Langsamen Schrittes, nicht leicht, nachdenklichen Körpers,
> aber im Stehn ist er herrlich. Noch immer dürfte ein Gott
> heimlich in diese Gestalt und würde nicht minder.
> Abwechselnd weilt er und zieht, wie selber der Tag,
> und Schatten der Wolken
> durchgehn ihn, als dächte der Raum
> langsam Gedanken für ihn.
>
> slow stepping, not light-footed, his body lost in

thought,
but splendid when he stands still. A God might
secretly take his form and not be any the lesser.
By turns he tarries and continues on like the day itself
and the shadows of the clouds
pass through him, as if the vast space
were thinking slow thoughts for him.
(translation Paul Archer)

The poetry is beautiful. However, one cannot help but wonder about how shepherd felt looking up toward the hotel on the cliff. And whether this young shepherd would participate in the revolution some twenty years later.

As well as the canyon and its bridge, Ronda is famous for its *plaza de toros* (bullring) which was built in 1785. The bullring is seen in the upper left of the aerial view of Ronda in the following illustration:



Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) first visited Ronda in 1923 and became enamored of its site and of the bullfights (Buckley, 1997). In his 1932 book on the traditions of bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon*, he remarked

> There is one town that would be better than Aranjuez to see your first bullfight in if you are only going to see one and that is Ronda.

Hemingway visited Spain during the Civil War, although at that time he could not visit Ronda, which was controlled by the Nationalists. He returned to Ronda many times in the 1950s. For the bullfights, and for the memories.

The Spanish Civil War

In 1931, the Spanish king was deposed and a new government was proclaimed: the Second Spanish Republic, the first having lasted for less than two years (1873-1874) before being aborted by a military coup. The governing coalition of the Second Republic was composed of many separate and feuding parties, among them Anarchists, Communists, Republicans and Catalonian Separatists. The right-wing opposition contained parties favoring the Monarchy or the Catholic Church. The Falangist party, a fascist organization was founded in 1933 in response to the new republic.

The government had to deal with multiple problems

- much of the land was owned by the aristocrats, who managed large tracts of land (*latifundia*), and who treated the peasants as slaves
- the military was far larger and more powerful than necessary for a country that had long ago lost its empire
- the church sided with the generals and the aristocrats, for they were the source of their power and wealth
- the new industries, run by a small number of capitalists, exploited the workers who made the factories run, and who were organizing into unions
- the police force – the *Guardia Civil* – mainly existed to support the landed aristocrats and the capitalists.

The course of the Second Republic was extremely turbulent. The government reduced funds for the military, and closed down the military academy in Zaragoza, run by General Franciso Franco. Strikes occurred and these were put down with excessive force. Attempts to take land away from the *latifundista* were unsuccessful. The government tried to restrict the role of the church in the educational system. Many of the poor, urged on by anarchists and communists, attacked the church. In 1933, Pope Pius XI published an encyclical *Dilectissima Nobis* ("Dear to us") specifically deploring the anti-clerical violence in Spain.

In the election of January,1936, the left-wing parties in the Popular Front won a majority against a coalition of the right-wing parties named the National Front. Many have suggested that the election was rigged to some extent, and the voting was followed by much violence. Manuel Azana Diaz (1880-1940), who had served in various positions in the preceding government, became the president of the newly elected Republican government.

In July 1936, General Emilio Mola, supported by General Franciso Franco, called for a coup to end the republic and to return the nation to its previous form. The leftist parties reacted by calling for a Revolution of the workers. The country descended into anarchy. The Nationalists (or Rebels) were able to take control the north of the country, but the Republicans (or Loyalists) held off the coup in the south and in the major cities. The Civil War had begun (Thomas, 1961; Graham, 2005: Payne, 2012).

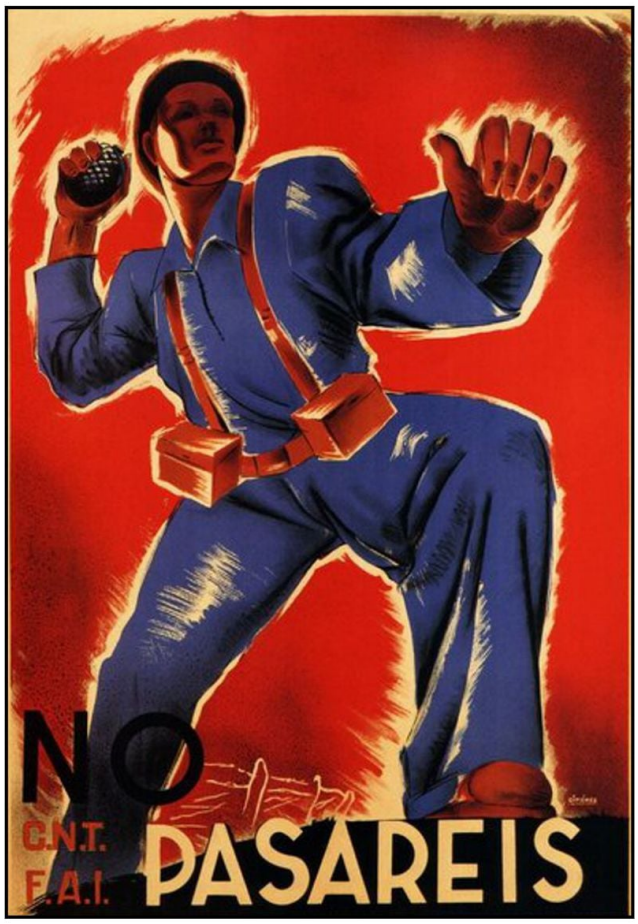
The governments of Germany and Italy immediately provided assistance to the Nationalists, and Russia came in on the side of the Republicans. England and France decided that they should not intervene in the internal politics of Spain. However, volunteers from these and many other countries (even Germany and Italy) began to organize the International Brigades to fight with the Republicans: among them were the Abraham Lincoln Brigade from the United States and the Mackenzie-Papineau Brigade from Canada.

Soon after the coup was declared, Franco borrowed planes from Italy and Germany and transported troops from North Africa to shore up the Nationalists in Seville, a Catholic stronghold. The regions of the country controlled by the Nationalists (blue) and the Republicans (white) in July, 1936) are shown in the following map (derived from Preston, 2012, p 658):

From Seville, General Franco sent troops northward to join up with the Nationalists besieging Madrid. Another key point in the fighting was near Teruel, where Nationalist soldiers were attempting to advance to the sea to cut off Barcelona from Madrid. Franco also sent troops eastward to relieve the city of Granada.

Mola died in a plane crash in June of 1937, and General Franciso Franco Bahamonde (1892-1975) became the supreme leader (*el caudillo*) of the Nationalist forces. The following illustration shows the leaders of the two sides. On the left is a modernist stone statue of Manuel Azena by José Noja and Pablo Serrano that was not erected until 1979. On the right is a bronze equestrian statue of Francisco Franco by José Capuz Mamano initially cast in 1964. Various versions of this statue were erected in several of the major cities of Spain.

The following figure shows propaganda posters from both sides of the civil war. On the left is a poster stating "*No Pasareis*" (You shall not pass). This slogan and its variant "*No Pasaran*" (They shall not pass) was used by the Republicans throughout the war. The Communist politician Dolores Ibarruri Gomez (also known as *La Pasionara* – the passionate one) used the latter version in a famous speech urging on the defenders of Madrid in November 1936. The Republican poster comes from the two parties that were the mainstay of the Popular Front: the CNT (*Confederacion Nacional de Trabajo*) and the FAI (*Federacion Anarquista Iberica*). The right poster is from the Falangists. In the background are the four red arrows held together by a yoke, the Spanish version of the *fasces* (bundle of rods) of the Italian Fascists. Superimposed is a hand on a rifle. The call is "To arms – Homeland, Bread and Justice."



Events in Ronda during 1936ca)

Soon after the military coup was declared in July, 1936, members of the CNT took control in Ronda and many of the small towns in Andalusia. Members of the *Guardia Civil* and many local Nationalist leaders were executed. Similar outbreaks of violence occurred in many regions of Spain. This “red terror” was not condoned by the Republican Government, which had difficulty controlling its many factions.

Once the Nationalists had shored up control of Seville, Franco placed the bloodthirsty General Queipo de Llano in command of retaking Southern Spain. After Granada was relieved, the Nationalists returned to the other cities of Andalusia. Reaching Ronda in September, 1936 they quickly subdued the town, and took bloody revenge. Those killed by the Nationalists far outnumbered those who had been murdered in the summer (Preston, 2012).

Exactly what had happened in Ronda during these early months of the war was not clear. The Nationalists declared that the anarchists had murdered several hundred people and thrown them over the cliff. This claim was used to justify their reprisals.

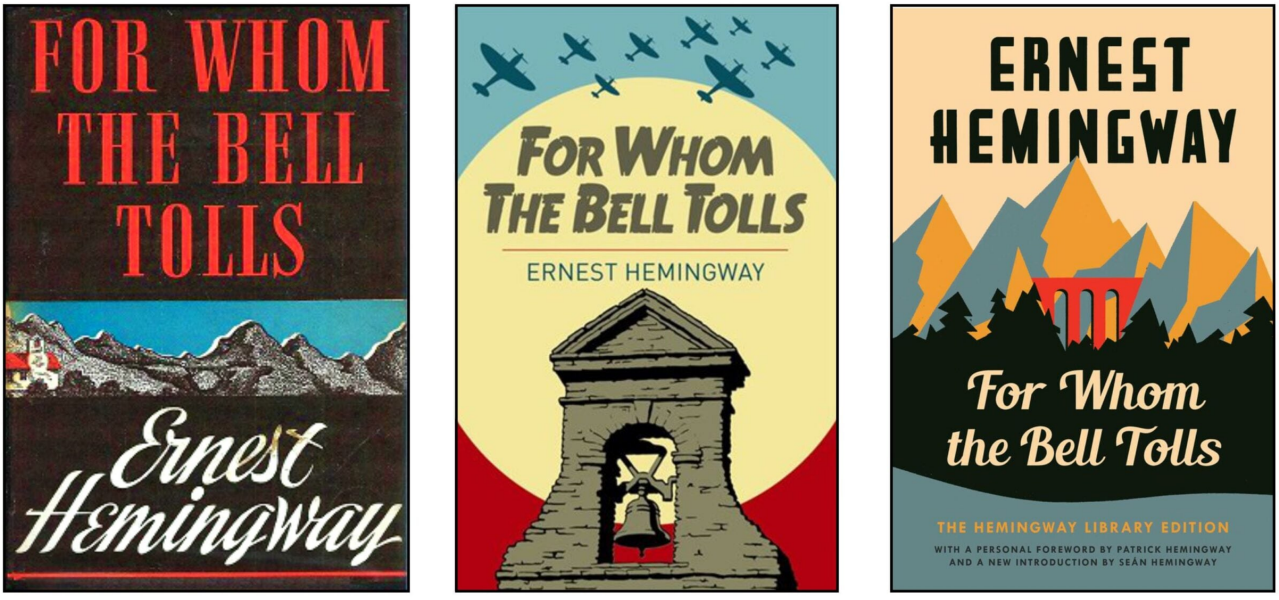
Many of the townspeople left Ronda and fled to Malaga, but this city soon fell to the Nationalists in February 1937. Republicans in Malaga were rounded up and shot. The Nationalists boasted that they executed more Republicans in seven days than the Republicans had killed in the seven months they were in control of the city (Preston, 2012, p 177).

Most of the citizens of Malaga, together with a few surviving Republican soldiers, then tried to reach Almeria along the coastal road – walking, riding donkeys and hanging onto rickety vehicles for a distance of about 200 km. These refugees were strafed and bombed by planes, and shelled by Nationalists warships. The number of people killed in what became known as the Malaga-Almeria Massacre was over 3000. The Canadian physician Norman Bethune used the few vehicles available to him to help the refugees travel to Almeria (Stewart, R., & Majada Neila, 2014), but this had little effect. The following photograph shows the refugees:

For Whom the Bell Tolls

Ernest Hemingway came to Spain toward the end of 1937 to produce a documentary film on the Civil War – *The Spanish Earth* – to help raise money for the Republicans. The photograph below shows him in the Republican trenches at Teruel (low center) together with the filmmaker Joris Ivens (high center).

After the Spanish Civil War ended in1939, Hemingway wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), a novel based on what he had heard about the violence perpetrated by both sides during the conflict. The following illustration shows some of the covers used by various editions of the book, the original on the left:



The epigraph to the novel is from John Donne's *Meditations*

upon Emergent Occasions (1624) The quotation ends with:

> any mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*.

The novel's central character is Robert Jordan, an American Professor of Spanish, and an explosives expert, now a volunteer serving with the Republicans. In the spring of 1937, he is ordered to blow up a mountain-bridge to prevent Nationalist forces from Segovia from reaching Madrid. For this task he recruits the help of a band of Republican guerillas, led by Pablo and his woman Pilar. Jordan falls in love with Maria, a beautiful young woman serving as the band's cook. Maria's father, the Republican mayor of Valladolid, and her mother had been executed by the Nationalists early in the war. She herself had her head shaved, and was raped and imprisoned, before finally escaping to the mountains.

One evening, Pilar tells Jordan and Maria what had happened in Ronda at the beginning of the war. Pablo, the leader of the local anarchists in the town, had captured the barracks of the *Guardia Civil* and executed all the guards. He had also rounded up the main supporters of the Nationalists and imprisoned them in the city council. Pilar describes the center of the town (see preceding illustrations):

> The town is built on the high bank above the river and there is a square there with a fountain and there are benches and there are big trees that give a shade for the benches. The balconies of the houses look out on the plaza. Six streets enter on the plaza and there is an arcade from the houses that goes around the plaza so that one can walk in the shade of the arcade when the sun is hot. On three sides of the plaza is the arcade and on the fourth side is the walk shaded by the trees beside the edge of the cliff with, far below, the river. It is three hundred feet down to the

river.

Pilar then describes how the town square was set up for the execution of the fascists:

> Pablo organized it all as he did the attack on the barracks. First he had the entrances to the streets blocked off with carts though to organize the plaza for a *capea*. For an amateur bull fight. The fascists were all held in the *Ayuntamiento*, the city hall, which was the largest building on one side of the plaza. It was there the clock was set in the wall and it was in the buildings under the arcade that the club of the fascists was.

Pablo organized the peasants and workers who had gathered in the square:

> He placed them in two lines as you would place men for a rope pulling contest, or as they stand in a city to watch the ending of a bicycle road race with just room for the cyclists to pass between, or as men stood to allow the passage of a holy image in a procession. Two meters was left between the lines and they ex-tended from the door of the *Avuntamiento* clear across the plaza to the edge of the cliff. So that, from the doorway of the *Ayuntamiento*, looking across the plaza, one coming out would see two solid lines of people waiting.
>
> They were armed with flails such as are used to beat out the grain and they were a good flail's length apart. All did not have flails, as enough flails could not be obtained. But most had flails obtained from the store of Don Guillermo Martin, who was a fascist and sold all sorts of agricultural implements. And those who did not have flails had heavy herdsman's clubs, or ox-goads, and some had wooden pitchforks; those with wooden tines that are used to fork the chaff and straw into the air after the flailing. Some had sickles and reaping hooks but these Pablo placed at the far end where the lines reached the edge of the cliff.

The assembled crowd was told that they must kill the fascists by beating them to death. One of the peasants asked Pilar why, and she reported the following exchange:

> “To save bullets” I said. “And that each man should have his share in the responsibility”
> “That it should start then. That it should start.” And I looked at him and saw that he was crying. “Why are you crying, Joaquin?” I asked him. “This is not to cry about.”
> “I cannot help it, Pilar,” he said. “I have never killed any one.”

One by one, the fascists were led out of the city hall and made their way through the crowd of peasants. One by one, they were beaten and clubbed to death. And one by one, their bodies were cast over the edge of the cliff into *el tajo*.

This fictional representation of the Anarchist terror in Ronda is extremely powerful. In the novel Hemingway also describes Nationalist atrocities in Valladolid – the summary execution of Maria’s parents and her abuse and rape by the Falangists. This vivid portrayal of the brutality of the war should make us rethink our hatreds. We are all in this life together; we are diminished by the death of any man; the bell tolls for us.

Later in the novel, Jordan and the guerilla band succeed in blowing up the bridge. but Jordan is severely wounded and unable to move. He convinces that the rest of the band to retreat while he stays to delay the advancing Nationalists. He insists that Maria leave with the guerillas. The novel ends with Jordan trying to stay conscious as the soldiers come closer. Talking to himself, he claims

> And if you wait and hold them up even a little while or just get the officer that may make all the difference. One thing well done can make □

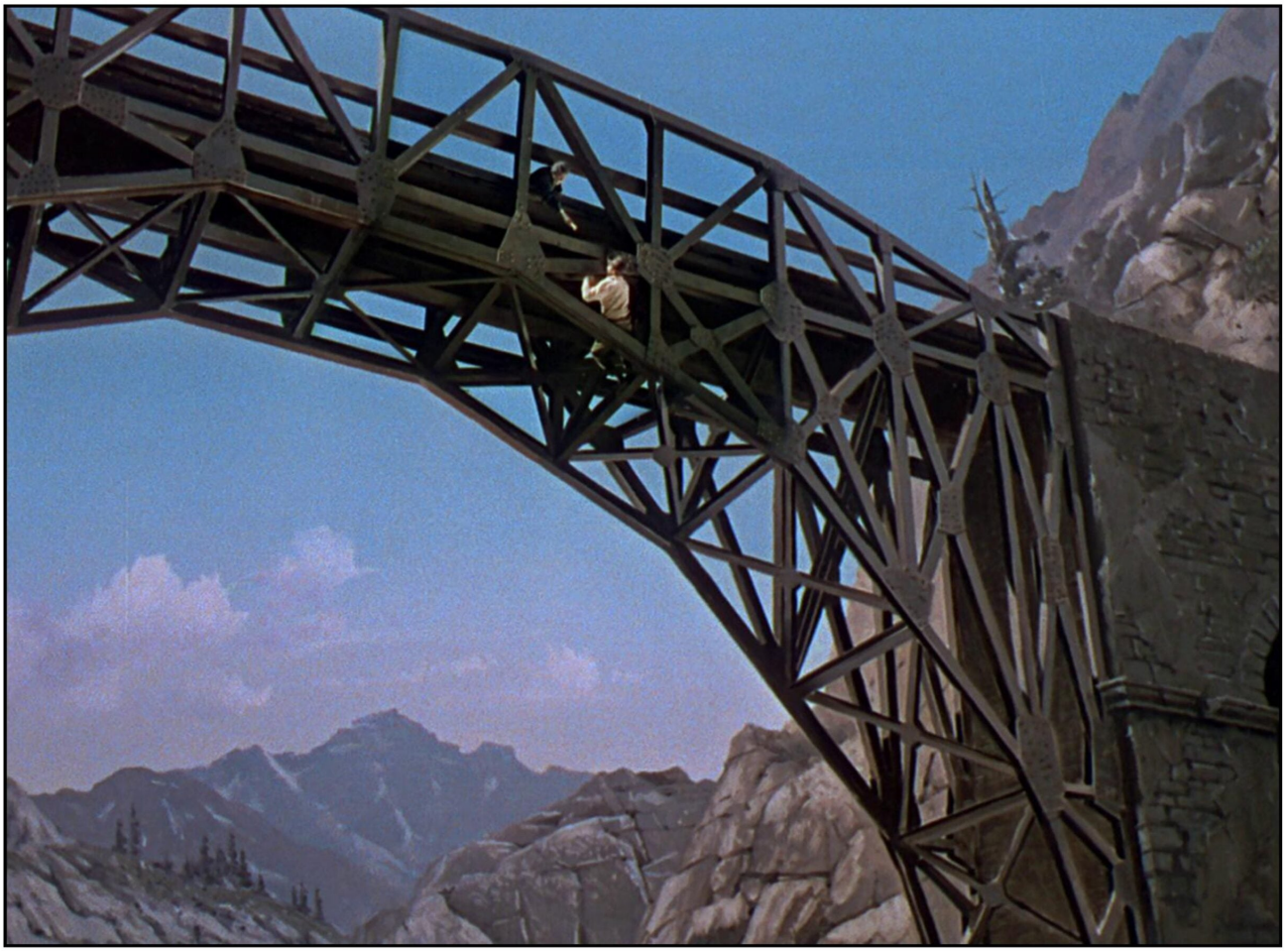
Hemingway leaves the thought unfinished. The novel ends with

an officer of the Nationalist forces riding slowly up toward where Jordan awaits him.

The book sold well, and in 1943 it was made into a film starring Gary Cooper as Jordan, Ingrid Bergman as Maria, Akim Tamiroff as Pablo and Katina Paxinou as Pilar. The film was an international success, although it was not distributed in France or Germany until after World War II (see posters below). The film received multiple nominations for the Academy Awards, with Katina Paxinou winning for best supporting actress.

The film follows the novel quite closely. When Pilar recounts her tale of what happened in Ronda at the beginning of the Civil War, the movie shows in flashback some of the brutal executions in the plaza:

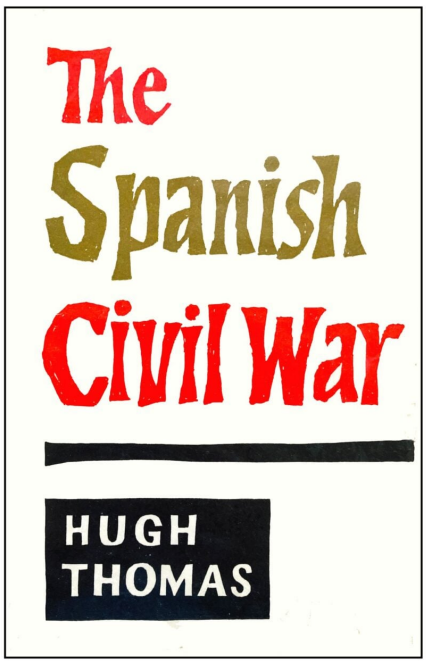
The bridge that Jordan dynamites just before the end of the movie is as high as the Puente Nuevo in Ronda:

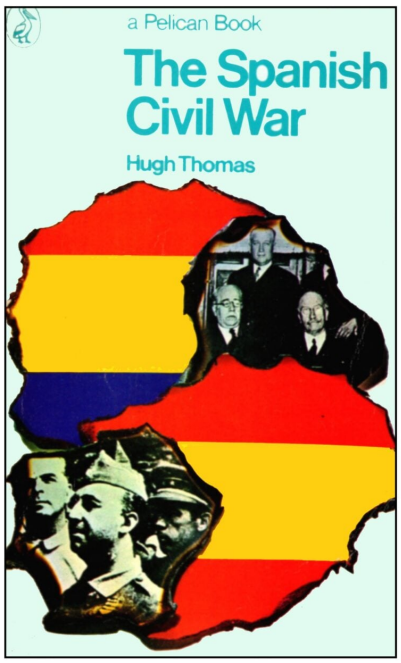


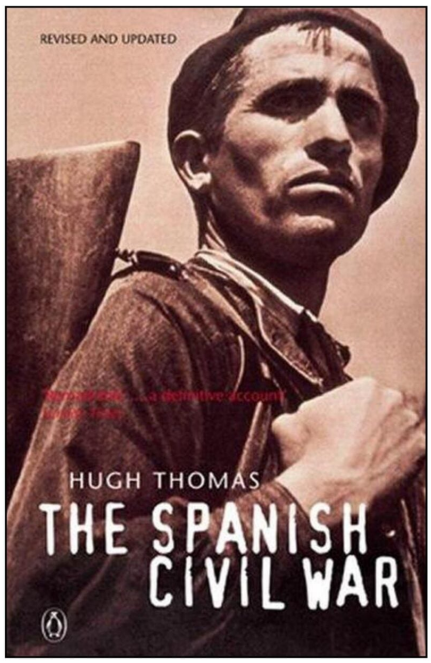
Historical Accounts of the Events in Ronda

The history of *The Spanish Civil War* (1961) by Hugh Thomas was the first major examination of what happened in Spain during

the war. The book became a best seller soon after it was published and it has since gone through two revisions and multiple printings:







Thomas discussed the events in Ronda:

> In country districts. revolution itself often consisted primarily of the murder of the upper classes or the bourgeoisie. Thus the description, in Ernest Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, of how the inhabitants of a small pueblo first beat the male members of the middle class and then flung them over a cliff, is near to the reality of what happened in the famous Andalusian town of Ronda (though the work was the responsibility of a gang from Malaga). There, 512 were murdered in the first month of war. (p 263 in 1989 printing)

Other historians have proposed that the Ronda executions described by Hemingway, although based on accounts he had heard, was completely fictional. Buckley (1997) described what happened in Ronda in the Summer of 1936, according to the records maintained in the town hall:

> On 19 July 1936 the commander of the small army garrison in

Ronda, upon reports of a military uprising in Morocco, went to the Town Hall with a small platoon and demanded that the mayor submit to his authority and publicly announce that the city was under martial law and the army was taking control. The mayor belonged to the left-wing coalition known as the Popular Front. He refused to follow the commander's orders and swiftly disarmed him and his small band of soldiers, heavily outnumbered by the peasant groups beginning to assemble on the plaza outside the town hall. Thus, Ronda remained loyal to the Republican government of Madrid, and did not fall to the fascists until 18 September 1936.

However, it would be would be wrong to assume that during these two months the Republican government in Madrid had any control over the town or its inhabitants. As soon as the reports of a military rising in Africa began to spread, the peasants from neighboring villages poured into Ronda and in effect took control. Although the mayor was nominally in charge, the real power belonged to a "Comite" formed by the peasants themselves, most of whom belonged to CNT (Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo), the Anarchist Labor Union.

The task of this committee was three-fold: first, to arrest all persons suspected of having fascist sympathies; second, to insure that food was evenly distributed to all inhabitants (money was outlawed and vouchers with the CNT rubber-stamp were issued); third, to prepare to defend Ronda from a probable attack by fascist troops stationed in Seville.

The word "revolution" immediately comes to mind when we attempt to describe the situation in Ronda in summer 1936. The Secretary's "Record of Proceedings" for 28 July 1936, preserved in Ronda's Town Hall, displays revolutionary rhetoric: "[W]e are living through a moment of historic transcendence … the fascist coup has spurred the populace to rise to the last man and to demand social justice . . . a new society is being born, based upon liberty, justice and equality … justice has now become `revolutionary justice'

> designed to cleanse the state of all fascist elements as well as to establish the basis for a new social order etc."

Many priests and supporters of the Nationalist cause were executed. However, these victims were not killed in the plaza, but were driven away from the center of the town and shot. It is difficult to determine the number of those killed, but it was likely much less than the 512 claimed by the Nationalists. None of the bodies were thrown into *el tajo*. This story seems to have been invented by General Queipo to inflame his troops as they went about their reprisals.

Corbin (1995) considers the story about the executions in the plaza and the casting of the bodies into *el tajo* as an example of myth-making. Myths have their basis in historical events but the stories become altered in the telling, often to justify the actions of those in power:

> Any story of the past has a double construction and a double truth. The truth of the tale told is its historical truth; the truth of its telling is its mythical truth.

The story of the executions by *el tajo* served the purpose of the Nationalists: it portrayed the class hatred of the anarchists and communists and the violence that they promulgated in the early weeks of the Civil War. This then justified their violent repression. Society must be protected from any recurrence of such revolutionary terror.

In *The Spanish Holocaust* (2012) which describes the repression of the Spanish Republicans during and after the Civil War, Paul Preston summarizes the events in Ronda:

> Famous for its Roman and Arab bridges and its exquisite eighteenth-century bullring, Ronda had suffered a pitiless repression at the hands of anarchists led by a character known as 'El Gitano.' Initially, the CNT committee had maintained a degree of order although churches were sacked and images destroyed, but soon there were murders being

> carried out by anarchists from Malaga and also by locals. However, there is no substance to the claim, first made by Queipo in a broadcast on 18 August and popularized by Ernest Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, that large numbers of prisoners were killed by being thrown into the *tajo*. The many rightist victims were shot in the cemetery. Francoist sources claim that victims of the red terror from Ronda and the nearby pueblos of Gaucin and Arriate numbered over six hundred. On 16 September, when Varela took the town, the defenders fled and his forces suffered only three casualties in the assault. His men stopped and interrogated anyone found in streets and shot many of them. Over half of the population fled towards Malaga. Under the new authorities, those of the town's defenders who had not fled were subjected to a bloody repression and the theft of their property. (p 171)

In the White City

The American poet, Philip Levine, spent time in Spain trying to learn more about the Spanish Civil War and the poets that wrote about it (Levine, 2016). He also wrote about Ronda in a prose-poem entitled *In the White City* (2009).

> From up there—& he points to the bridge high above us—they tossed down the fat barber, the Falangist, to his death. "It is all in the book by the American communist." "The communist?" I say. Yes, the friend of Fidel Castro, Comrade Hemingway "The tourists come because of your Mr. Hemingway, that is why you are here." Who can argue with this young, balding lieutenant of the Guardia Civil who has dared to leave his barracks lacking his tricorne & with only a small sidearm? In felt house slippers he stands at ease on the west streets of his town, Ronda, to show me the world. "On those rocks," he continues, pointing to a ledge half way down the

> gorge, “he first hits & his belly explodes. Then they rape his beautiful daughter, the film star that is Swedish, & when they have finish they shave her head. That is why we execute them all.” Does he mean that is why in the novel the Nationalists executed them. (I am careful not to say “the fascists”; it is 1965.) “No, no, executed them here, in life or death”—he smiles at his little joke—“up there on the bridge”— & he points again,— “by military firing squad one at a time, properly. That is why the whole town must witness & learn. It is educational.” But, I insist, the death of the Falangist was merely in a novel that made no effort to be true to events, *una novela*, a fiction, a best seller. The lieutenant enjoys this repartee, he’s amused by my innocence, he shakes his head, he is discreet & patient with this visitor to his ancient city that boasts the first Plaza de Toros in all the world. “You Americans,” and he suppresses his laughter, “you think because he was a famous red he could not tell the truth. They do not give Noble Prizes to liars.”

The poem illustrates how history becomes mixed up with fiction, with movies, and with photographs to form the myths that we remember about the past. Hemingway was not a communist and, though he spent time in Cuba, he was not a friend of Castro (Michaud, 2012). This idea stems from photographs of the two of them together at a fishing competition, the only time they ever met. The character Maria in Hemingway’s novel, played by the Swedish film-star in the movie, was the daughter of a mayor who was executed in the Civil War, but this was in a different town, and the mayor there was a Republican executed by the Nationalists. The poem ends with the idea that fiction written by a winner of the Noble (sic) Prize has to be true.

The following is an etching of the *Puente Nuevo* in Ronda done by Gary Young for a broadside edition of Levine's poem.

Epilogue

By the spring of 1938, the Nationalists ultimately made their way to the sea, isolating Barcelona from Madrid. After Franco's troops marched into Barcelona in January 1939, Manuel Azana was among the thousands of refugees who fled from Barcelona to France. In March, Madrid was taken and Franco declared victory on April 1, 1939, and became the Prime Minister of Spain, continuing in this office until 1973. During and after the war, many thousands of Republicans were executed by the Nationalists in a repression known as the "white terror" or the "Spanish Holocaust" (Preston, 2012).

Hemingway's novel was translated into Spanish as *Por quién doblan las campanas,* but was not allowed into Spain until 1969. The movie was not shown there until 1978. Hugh Thomas's history of the war was forbidden in Spain until after the death of Franco in 1975. Today Spain continues to unearth the bodies of those executed during and after the war, and to seek some understanding of the violence and brutality of those days (Anderson, 2017). The myths need to be converted back into history.

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Madness and Poetry

Robert Lowell (1917-1977) was one of the most important American poets of the mid-20th-Century. He was famous both for his contribution to poetry and for his recurrent attacks of mania. This post reviews his life, comments on some of his poems, and considers the relations between creativity and mood disorders. Madness sometimes goes hand-in-hand with poetry:

> Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
> Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends
> The lunatic, the lover and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact
> (Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V, 1, 5-9)

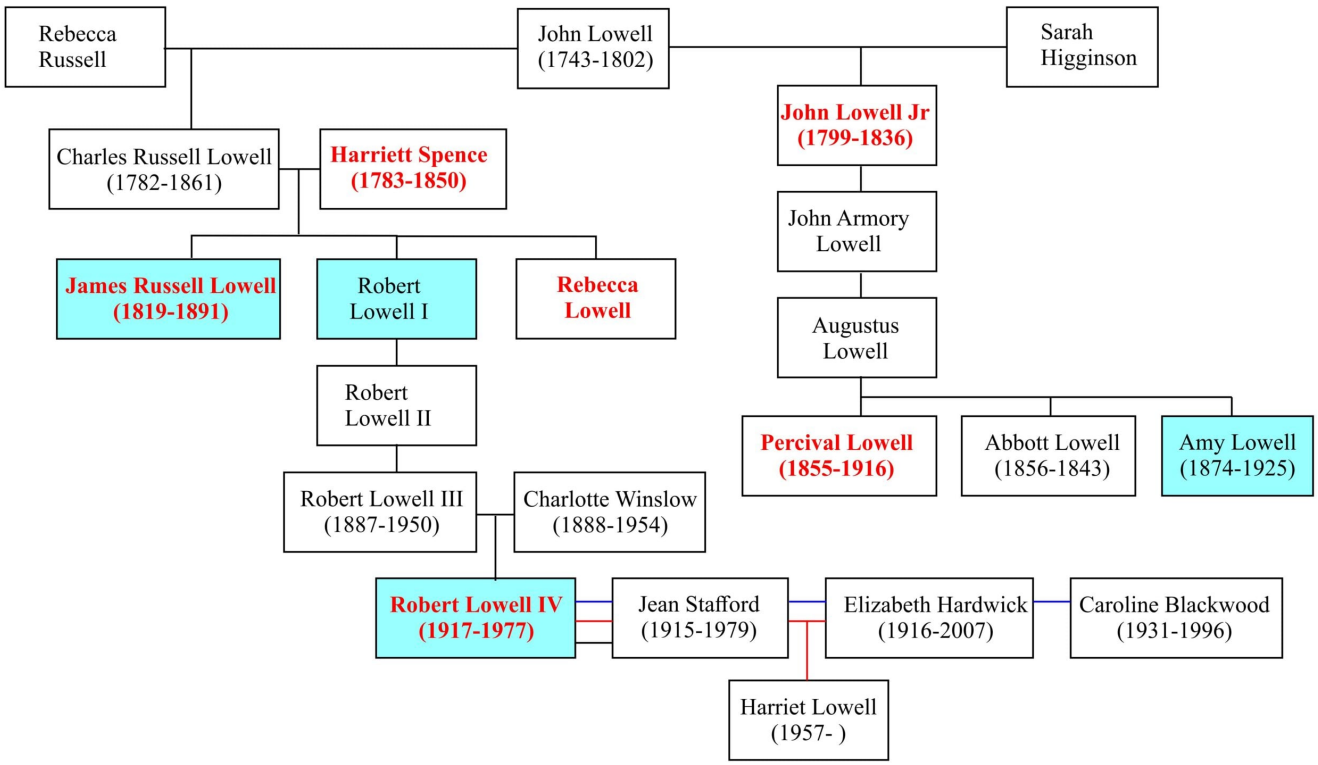
Family Background

Robert Traill Spencer Lowell IV, as his full name suggests, was born to a long line of "Boston Brahmins," a term that Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. coined to describe the an untitled aristocracy with ancestors among the original Protestant

colonists who came to New England in the 17th Century.

The following figure shows part of Lowell's family tree (Jamison, 2017, pp 39-51; also websites by Wikipedia, Geneanet, and Nicholas Jenkins). The diagram begins with John Lowell (1743-1802), a judge in the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts, remembered for authoring Article I of the United States Bill of Rights:

> All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential and inalienable rights, among which may be reckoned the right of enjoying and defending their lives and liberties.



The Lowell family tree is noteworthy for the incidence of published poets (light blue shading) and mental disturbances (red lettering). In 1845, Lowell's great-great-grandmother Harriett Bracket Spence was institutionalized for incurable madness in the McLean Asylum for the Insane in Somerville. The hospital later moved to Belmont and became known simply as McLean Hospital (Beam, 2003). Lowell was himself committed

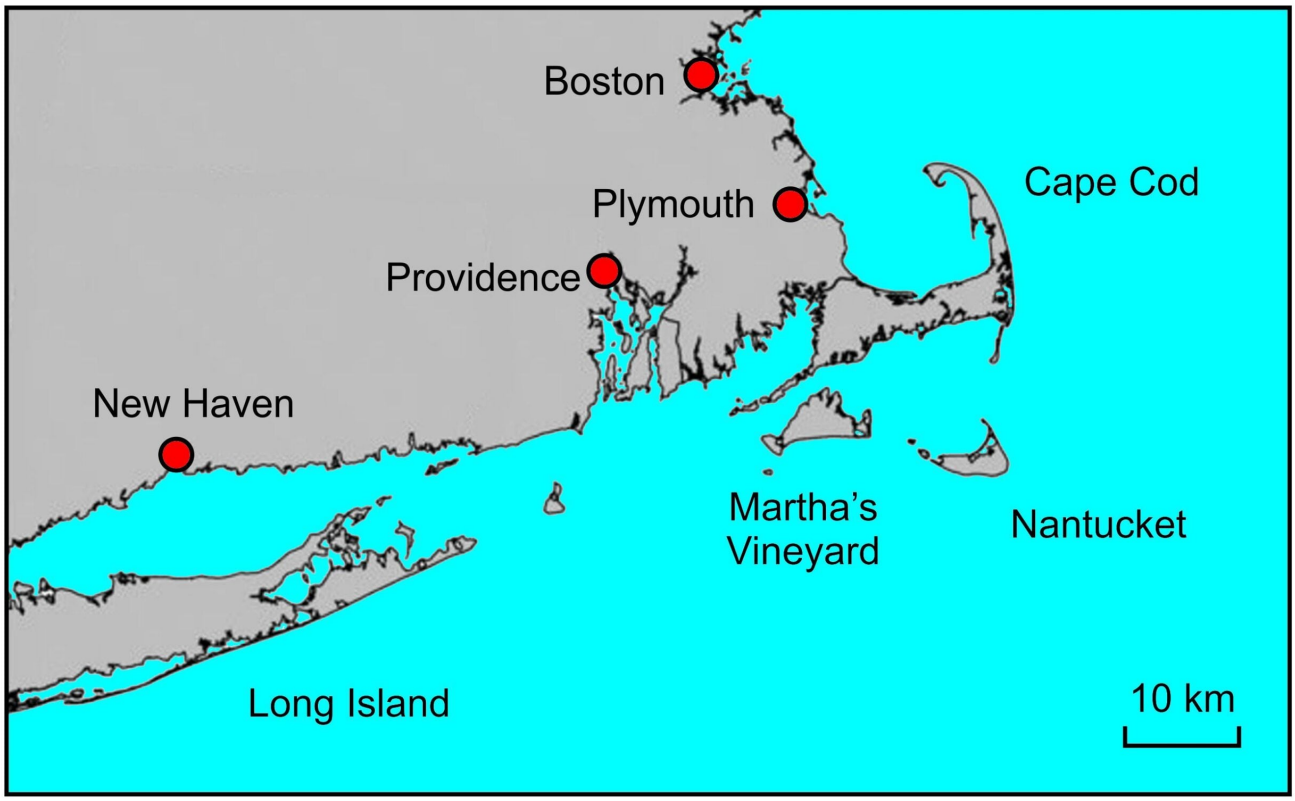
there for treatment on several occasions between 1958 and 1967.

Charles Russell Lowell was considered one of the “fireside poets,” a group which included Longfellow, Whittier and Bryant. These were poets whose work was read aloud to the family at the fireside. Amy Lowell became fascinated by Chinese poetry, which she attempted to imitate in brief intensely visual poems, a style that came to be known as “Imagism.” Percival Lowell was an astronomer who falsely believed that the markings he observed on the planet Mars represented a network of canals.

Through his mother, Charlotte Winslow, Lowell was a direct descendent of Mary Chilton (1607-1679), who arrived on the *Mayflower* in 1620. On this father’s side, he could trace their ancestry back to a Percival Lowle (1571-1664), who settled just north of Boston some 20 years after the Mayflower arrived.

Youth

While attending St Mark’s, an Episcopal preparatory school in Southborough, just south of Boston, Lowell was significantly influenced by a young teacher and poet, Richard Eberhart, and decided that poetry was his calling. He spent the summers of 1935 and 1936 with his friends, Frank Parker and Blair Clark, in a rented cottage on Nantucket Island just south of Cape Cod (see map below). There, under Lowell’s domineering direction, the three engaged in an impassioned study of literature and art. Lowell came to be known as “Cal,” a nickname that derived from both the Roman Emperor Caligula and Shakespeare’s character Caliban (Hamilton, 1982, p 20).



Lowell attended Harvard University but after two years left to study with the poet Allen Tate, finally graduating from Kenyon College in 1940. After graduation, he married Jean Stafford (McConahay, 1986), started graduate studies in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, converted from his family's Protestant religion to Roman Catholicism, and began writing the poems for his first book. These were days of decision.

When the United States entered World War II in 1941, Lowell initially registered for the draft. However, he soon became upset with the Allied policy of "strategic" bombing: attacking civilian targets to undermine morale, as opposed to the "tactical" bombing of military targets. After receiving orders for his induction into the armed forces in 1943, he wrote an open letter to President Roosevelt describing his objections:

> Our rulers have promised us unlimited bombings of Germany and Japan. Let us be honest: we intend the permanent destruction of Germany and Japan. If this program is carried out, it will demonstrate to the world our Machiavellian

> contempt for the laws of justice and charity between nations; it will destroy any possibility of a European or Asiatic national autonomy; it will leave China and Europe, the two natural power centers of the future, to the mercy of the USSR, a totalitarian tyranny committed to world revolution and total global domination through propaganda and violence.
>
> In 1941 we undertook a patriotic war to preserve our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor against the lawless aggressions of a totalitarian league: in 1943 we are collaborating with the most unscrupulous and powerful of totalitarian dictators to destroy law, freedom, democracy, and above all, our continued national sovereignty. (quoted in Hamilton, 1982, p. 89)

Lowell was sentenced as a Conscientious Objector to a year and a day at the Federal Correctional Center in Danbury Connecticut. He was released on parole after 5 months, and spent the rest of his sentence working as a cleaner in the nearby Bridgeport hospital. At the end of this period, his first book, *Land of Unlikeness,* was published in a limited edition, to encouraging reviews.

Lord Weary's Castle

Lowell's first mainstream book of poetry, *Lord Weary's Castle*,

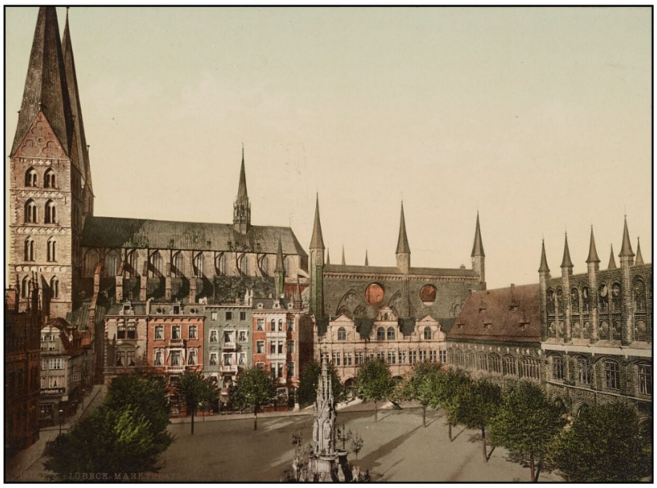
was published in 1946 and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. The title comes from an old ballad about the stonemason Lambkin who built a castle for Lord Weary. After the lord refused to pay for the castle, Lambkin murdered the lord's wife and child. The frontispiece of the book was an engraving of Cain's murder of Abel by Lowell's schoolfriend Frank Parker (right). Title and frontispiece both point to humanity's long history of violence.

The first poem in the book is *The Exile's Return*:

> There mounts in squalls a sort of rusty mire,
> Not ice, not snow, to leaguer the Hôtel
> De Ville, where braced pig-iron dragons grip
> The blizzard to their rigor mortis. A bell
> Grumbles when the reverberations strip
> The thatching from its spire,
> The search-guns click and spit and split up timber
> And nick the slate roofs on the Holstenwall
> Where torn-up tilestones crown the victor. Fall
> And winter, spring and summer, guns unlimber
> And lumber down the narrow gabled street
> Past your gray, sorry and ancestral house
> Where the dynamited walnut tree
> Shadows a squat, old, wind-torn gate and cows
> The Yankee commandant. You will not see
> Strutting children or meet
> The peg-leg and reproachful chancellor
> With a forget-me-not in his button-hole
> When the unseasoned liberators roll
> Into the Market Square, ground arms before
> The Rathaus; but already lily-stands
> Burgeon the risen Rhineland, and a rough
> Cathedral lifts its eye. Pleasant enough,
> *Voi ch'entrate*, and your life is in your hands.

The poem is elusive. In their notes to the *Collected Poems* (2003), Bidart and Gewanter remark on the similarity of some of the poem's lines to passages in Thomas Mann's novella *Tonio Kröger*, first published in 1903. It recounts the return of a young poet to Lübeck, where he (like the author) had grown up. In the opening lines of the novella, Mann remarks that "sometimes a kind of soft hail fell, not ice, not snow" (Neugroschel translation, 2998, p 164). He also describes Tonio's father as the "impeccably dressed gentleman with the wildflower in his buttonhole." (p 180). So we should likely place the poem in Lübeck, though I am not sure why Lowell uses the French term Hôtel de Ville to describe its historic city hall (later referred to by its German name Rathaus).

In 1942 Lübeck was one of the first German cities to be strategically bombed by the Allies. The following illustration shows the Market Square and City Hall in a 1906 postcard together with a photograph of the destruction after the bombing. The Allied attack focused on the city center, which had no military significance; the docks (in the upper right of the photograph) were completely spared.



Lowell's poem imagines the military occupation of the devastated city. Though there may be hope for some sort of salvation – the lilies probably allude to the Virgin Mary and the Annunciation – the general impression is of the Gates of

Hell. The last line quotes from Dante's *Inferno*: *Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate* (Abandon all hope, you who enter here).

The most important poem of the book is the seven-part *The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket* (Axelrod, 2015; Hass, 1977; Remaley, 1976). The poem was written in memory of Lowell's cousin Warren Winslow, who died in an explosion that sank the destroyer *Turner* close to Rockaway Point near Coney Island in 1944 (Fender, 1973). The cause of the explosion is not known; it was likely caused by an accident and not by enemy action.

The full poem is available on the website of the Poetry Foundation. The beginning vividly describes the recovery of the body of a drowned sailor:

> A brackish reach of shoal off Madaket—
> The sea was still breaking violently and night
> Had steamed into our North Atlantic Fleet,
> When the drowned sailor clutched the drag-net. Light
> Flashed from his matted head and marble feet,
> He grappled at the net
> With the coiled, hurdling muscles of his thighs:
> The corpse was bloodless, a botch of reds and whites,
> Its open, staring eyes
> Were lustreless dead-lights
> Or cabin-windows on a stranded hulk
> Heavy with sand.

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/graveyard-1.mp3

Madaket is a beach on the Southwestern edge of Nantucket. As noted by Bidart and Gewanter, much of the description of the drowned sailor derives from Thoreau's *The Shipwreck* (1864). Warren Winslow's body was never recovered. Lowell's poem therefore alludes to all those who died at sea in the war. The

poem conveys the violence of such deaths with harsh rhymes, irregular rhythms and the striking enjambment of the fourth line.

The second section of the poem further generalizes the tragedy to all those sailors who have died at sea, like those of the 19th Century whalers in Melville's *Moby Dick* or the Quaker seamen buried in the Nantucket graveyard. The third section reveals how the sailors failed to understand their deaths. They thought that God was on their side, but did not realize that God was in the sea that drowned them or the whale they tried to kill. The next two sections further describe the violence of the whale trade, and by extension the violence of the war that had just come to an end.

Where might we find redemption from the ongoing violence? The sixth and penultimate section of the poem – *Our Lady of Walsingham* – changes dramatically from the previous sections. In 1061, Richeldis de Faverches, an Anglo-Saxon noblewoman, received a vision of the Virgin Mary in Walsingham, a small village in Norfolk. Following the Madonna's request, she built there a replica of Jesus's home in Nazareth, and placed a statue of the Virgin with the infant Jesus within. This shrine became one of the most visited pilgrimage sites in Europe. In 1538, during Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, the shrine and its associated priory were torn down. (A damaged statue of the virgin in the Victoria and Albert Museum may actually be what remains of the Walsingham statue.) In 1897 a new statue (illustrated on the right) was blessed by the pope and placed in the Slipper Chapel, the last station on the original pilgrimage route to Walsingham. In the 20th Century, Walsingham began to welcome pilgrims again, though now separate Catholic and Anglican sites compete for their visit.

Lowell looks to find salvation but finds indifference:

> Our Lady, too small for her canopy,
> Sits near the altar. There's no comeliness
> At all or charm in that expressionless
> Face with its heavy eyelids. As before,
> This face, for centuries a memory,
> *Non est species, neque decor,*
> Expressionless, expresses God: it goes
> Past castled Sion. She knows what God knows,
> Not Calvary's Cross nor crib at Bethlehem
> Now, and the world shall come to Walsingham.

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The face of the Virginis indeed "expressionless." The Latin "there is nothing special nor beautiful about him" is from

Isaiah 53:2, which in the Vulgate reads

> Et ascendet sicut virgultum coram eo, et sicut radix de terra sitienti. Non est species ei, neque decor, et vidimus eum, et non erat aspectus, et desideravimus eum:

The King James Version translates this verse (and the succeeding three verses) as

> For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.
> He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
> Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
> But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.
> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

This is part of Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah, the man of sorrows who will take away our sins. Looking for redemption, the world comes to Walsingham, but the Virgin pays the world no special attention. Our ideas of God being born in human form at Bethlehem and of our salvation through his death on Calvary are human hopes not divine realities.

The final section of the poem describes the Atlantic Ocean as seen from Nantucket:

> The empty winds are creaking and the oak
> Splatters and splatters on the cenotaph,
> The boughs are trembling and a gaff

Bobs on the untimely stroke
Of the greased wash exploding on a shoal-bell
In the old mouth of the Atlantic. It’s well;
Atlantic, you are fouled with the blue sailors,
Sea-monsters, upward angel, downward fish:
Unmarried and corroding, spare of flesh
Mart once of supercilious, wing’d clippers,
Atlantic, where your bell-trap guts its spoil
You could cut the brackish winds with a knife
Here in Nantucket, and cast up the time
When the Lord God formed man from the sea’s slime
And breathed into his face the breath of life,
And blue-lung’d combers lumbered to the kill.
The Lord survives the rainbow of His will.

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The poem concludes by remembering how God made man by breathing into his face, and how God later destroyed everyone except Noah and his family in the flood, when huge “combers” (long curling sea waves) covered the earth. The final line likely alludes to the rainbow that God gave as a sign to Noah that he would not flood the Earth again:

> And I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.
> And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:
> I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. (*Genesis* 9: 11-13)

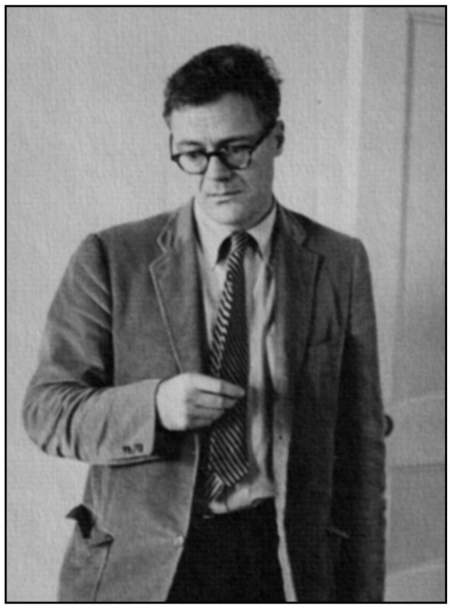
The world wars have shown that humanity’s propensity for violence has not improved. One assumes that God will keep his promise. But at what cost? God will survive but humanity may perhaps extinguish itself.

Madness

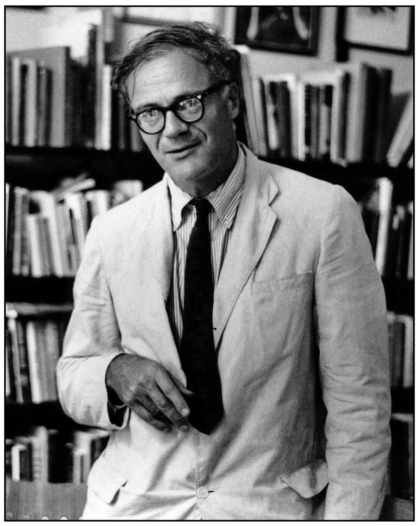
After *Lord Weary's Castle*, Lowell became famous. The following illustrations show photographs of him from youth to maturity:

1930

1947

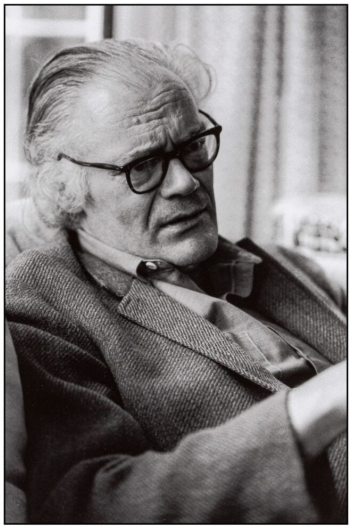


1961 (Henri Cartier-Bresson)



1965 (Elsa Dorfman)

1967 (Jane Brown)



1977 (Judith Aronson)

Lowell published his second book T*he Mills of the Kavanagh* in 1948. In early 1949 he started to become "wound up" (Hamilton, 2003, p 140). While teaching at Yaddo, an artists' community in Saratoga Springs, New York, he became unjustifiably

paranoid about a communist takeover of the center. By the time he arrived in Bloomington, Indiana, to give a talk in March, he was frankly psychotic. He later remembered his state of "pathological enthusiasm:"

> The night before I was locked up, I ran about the streets of Bloomington, Indiana, crying out against devils and homosexuals. I believed I could stop cars and paralyze their forces by merely standing in the middle of the highway with my arms outspread. Each car carried a long rod above its taillight, and the rods were adorned with diabolic Indian or voodoo signs. Bloomington stood for Joyce 's hero and Christian regeneration. Indiana stood for the evil, unexorcized, aboriginal Indians. I suspected I was a re-incarnation of the Holy Ghost and had become homocidally hallucinated. To have known the glory, violence and banality of such an experience is corrupting. (*Memoirs*, p 190)

Lowell's mind was experiencing an overwhelming "flight of ideas." He suffered from delusions of grandeur. His behavior was irrepressible and reckless. He refused to sleep. Lowell was 6-foot 1-inch tall: when he was psychotic, it was extremely difficult to restrain him (Jamison, 2017, p 83). He was finally subdued by the police, and committed to a psychiatric hospital. This was the first of multiple prolonged hospital stays, most lasting several months, that occurred once every year or two from 1949 to 1968 (Jamison, 2017, pp 112-113). Initially, he was treated with Electro Convulsive Therapy. In the 1960s, when the major tranquilizers became available, his bouts of mania were controlled by chlorpromazine. After 1968, treatment with lithium provided him with some respite from his illness. Yet the mania still occasionally occurred.

Each manic attack was followed by a prolonged period of depression. Lowell attributed his depression to his regret and shame over what had happened when he was psychotic. However, they were likely part and parcel of his bipolar mood disorder.

Lowell wrote feverishly during the periods just before he went completely manic, He then revised what he had written during his prolonged periods of depression.

Mania and depression are more common in creative individuals than in normal controls and this association appears most prominent for poets (Andreasen & Canter, 1974; Ludwig, 1995; Andreasen, 2008; Jamison, 2017; Greenwood, 2022). The flight of ideas that characterizes mania can easily lead to novel ways of looking at things. This is especially true during the hypomanic phase that precedes the psychotic break, when some modicum of control remains.

Despite his recurring attacks of mania, Lowell continued to write. In his 1959 book, *Life Studies*, he examined himself and his family in intimate detail. Rosenthal (1967) used the term "Confessional Poetry" to describe this work. Poets had always tapped into their personal experience to write poetry but until now none had been so unabashedly honest about their failings:

> Because of the way Lowell brought his private humiliations, sufferings, and psychological problems into the poems of *Life Studies*, the word 'confessional' seemed appropriate enough. Sexual guilt, alcoholism, repeated confinement in a mental hospital (and some suggestion that the malady has its violent phase)—these are explicit themes of a number of the poems, usually developed in the first person and intended without question to point to the author himself. … In a larger, more impersonal context, these poems seemed to me one culmination of the Romantic and modern tendency to place the literal Self more and more at the center of the poem.

During the 1950s and 1960s Lowell became the poetic consciousness of the United States, declaiming against its descent into materialism and its waging of unjustified wars. Lowell was one of the lead speakers at the 1967 March on the Pentagon to protest the Vietnam War. Norman Mailer describes

him at the March:

> Lowell had the most disconcerting mixture of strength and weakness in his presence, a blending so dramatic in its visible sign of conflict that one had to assume he would be sensationally attractive to women. He had something untouchable, all insane in its force: one felt immediately that there were any number of causes for which the man would be ready to die, and for some he would fight, with an axe in his hand and a Cromwellian light in his eye. It was even possible that physically he was very strong—one couldn't tell at all—he might be fragile, he might have the sort of farm mechanic's strength which could manhandle the rear axle and differential off a car and into the back of a pickup. But physical strength or no, his nerves were all too apparently delicate. Obviously spoiled by everyone for years, he seemed nonetheless to need the spoiling. These nerves—the nerves of a consummate poet—were not tuned to any battering. (Mailer, 1968, pp 53-54)

Final Poems

Lowell's last book of poetry, *Day by Day*, came out just after his death from a sudden heart attack in 1977. The penultimate poem in that book is *Thanks-Offering for Recovery*:

> The airy, going house grows small
> tonight, and soft enough to be crumpled up
> like a handkerchief in my hand.
> Here with you by this hotbed of coals,
> I am the *homme sensuel*, free
> to turn my back on the lamp, and work.
> Something has been taken off,
> a wooden winter shadow—
> goodbye nothing. I give thanks, thanks—
> thanks too for this small
> Brazilian *ex voto*, this primitive head
> sent me across the Atlantic by my friend . . .

a corkweight thing,
to be offered *Deo gratias*
in church on recovering from head-injury or migraine—
now mercifully delivered in my hands,
though shelved awhile unnoticing and unnoticed.
Free of the unshakable terror that made me write . . .
I pick it up, a head holy and unholy,
tonsured or damaged,
with gross black charcoaled brows and stern eyes
frowning as if they had seen the splendor
times past counting . . . unspoiled,
solemn as a child is serious—
light balsa wood the color of my skin.
It is all childcraft, especially
its shallow, chiseled ears,
crudely healed scars lumped out
to listen to itself, perhaps, not knowing
it was made to be given up.
Goodbye nothing. Blockhead,
I would take you to church,
if any church would take you . . .
This winter, I thought
I was created to be given away.

Lowell is describing a small figurine from the northeastern region of Brazil, a gift from his friend Elizabeth Bishop. This was an *ex voto* ("from a vow") offering, called *milagré* in Portuguese. Such objects, were left at a church as thanks to God after recovery from illness. A tiny leg would be left when the arthritis abated, a miniature head after the migraine had ended. The illustration on the right shows a small (4-inch) head (not the one described by Lowell). The poet wonders whether such an offering might serve as thanks now that the "unshakable terror that made me write" had finally finished.

Epilogue

Lowell's final poem in the book *Day by Day* serves as an epilogue to a life distinguished by severe madness and by significant poetry:

> Those blessèd structures, plot and rhyme—
> why are they no help to me now
> I want to make
> something imagined, not recalled?
> I hear the noise of my own voice:
> The painter's vision is not a lens,

it trembles to caress the light.
But sometimes everything I write
with the threadbare art of my eye
seems a snapshot,
lurid, rapid, garish, grouped,
heightened from life,
yet paralyzed by fact.
All’s misalliance.
Yet why not say what happened?
Pray for the grace of accuracy
Vermeer gave to the sun’s illumination
stealing like the tide across a map
to his girl solid with yearning.
We are poor passing facts,
warned by that to give
each figure in the photograph
his living name.

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/lowell-epilogue.mp3

At the end of the poem Lowell refers to Vermeer’s 1662 painting *Woman Reading a Letter* in Amsterdam’s Rijksmuseum. Lowell’s prayed to be as accurate in his poetry as Vermeer in his painting. On another level, the painting embodied the tranquility that was so often missing in his life.

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Edward Hopper

Edward Hopper (1882-1967) painted the independence and the loneliness of 20th-Century America. He was a realist in the days when most painters tended toward the abstract. Yet his paintings incite the imagination far more than the works of any abstract expressionist. His enigmatic images force the viewer to wonder what is going on:

> Hopper was neither an illustrator nor a narrative painter. His paintings don’t tell stories. What they do is suggest—powerfully, irresistibly—that there are stories within them, waiting to be told. He shows us a moment in time, arrayed on a canvas; there’s clearly a past and a future, but it’s our task to find it for ourselves. (Block, 2016, p viii).

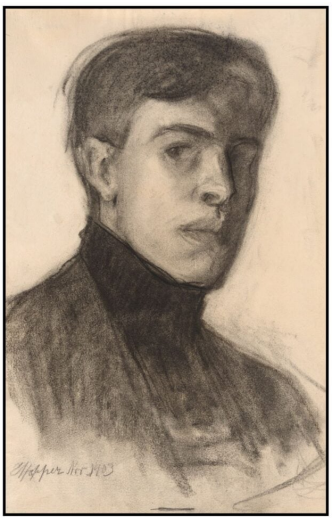
More than any other painter, Hopper has inspired writers to find the stories and meanings behind his paintings. This post

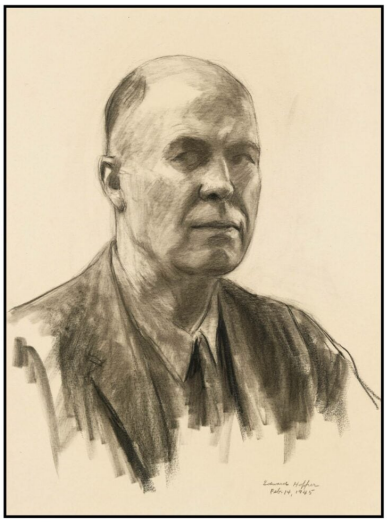
summarizes his life, describes his working methods, and presents some of his pictures together with the writings they have stimulated.

Early Life

Hopper was born in Nyack, a town on the Hudson River some 25 km north of the upper end of Manhattan (Levin, 1980a, 2007). He decided early to become an artist and studied at the New York School of Art and Design in Greenwich Village, where he was taught by William Merritt Chase and Robert Henri, among others. Hopper considered Thomas Eakins his artistic hero.

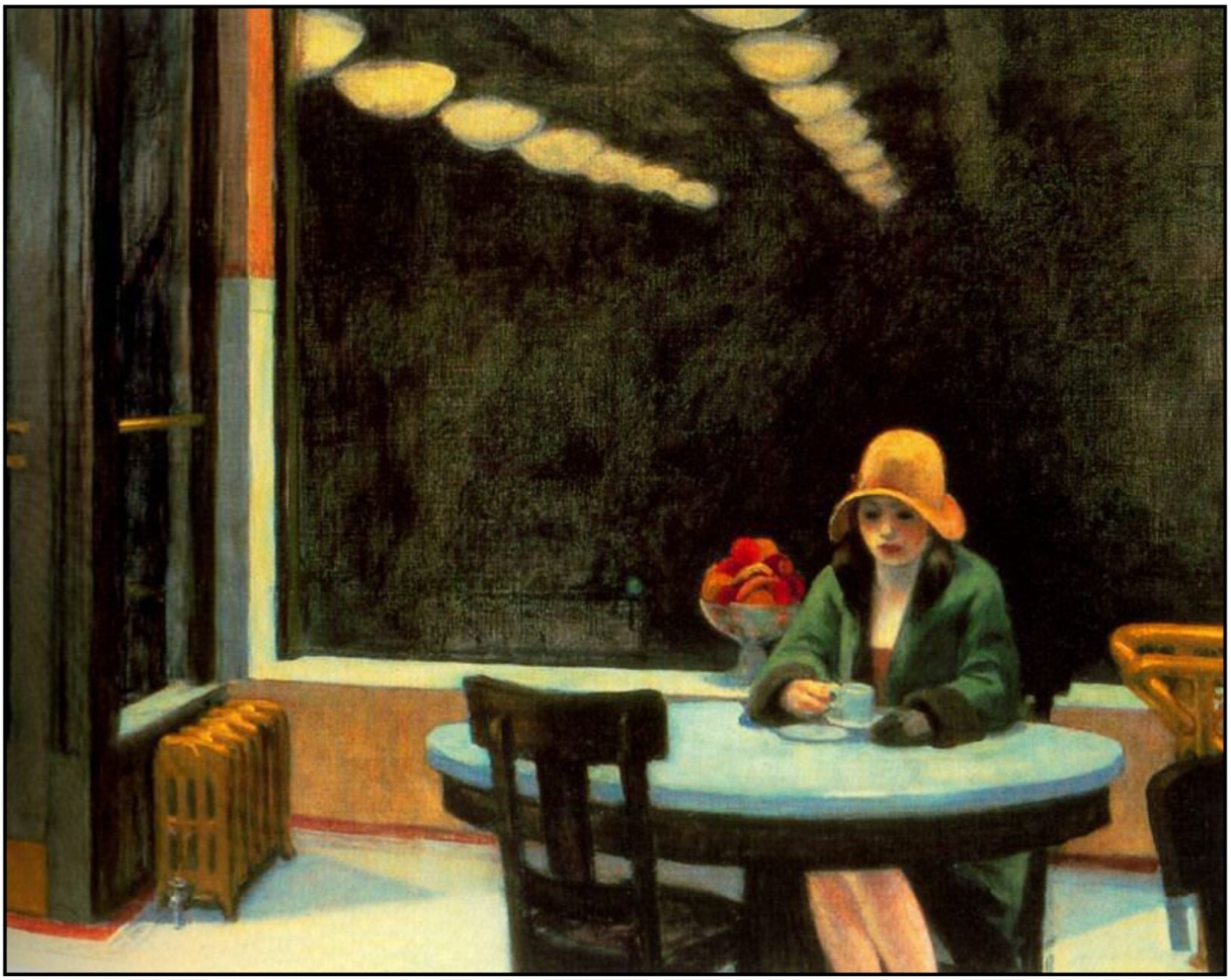
The 1903 self-portrait, illustrated on the left below, shows the conscientious young student. The others are from 1930, when he was becoming successful, and from 1945 after he had become famous.

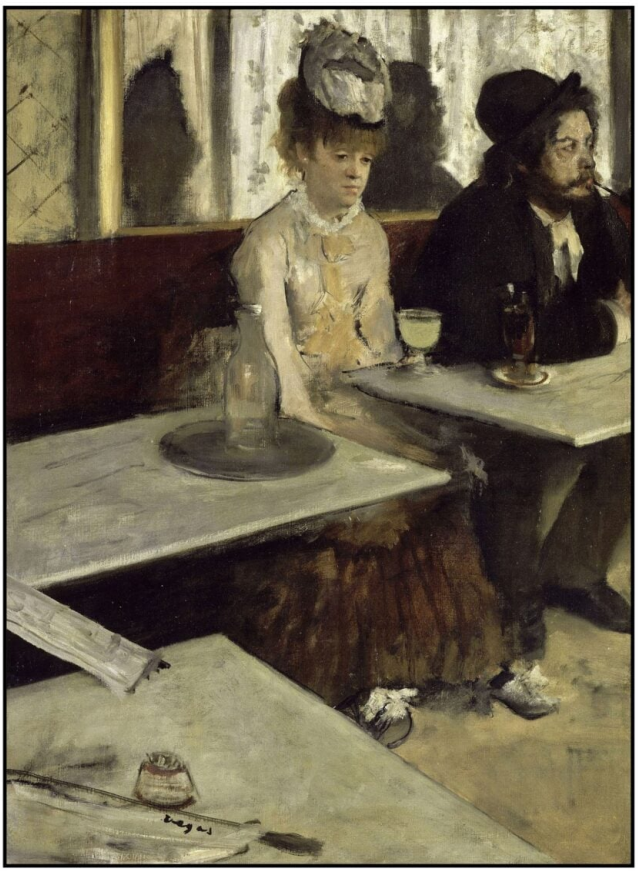




In 1906 Hopper made his first trip to Paris, where he stayed for almost one year, making occasional journeys to other cities in Europe. He returned for two further shorter visits in 1909 and 1910. In Paris, he visited the museums, attended classes, and sketched and painted *en plain air.* The illustration on the right from the graphic biography by Rossi and Scarduelli (2021) was derived from a 1907 photograph of the young student sketching (Levin, 2007, p 68).

Hopper was influenced by the impressionists, in particular Edouard Manet and Edgar Degas (Kranzfelder, 2002, p 150). His later painting *Automat* (1927) shows similarities in mood and structure to Manet's *The Plum Brandy* (1877) and to Degas' *The Absinthe Drinker* (1876):





Another influence was Eugéne Atget who had photographed the empty streets of Paris (Llorens & Ottinger, 2012, p. 263). Since his camera required long exposure-times, Atget chose to photograph early in the morning before there were any people moving around in the streets. His haunting images foreshadow Hopper's lonely city-scenes. Walter Benjamin in his Little History of Photography (1931) remarked that Atget's photographs sometimes seem to portray the "scene of a crime." The same can be said of many of Hopper's paintings.

The ongoing modernist revolution in Paris had no effect on the young American. Hopper paid little attention to the post-impressionists (Van Gogh, Cézanne and Gauguin), and was apparently unaware of the current work of painters like Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse.

One of the last paintings from Hopper's time in Europe was entitled *Soir Bleu* (1914). Various characters interact on a café terrace:

On the left is a *macquereau* (French: mackerel, slang for "pimp"). In the center, a garishly made-up prostitute attempts to entice a client from a table where three men are seated:

someone who appears from his beret to be an artist, a soldier with epaulettes on his uniform, and a clown in full make-up and costume. On the right a bourgeois man and woman survey the scene. One is tempted to consider Hopper as the clown, out of place and without voice among the French. Three of the figures are smoking: the clown, the pimp and the artist. This may suggest something similar in their livelihoods: they all survive by selling to the rich and powerful: the couple on the right and the soldier. Hopper exhibited the painting when he returned to New York, but it was never sold and stayed in storage at his studio until his death.

The painting's title may come from a poem *Sensation* (1870) by Rimbaud, which in its second verse talks of being mute like the clown.

> *Par les soirs bleus d'été j'irai dans les sentiers,*
> *Picoté par les blés, fouler l'herbe menue :*
> *Rêveur, j'en sentirai la fraicheur à mes pieds.*
> *Je laisserai le vent baigner ma tête nue.*

Je ne parlerai pas ; je ne penserai rien.
Mais l'amour infini me montera dans l'âme ;
Et j'irai loin, bien loin, comme un bohémien,
Par la Nature,—heureux comme avec une femme.

Summer's deep-blue evenings I will go down the lanes,
Tickled by the wheat-berries, trampling the short grass:
Dreaming, I will feel the coolness at my feet.
I will let a northern wind bathe my bare head.

I will not stir my tongue; I will think of nothing.
Yet love infinite shall at once mount in my soul;
And I will go far, very far, like a gypsy,
Through Nature,—enchanted as with a woman.
(translation by Gregory Campeau)

Back in New York, Hopper was unable to sell more than an occasional painting. He therefore supported himself by

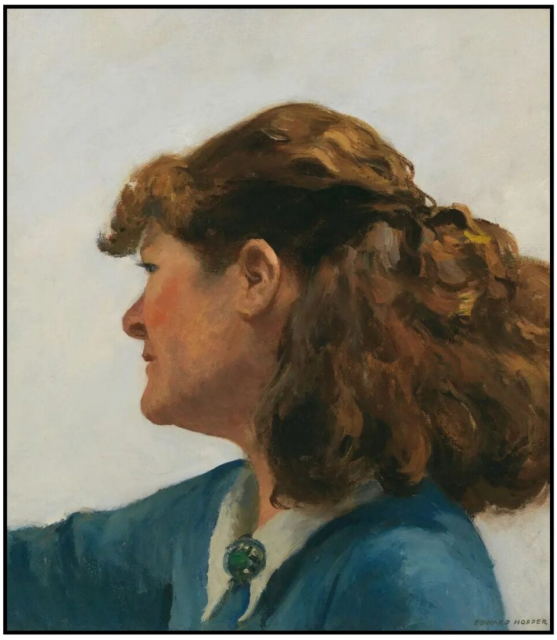
providing illustrations for magazine stories and advertisements. For a while he learned etching with Martin Lewis. From these studies, he developed a better sense of how light plays on surfaces, especially at night. He also began to define spaces more distinctly than the impressionists that he had hitherto been following.

In 1913, Hopper moved into the top floor of Number 3, Washington Square North, Greenwich Village. This was his studio and residence for the rest of his life. The following illustration shows the building, the roof-top view from the top floor (Levin, 1985) and Hopper's 1932 painting *City Roofs*:

Jo Nivison

In the summer of 1923 on a painting trip to Gloucester, Massachusetts, Hopper re-encountered Jo Nivison, who had been

a fellow-student at the New York School of Art and Design. They both painted water-colors and on their return to New York, Nivison was instrumental in getting Hopper’s work exhibited. They enjoyed each other’s company and were married in 1924. Both were 41 years old. They were physically and psychologically different: he was 6 ft 5 inches while she was just 5 ft; “she was gregarious, outgoing, sociable and talkative, while he was shy, quiet, solitary, and introspective” (Levin, 2007, p 168). The following illustration shows a 1906 portrait of*: The Art Student Miss Josephine Nivison* by Robert Henri, a photograph of Jo and Edward (from the 1930s), and a 1936 painting of *Jo Painting* by Hopper.



Edward painted and Jo took care of things. She modelled for his figure paintings, and kept meticulous records of his paintings in a set of notebooks. She sometimes rebelled against her help-mate status, and urged her husband to promote her own artistic career. There were arguments, some of which degenerated into physical fights. Nevertheless, their marriage lasted until Edward’s death in 1967. Jo died a year later, leaving all her husband’s unsold paintings to the Whitney

Museum of American Art. The museum also accepted her paintings, but many of these were discarded. Jo Hopper was not given the recognition that she deserved (Colleary, 2004; Levin, 1980b, 2007, pp. 717-728; McColl, 2018).

Working Methods

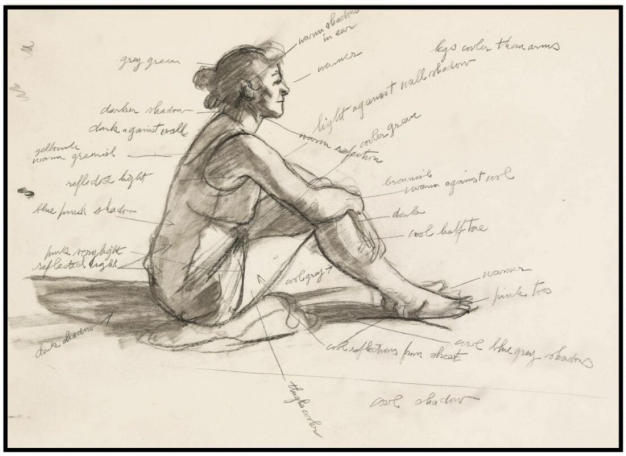
Although Hopper worked *en plein air* in France and during his summer excursions to New England, most of his pictures were painted in the studio from sketches made *in situ*. His images are thus based on reality but tempered by the imagination. The perspectives are altered; the surfaces are simplified and flattened; the colors are changed to what they might have been rather than what they were. His 1946 painting *Approaching a City* shows the rail lines of the Metro-North Railroad entering the tunnel at 97th Street to travel under Park Avenue to Grand Central Station. The painting provides a heightened representation of what a traveler might experience coming into a city for the first time. The illustration below shows the painting together with contemporary (Conaty,2022, p 13) and more recent (Levin, 1985) views of the scene.

The perspective of the painting would only be possible from

the level of the rail-lines. Hopper has tried to see from the point of view of a passenger in a train rather than a pedestrian on Park Avenue. Even if the graffiti were erased, the opposite wall is (and was) not as it appears in the painting. Hopper has flattened its texture and removed the cables. The buildings above the wall are not those on Park Avenue, either now or when the painting was made. Conaty (2022, p 13) remarks

> Here. the building types – from the nineteenth century brownstone to the modern industrial structure at the far left – suggest the passage of time in the histories that coexist, pictured as a single mass of forms seen from the train track below.

The illustration below shows Hopper's 1954 painting *Morning Sun*. The preparatory sketches show both the general layout of the room the effects of the bright morning light, and a more accurate representation of the model (Jo) with extensive details about shading and color:



The Lonely City

Although Hopper painted many different subjects, he is best known for his pictures of lonely urban surroundings. The most recent exhibition of his work at the Whitney Museum focuses on his depiction of New York City (Conaty, 2022).

The 1930 painting *Early Sunday Morning* shows a deserted New York Street. Though long considered to represent 7th Avenue in

Greenwich Village, recent evidence has pointed to a source on Bleeker Street (Marcum 2022). The painting has a wonderful visual rhythm: the repetition and variation between the different units and their windows reminds me of the stanzas and rhymes of poetry.

John Updike (2005 p 199) describes the painting:

> *Early Sunday Morning* is a literally sunny picture, with even something merry about it: bucolic peace visits a humdrum urban street. We are gladdened by the day that is coming, entering from the right, heralded by the shadows it throws. The glow on the sidewalk is picked up by the yellow window shades. The barber pole is cheerful, the hydrant basks like a sluggish, knobby toad. But the silent windows, especially the darkened big shopwindows, hold behind them an ominous mortuary stillness. The undercurrents of stillness threaten to drag us down, even as the day dawns. The diurnal wheel turns, taking the sun on one of its sides. But the other side, the side where sun is absent, has its presence, too, and Hopper's apparently noncommittal art excels in making us

aware of the elsewhere, the missing, the longed-for. He is, to use a phrase generally reserved for writers, a master of suspense.

The painting takes liberties with the shadows. Neither 7th Avenue nor Bleeker Street run directly east-west, and the morning sun could not cast shadows so long and so parallel to the buildings in either place. As noted by the poet John Hollander (in Levin 1995 p 43), the long shadow on the sidewalk is especially mysterious:

Long, slant shadows
Cast on the wan concrete
Are of nearby fallen
Verticals not ourselves.
Lying longest, most still,
Along the unsigned blank
Of sidewalk, the narrowed
Finger of shade left by
Something, thicker than trees,
Taller than these streetlamps,
Somewhere off to the right
Perhaps, and unlike an
Intrusion of ourselves,
Unseen, long, is claiming
It all, the scene, the whole.

A striking aspect of the painting is it overwhelming silence: the calm before or after the storm of normal life. Ward (2017, p 169) remarks

Hopper's paintings are uniquely silent, conveying a sense of unnatural stillness. The silence is more active than passive, mainly because it suggests little of the calmness, tranquility, or placidity commonly associated with it. Hopper's silences are tense—hushed decorums maintained with terrific strain.

Probably Hopper's most famous painting is *The Nighthawks* (1942), wherein a man and a woman sit at the counter of an all-night diner. They are served by a young waiter and observed by a solitary man at the other end of the counter. The diner is brightly lit; outside it is dark. The streets are deserted: it is likely long past midnight. We sense the couple's anxiety and we are grateful for the light.

Hopper may have based the painting on a restaurant near the intersection of Greenwich Avenue and 7th Avenue (now Mulry Square). More likely it is an amalgam of various diners in the area. The title apparently comes from the beak-like nose of the man sitting with the woman.

The poet Mark Strand (1994, pp. 6-7) described the general effect of the picture:

> The dominant feature of the scene is the long window through which we see the diner. It covers two-thirds of the canvas, forming the geometrical shape of an isosceles trapezoid, which establishes the directional pull of the painting, toward a vanishing point that cannot be witnessed, but must

> be imagined. Our eye travels along the face of the glass, moving from right to left, urged on by the converging sides of the trapezoid, the green tile, the counter, the row of round stools that mimic our footsteps, and the yellow-white neon glare along the top. We are not drawn into the diner but are led alongside it. Like so many scenes we register in passing, its sudden, immediate clarity absorbs us, momentarily isolating us from everything else, and then releases us to continue on our way. In *Nighthawks*, however, we are not easily released. The long sides of the trapezoid slant toward each other but never join, leaving the viewer midway in their trajectory. The vanishing point, like the end of the viewer's journey or walk, is in an unreal and unrealizable place, somewhere off the canvas, out of the picture. The diner is an island of light distracting whoever might be walking by—in this case, ourselves—from journey's end. This distraction might be construed as salvation. For a vanishing point is not just where converging lines meet, it is also where we cease to be, the end of each of our individual journeys. Looking at *Nighthawks*, we are suspended between contradictory imperatives—one, governed by the trapezoid, that urges us forward, and the other, governed by the image of a light place in a dark city, that urges us to stay.

Night makes us aware of our insignificance. A café can fend off these feelings. The older waiter in Hemingway's story *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* (1933) notes how his café provides an elderly customer with some sense of security in the night:

> It is the light of course but it is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant. You do not want music. Certainly you do not want music. Nor can you stand before a bar with dignity although that is all that is provided for these hours. What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it

needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was *nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada*. [nothing and then nothing and then nothing]

Strong (1988) remarks on the similarities between the isolation of Hopper's images and the loneliness of Robert Frost's poems. Hopper read and admired Frost's poems. Jo Nivison painted a picture of him reading Frost in 1955 (Levin, 1980b). Frost's poem *Desert Places* (1934) ends:

> And lonely as it is, that loneliness
> Will be more lonely ere it will be less –
> A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
> With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars – on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.

There is something essentially American about the lonely individualism – the internal desert places – of Hopper, Hemingway and Frost.

Ecphrasis

Ecphrasis (Greek: words about) is the verbal description of a work of art, either real or imagined, expressed in vivid poetic language (Heffernan, 2015; Hollander 1988, 1995; Hollander & Weber, 2001; Panagiolidou, 2013). Ecphrasis is concerned with the effects the art on the viewer whereas "interpretation" deals with the what and how of these efects (Carrier, 1987).

Perhaps more than any other artist, Hopper has stimulated the imagination of poets and writers. Poems and stories written in response to his paintings have been collected in several anthologies (Block, 2016; Levin, 1995; Lyons et al., 1995),

and individual poets have composed whole books inspired by his images (Farrés, 2009; Hoggard, 2009; Strand, 1994). The following are three examples of Hopper's images and the poetry and prose that they have evoked.

Hopper's 1921 etching *Evening Wind* shows a nude woman about to lie down in bed as the wind blows the curtain into the room. The viewer feels that he is in the same room as the woman, and this intimacy recalls Degas' paintings of women bathing. The Hopper website suggests that the sudden interruption of the wind might be akin to the appearance of a god, like the annunciation to Mary or the shower of gold that fell upon Danae.

Robert Mezey (Levin, 1995, p 24) describes the etching in a beautifully constructed sonnet:

> One foot on the floor, one knee in bed,
> Bent forward on both hands as if to leap
> Into a heaven of silken cloud, or keep
> An old appointment – tryst, one almost said –
> Some promise, some entanglement that led
> In broad daylight to privacy and sleep,
> To dreams of love, the rapture of the deep,
> Oh, everything, that must be left unsaid –
>
> Why then does she suddenly look aside
> At a white window full of empty space
> And curtains swaying inward? Does she sense
> In darkening air the vast indifference
> That enters in and will not be denied,
> To breathe unseen upon her nakedness?

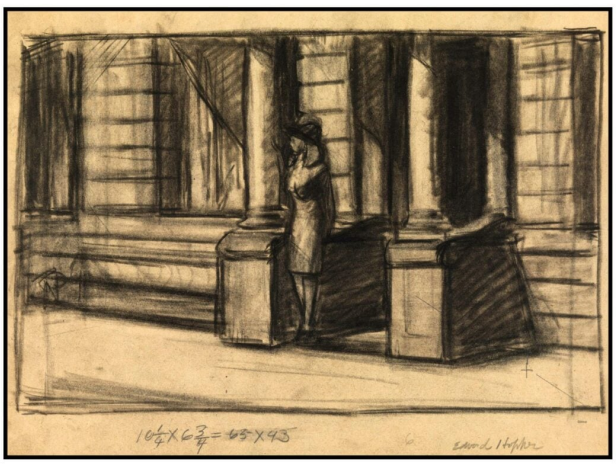
Hopper’s 1939 painting *New York Movie* depicts an usherette at one of the grand movie theaters in New York. She is standing beautifully and pensively near the side exit.

Leonard Michaels (Lyons et al, 1995, p 3) wonders about who she might be:

> Of course, she wasn’t going anywhere. I mean only that there was drama in the painting, a kind of personal story, and it was more engaging, more psychologically intense, than the movie on the distant blurry screen, a rectangle near the upper left corner of the painting, like a window in a dark room. The usherette isn’t looking at that movie, isn’t involved with any movie drama, any mechanical story told with cuts and fades while music works on your feelings. Her drama is mythical, the myth of Eurydice doomed to wait at the edge of darkness. The red flashes in the shadows of the painting are streaks of fire and streams and gouts of blood. Eurydice stands at the edge of Hades waiting for Orpheus.

This movie theater, like many others in Hopper's day, is called the Orpheum.

The 1943 painting of *Summertime* shows a young woman in a thin dress standing at the door of a New York building. She is about to face the day. She feels warm but a cooling breeze blows the dress against her body.



James Hoggard (2009) imagines Hopper talking about his painting:

> It’s good you noticed, if you did
> A number, I’ll say, have not come close
> This one’s a nude, the clothes a guise,
> a mask, a witty, illusory stab
> at idiot propriety – imagination strips
> everything bare, as I’ve done here:
> the nipples and heft of breasts in view
> and the screaming delight of thighs
> rising toward the truth between them,
> as suggested by the curtain’s cleft –
> all this a celebration of my mood,
> and my mood trumps anything that’s yours
>
> This lass, who looks sweetly nubile now,
> is Jo, my wife, whose age has been reduced
> by the cleverness of my brush and paint
> I’ve stripped her nearly bare, but I
> have also preserved defiant ghosts
> in the willful set of her swelling lips
>
> The tensions and songs here are mine
> You can do with your own what you will

Homage in Film and Photography

Hopper’s work has had a large influence on the visual arts as well as on poetry. Many of Hopper’s paintings depict large ornate 19th-Century houses – often standing isolated from other buildings. One such picture is *House by the Railroad* (1925). According to Levin (1985) this was likely partially based on a house in Haverstraw just north of his home in Nyack (lower left of the illustration below). This house is across the street from the railway: Hopper often compressed the distances

between things in his paintings. The Mansard roof and central tower and columned porch were also found in other houses that Hopper painted. These houses defiantly insists on their isolated existence.

Variations on this house have appeared in several movies: most importantly Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and Terrence

Malick’s *Days of Heaven* (1978). These sets are shown in the illustration above (lower middle and lower right).

Many photographers have been profoundly influenced by Hopper’s pictures. Phillip Lorcia diCorcia photographs isolated people in urban settings: his images suggest what Hopper might have seen he had lived a further fifty years (Llorens & Ottinger 2012, pp. 306-309). Even more recently, the photographer Richard Tuschman has recreated many of Hopper’s paintings in photographs. The illustration below shows Hopper’s 1926 painting *Eleven a.m.* together with Tuschman’s *Woman at a Window*, 2013. The chair has changed from blue to pink and the model now wears heels. Most importantly her face is visible.

Empty Rooms

Hopper was always intrigued by the play of light in empty rooms. His 1951 painting *Rooms by the Sea*, shows an empty room leading through an open door to the sea. The image derives from the Hopper's studio in Truro on Cape Cod. The door does not directly open onto the sea: Hopper has compressed the space. The main room in the painting is completely bare. On the left, however, another room can be glimpsed with a couch, a chest-of-drawers, and a painting on the wall. Hollander (2001, pp. 72-25) suggests that the two rooms might represent the memories of the past and the presentiments of the future.

One of Hopper's late paintings *Sun in an Empty Room* (1963) is devoid of detail. The room contains nothing but the light. The

stark simplicity almost approaches the abstract, though Hopper would insist that the image is still tied to reality.

Strand (1994, pp. 57-58) remarks:

> In the later painting, *Sun in an Empty Room*, there is nothing calming about the light. It comes in a window and falls twice in the same room—on a wall close to the window and on a slightly recessed wall. That is all the action there is. We do not travel the same distance—actual or metaphorical—that we do in *Rooms by the Sea*. The light strikes two places at once, and we feel its terminal character instead of anything that hints of continuation. If it suggests a rhythm, it is a rhythm cut short. The room seems cropped, as if the foreground were cut away. What we have is a window wall, with the window framing the highlighted leaves of a nearby tree, and a back wall, a

> finality against which two tomblike parallelograms of light stand up-right. Done in 1963, it is Hopper’s last great painting, a vision of the world without us; not merely a place that excludes us, but a place emptied of us. The light, now a faded yellow against sepia-toned walls, seems to be enacting the last stages of its transience, its own stark narrative coming to a close.

Last Things

Hopper’s last painting, *Two Comedians* (1965) portrays two actors taking their bows on a stage raised high above the audience. They actors are the artist and his wife. Representing himself as a comedian refers back to his earlier painting *Soir Bleu.* The illustration below shows the painting together with Scarduelli’s impression of the elderly couple in their studio (Rossi & Scarduelli, 2021).

The Portuguese poet Ernest Farrés (translated by Lawrence Venuti, 2006) imagines Hopper’s comments on the painting

Perhaps it’s the costume
that lets me laugh,
or smile as it were –
for me they’ve been the same

Perhaps it’s the clown’s disguise
that lets me be
looser than I usually am
strutting cock-proud now,
goofy-eyed at a crowd,
the illusion of a crowd
no one sees but you and me

Clowns, we move toward stage’s edge,
a place I’ve made like a roof’s edge,
with threat or promise of a fall

But the moment seems sweet,
our domestic wars almost done,
and white-clad and foolscapped,
we seem blest as we press
toward the last edge we’ll meet,

our lyrical selves always in France,
our final days just bibelots:
Nous sommes, Jo et moi, les pierrots

Final Words

Hopper painted the real world, but he allowed his imagination to interact with his perception. Conaty (2022, p 14) remarks that he often felt torn between working from the fact and improvising upon what he saw. Hopper argued against abstract expressionism, insisting that art should always have its source in “life.” The following is his 1953 statement on art from the short-lived magazine *Reality* (quoted in Llorens & Ettinger, 2012, p 275):

> Great art is the outward expression of an inner life in the

> artist, and this inner life will result in his personal vision of the world. No amount of skillful invention can replace the essential element of imagination. One of the weaknesses of much abstract painting is the attempt to substitute the inventions of the intellect for a pristine imaginative conception. The inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm and does not concern itself alone with stimulating arrangements of color, form, and design. The term “life” as used in art is something not to be held in contempt, for it implies all of existence, and the province of art is to react to it and not to shun it. Painting will have to deal more fully and less obliquely with life and nature’s phenomena before it can again become great.

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The White Monks

In 1098 a small group of monks left the Benedictine monastery of Molesme in Burgundy to live in the forest of Cîteaux (Latin *Cistercium*) just south of Dijon. They considered their original home too lax and luxurious, and wished to return to the austere life of solitude, chastity, poverty and manual labor that St Benedict had originally proposed in the 6th Century. They distinguished themselves from the Benedictines by wearing undyed white robes rather than black. Over the next hundred and fifty years, the small monastery founded by these "white monks" at Cîteaux became the center of the Cistercian Order, which linked together over 500 abbeys in Europe, extending from Portugal to Estonia and from Sicily to Norway. The Cistercians were noted for the proficiency of their agriculture, the fervor of their scholarship, and the beauty of their buildings. This post comments on their achievements.

Early Christian Monasticism

The earliest histories of many different cultures record how some individuals renounced the pleasures of the world and lived apart from society (Davis, 2018). In Christian times these were called ascetics (Greek *askein* exercise) and hermits (Greek *eremos* desert). However, many of these individuals could not completely reject the society of others, and formed themselves into communities. Then they were called by the contradictory terms “monks” (Greek *monos* alone) or “cenobites” (Greek *koinos* community + *bios* life). The monastery became a place where one could practise a spiritual rather than a worldly life in the limited company of other like-minded individuals.

Pachomius the Great (292-348 CE) is usually considered the founder of Christian monasticism. After years of studying with the hermit Palaemon, he set up a small community of monks in Tabbennisi in Upper Egypt and proposed a set of rules to govern their life. The main rules required a strict scheduling of prayers and psalms throughout the day and night, obedience to the leader of the community, keeping away from members of the opposite sex, following a vegetarian diet, limiting any unnecessary speech, and performing manual labor. Pachomius was called *Abba* (father) by his disciples: from this came the term “abbot” and “abbey.”

Many other Christians retired to the Egyptian deserts to devote themselves to contemplation and worship. The most famous of these were Anthony the Great (251-356 CE) who lived as a hermit in the Eastern Desert and then organized his disciples into a monastery, and Paul of Thebes (227-341 CE) who lived alone in the desert from age of 16 until his death at the age of 113 years. The illustration below shows a 1640 painting of Paul by Jusepe de Ribera

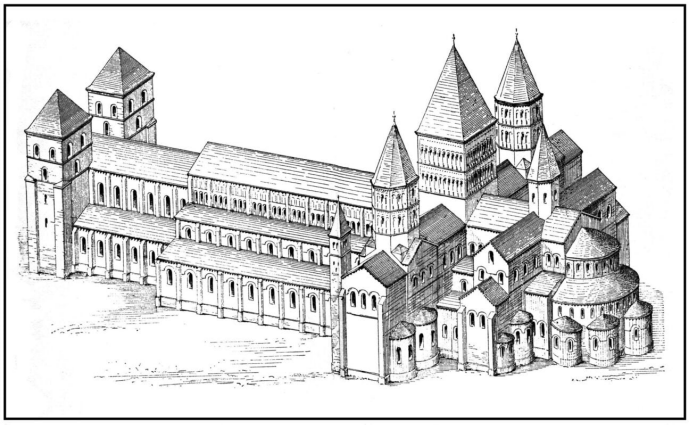
Pachomius, Anthony, Paul and their colleagues became known as the “Desert Fathers” (Dunn, 2007; Wortley, 2019). Their teachings were collected together as the *Apothegmata ton Pateron* – the “Sayings of the Fathers” (Merton,1960) of which the following is an example:

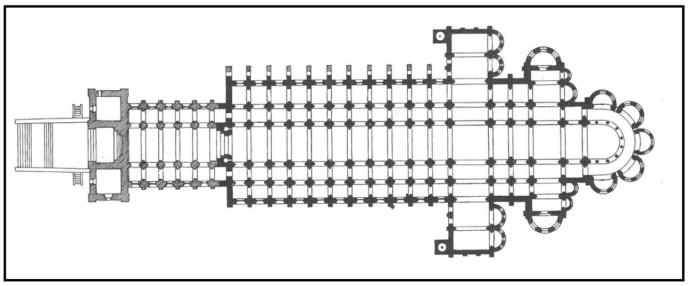
> Just as bees are driven out by smoke, and their honey taken away from them, so a life of ease drives out the fear of the Lord from a man’s soul and takes away all his good works.

Monasticism was established in Western Europe by Saint

Benedict (480-543 CE) who founded several monasteries in central Italy, most famously at Monte Cassino in the mountains south of Rome. The Rule of Saint Benedict updated and extended the general principles of monasticism – poverty, charity, silence, obedience, prayer and labor – that had been proposed by Pachomius. His followers became the Benedictines, and their monasteries prospered.

As the years passed, however, the monks no longer participated in manual labor, leaving that to the "lay brothers" who joined the monastery in hope of salvation. The abbey churches became richly decorated, the monk's quarters became palatial, the diet became sumptuous, the communion vessels were made of gold and silver, and the vestments were sewn with silk and jewels. The most luxurious of the Benedictine monasteries was the Abbey of Cluny founded in 910 CE in Burgundy halfway between Dijon and Lyon. The abbots of Cluny established many daughter monasteries from which they derived much of the revenue to support their building. In its final form (1088-1130 CE) the abbey church at Cluny (illustrated below) was the world's largest church, with 6 bell towers, a overall length of 555 ft, 5 naves with the central nave 98 ft high, and the dome at the crossing 118 ft high.





The Monastery at Cîteaux

Many monks rebelled against the luxury of the Benedictines. In the period between 1050 and 1250 several new monastic orders were founded, among them: the Carthusians (1084), the Carmelites (1150), and the Order of Saint Augustine (1244). The most successful of these were the Cistercians founded by Robert de Molesme in 1098.

Histories written later described how Robert de Molesme (1028-1111), his prior Alberic and his secretary Stephen Harding, and 21 other monks became disillusioned with the current laxity of the Benedictines and founded a new community at Cîteaux in 1098:

> After many labors, therefore, and exceedingly great difficulties … they at length attained their desire and arrived at Cîteaux – at that time a place of horror and of vast solitude. But judging that the harshness of the place was not at variance with the strict purpose they had already conceived in mind, the soldiers of Christ held the place as truly prepared for them by God: a place as agreeable as

> their purpose was dear. (quoted in Bruun and Jamroziak, 2013)

The “place of horror and of vast solitude” directly quotes the description of Jacob’s inheritance in Deuteronomy 32:10, which in the Vulgate reads *in loco horroris, et vastae solitudinis* (Bruun and Jamroziak, 2013). Modern historians believe that the site of the new monastery was actually far more congenial to settlement (Berman, 2010).

Robert was soon recalled back to Molesme, and the early success of Cîteaux was largely the work of the English monk Stephen Harding (1060-1134), who set out the governing rules for the order – the *Carta Caritatis* (Merton & O’Donnell, 2015). He convinced other communities to join with them in their devotion to a strict interpretation of the rule of Saint Benedict concerning poverty, charity, chastity, and obedience as outlined in the Rule of Saint Benedict.

However, the new order was more egalitarian than the Benedictines. Even the abbot could be criticized and punished for transgressing the rule. Lay brothers were integrated into the monastery rather than simply exploited. These brothers lived under same conditions as monks but, because they could not read or write, they did not participate in the singing of psalms or the copying of manuscripts. The Cistercians also founded numerous convents for women, the first being Le Tart Abbey in 1132 only a few miles from Cîteaux.

For clothing, monks were limited to two white robes, one black or brown scapular (over the shoulder) with cowl (hood) to wear over the robe when the monk was working in the fields, and one pair of stockings and shoes. The monks were tonsured – their remaining hair symbolizing Christ's crown of thorns. Lay brothers were not tonsured. The illustration on the right shows a painting of Cistercian monks from Staffarda Abbey in Northern Italy.

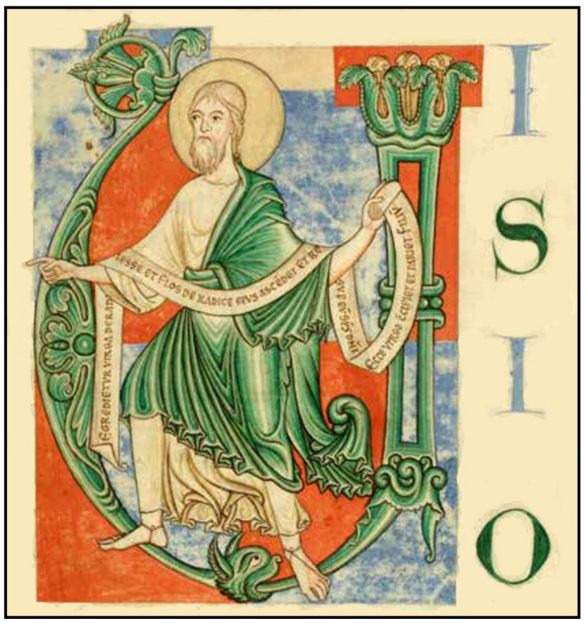
The abbots of the affiliated monasteries reported yearly at the meeting of the Annual General Chapter in Cîteaux, but the individual abbeys were largely autonomous. Since they were not required to pay tribute to the mother abbey, new monasteries preferred to become Cistercian rather than Benedictine. In addition, the Cistercians stipulated an arms-length relationship to donors and benefactors. These were not allowed to enter the cloister, to erect family monuments within the abbey church or to be buried in the monastery grounds.

As well as being an able administrator, Harding was an important scholar and talented scribe Reilly, 2018). Over the

first few years of his tenure as abbot of Cîteaux (1108-1133), he and his monks produced a new illustrated version of the Vulgate Bible of Saint Jerome (342-420 CE). The following shows the section of I Samuel 17 dealing with David and Goliath.

Among the many manuscripts produced in the monastery under Harding were a new edition of the *Moralia in Job* by the 6th-Century pope Gregory I, and a copy of Jerome's *Commentary on Isaiah*. On the left below is the letter "E" from the beginning of Book XIII of the *Moralia*. The illumination shows monks at their work harvesting the grapes, just like Gregory is harvesting meaning from the Book of Job. On the right is shown the letter "V" from the beginning of Jerome's commentary – the initial verse of Isaiah in the Vulgate begins *Visio Isaiae* (The vision of Isaiah …). In the illumination the prophet carries a banner detailing two of his main prophecies: that the Messiah will be a descendant of the house of Jesse, father of King David (Isaiah 11:1, *Et egredietur virga de radice*

Jesse) and that a virgin shall conceive and bear a son (Isaiah 7:14, *Ecce virgo concipiet, et pariet filium*).



Bernard of Clairvaux

In 1113, Bernard de Fontaine (1090-1153), a scion of the highest Burgundian aristocracy, joined Stephen Harding at the monastery of Cîteaux, bringing with him 30 other young noblemen. Impressed by the young monk, in 1115 Harding sent Bernard to the Champagne region of France to found the monastery of Clairvaux (Latin *Clara Vallis*, clear valley), where he served as the abbot until his death (Holdsworth, 2013).

Bernard was eloquent and charismatic. In a 1953 encyclical Pope Pius called him “Doctor Mellifluus” and considered him the last of the “Fathers of the Church” (though these are generally only recognized up to the 8th Century). The following quotations are from his series of sermons on the *Song of Songs,* which he interprets as describing the marriage between the soul and Christ:

> The soul seeks the Word, and consents to receive correction,

> by which she may be enlightened to recognize him, strengthened to attain virtue, molded to wisdom, conformed to his likeness, made fruitful by him, and enjoy him in bliss. (Thornton & Varenne, 2007, pp 226-227).
>
> For there are some who long to know for the sole purpose of knowing, and that is shameful curiosity; others who long to know in order to become known, and that is shameful vanity. To such as these we may apply the words of the Satirist: "Your knowledge counts for nothing unless your friends know you have it." There are others still who long for knowledge in order to sell its fruits for money or honors, and this is shameful profiteering; others again who long to know in order to be of service, and this is charity. Finally, there are those who long to know in order to benefit them selves, and this is prudence. (Thornton & Varenne, 2007, p 156)

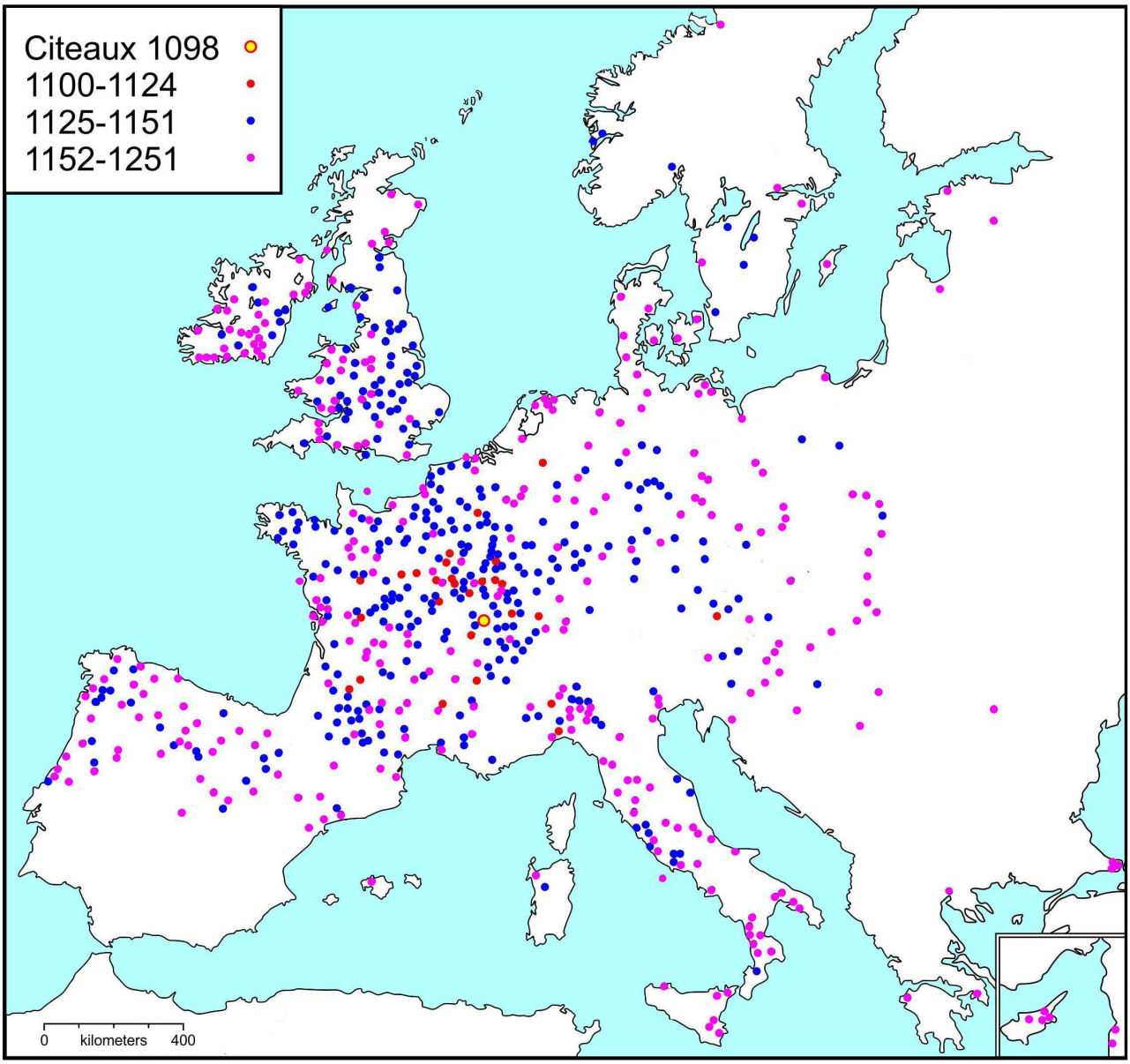
Bernard derived much of his faith from mystical contemplation. He was particularly devoted to the Virgin Mary and legends describe how he experienced visions of Mary. He was often called "Mary's Troubadour." The illustration below shows Fillipino Lippi's 1487 altarpiece *The Apparition of the Virgin to St Bernard* now in the Benedictine Abbey (*Badia*) in Florence. Seated at his writing desk in his white robe, Bernard is suddenly surprised by the Virgin and a group of angels floating before him. In the dark recess in the rocks behind him is the Devil biting on his chains. The quotation on the rock beside him is from Epictetus: *Sustine et abstine,* urging restraint and abstinence. In the background other monks gather to wonder at the vision, a young monk brings an elderly brother to see what is happening, and a sick patient is carried toward the abbey. In the right foreground is Francesco de Pugliese, the donor of the altarpiece.

Early in their history, the Cistercians decreed that all their monasteries should be dedicated to the Mary, Queen of Heaven, and that all abbey seals should bear her image. The close association between the Cistercians and Mary contributed significantly to the success of the order. This was the age wherein the cult of the Virgin flourished.

Bernard was highly involved in the politics and controversies of his age. Over many years he disputed with the philosopher Pierre Abélard about the nature of the Trinity, with Bernard

claiming that this could only be understood by faith and could not be demonstrated by logic. Pope Benedict XVI later called their opposing approaches the “theology of the heart” and the “theology of reason.” Bernard convinced the pope to support the Knights Templar, a militant monastic order founded in 1119 by a group of French knights, one of which was Bernard’s uncle. In a fiery sermon in Vézelay, he urged on the Second Crusade (1147-1150), and was abashed when this came to naught.

Most importantly he urged his monks to become soldiers of Christ and dispatched them to all the corners of Europe. Through their influence hundreds of monasteries were founded or became affiliated to the Cistercian order. The map below shows the spread of Cistercian abbeys through Europe. Clairvaux was the mother house (or grandmother house) for most of the abbeys in England and Northern France, and for many of the abbeys in Spain and Italy. The greatest Cistercian expansion was in the first fifty years (red and blue dots). Over the next century the expansion continued (purple dots). Then the Black Death laid waste to Europe from 1346 to 1353, and everything slowed down. Although most of the abbeys maintained their power, a few became deserted and fell into ruins. Over the years the abbeys slowly regained their prominence and the number of active Cistercian abbeys crested at around 700 by the time of the Reformation in the early 16th Century.



Architecture

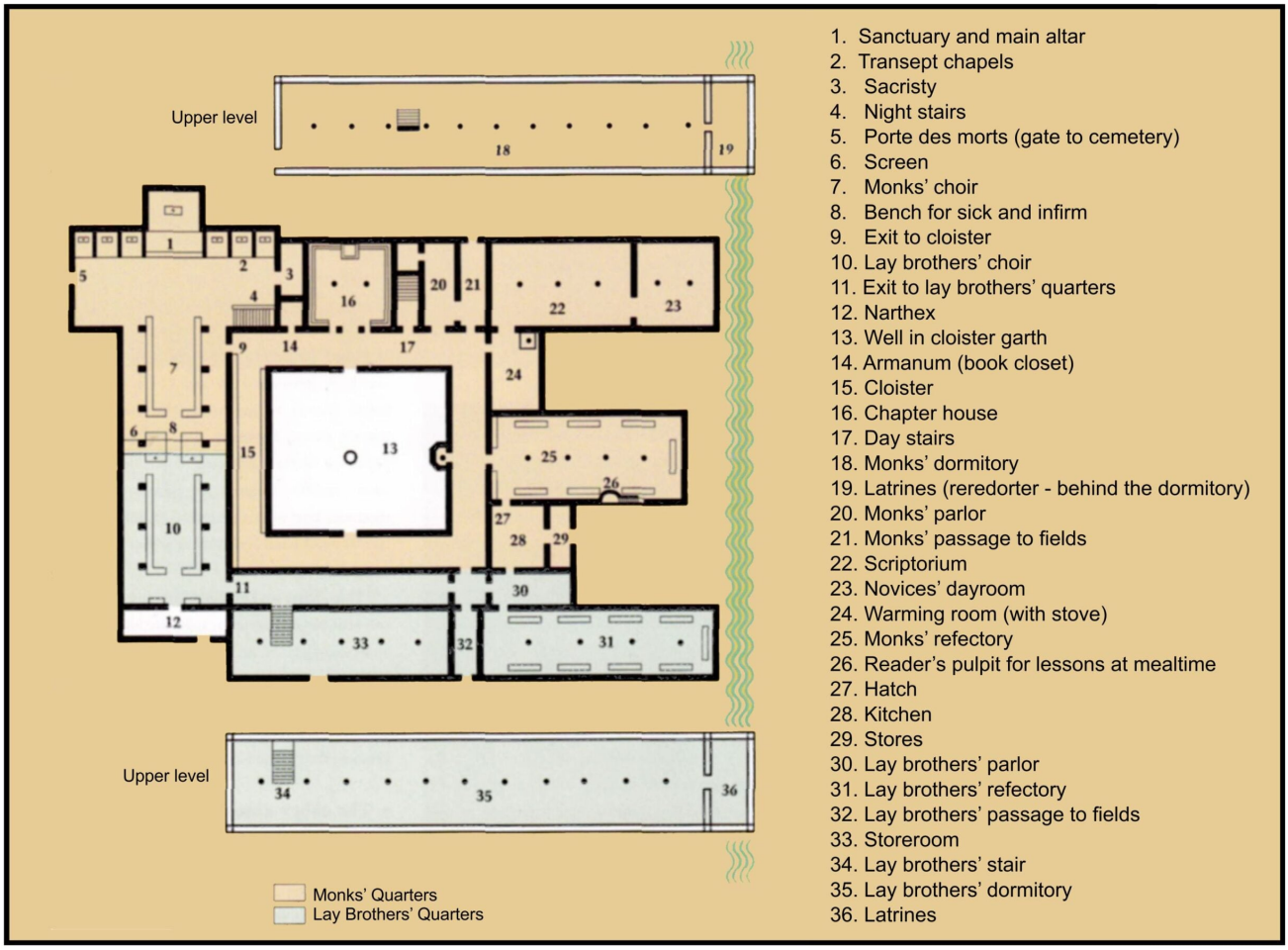
Cistercian monasteries were typically located in valleys. The stream or river running through the valley provided fresh water for drinking and cooking and took away all the biodegradable waste produced in the abbey. Many of the Cistercian abbeys have variants of “valley” or “fountain” in their name. An anonymous Latin ditty describes the differences between the main Catholic orders:

Bernardus valles	Bernard loved

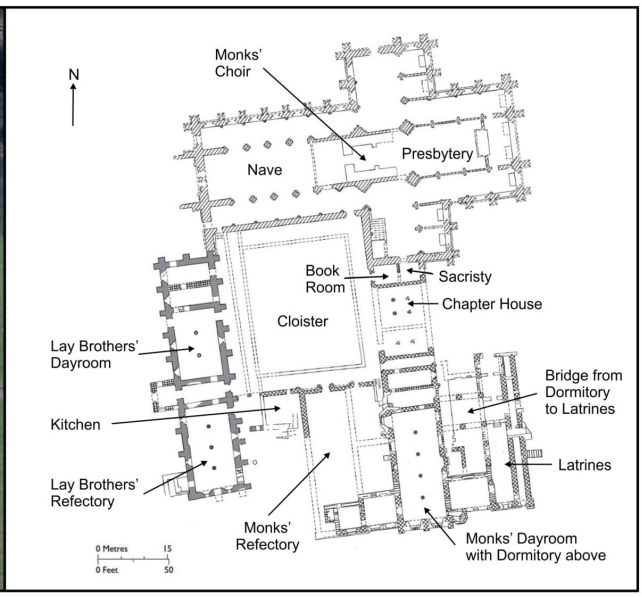
the valleys
Colles Benedictus amavit, Benedict the hills
Oppida Franciscus Francis the small towns
Magnas Ignatius urbes. and Ignatius the great cities

The founding monks either lived in temporary wooden buildings or remained at the mother abbey during the ten to twenty years that it took to build the stone church and monastery buildings. at the site, most of the work was carried on by dedicated stone-masons supervised by master-builders (the first architects). some of these master-builders may have been monks but most were simply professionals who travelled from site to site. since the stone was obtained from local quarries, the texture of the walls differs from abbey to abbey. Fernand Pouillon's novel *Les Pierres Sauvages* vividly describes the building of the abbey of Le Theronet in Provence over the years 1160-1176.

The following diagram (modified slightly from Gaud & Leroux-Dhuys, 1998, p 52; see also Tobin, 1995, p 21) shows the typical layout of a Cisterican monastery. The basic plan was adapted to the specific site, but was nevertheless remarkably consistent from abbey to abbey:



The illustration below shows the ruins of Neath Abbey in South Wales as viewed on Google Maps and a plan of the abbey from the Medieval Heritage website. I am partial to his abbey since Neath was my father's home town, and I visited the abbey as a child. Note that the orientation is rotated 90° clockwise from the preceding plan so that North is upward.



Bernard of Clairvaux criticized the luxurious decoration of the Cluniac churches. In an *Apologia* written in 1128 he remarked

> I say nothing of the enormous height, extravagant length and unnecessary width of the churches, of their costly polishings and curious paintings which catch the worshipper's eye and dry up his devotion … Let these things pass, let us say they are all to the honor of God. Nevertheless, just as the pagan poet Persius inquired of his fellow pagans, so I as a monk ask my fellow monks: … "Tell me, poor men, if you really are poor what is gold doing in the sanctuary?"
>
> … The church is resplendent in her walls and wanting in her poor. She dresses her stones in gold and lets her sons go naked. The eyes of the rich are fed at the expense of the indigent. The curious find something to amuse them and the needy find nothing to sustain them.

He also thought that the various figurative sculptures on the capitols of the pillars and on the gargoyles of the roof had no place in a monastery, where they would only serve to

distract the monks from their contemplation.

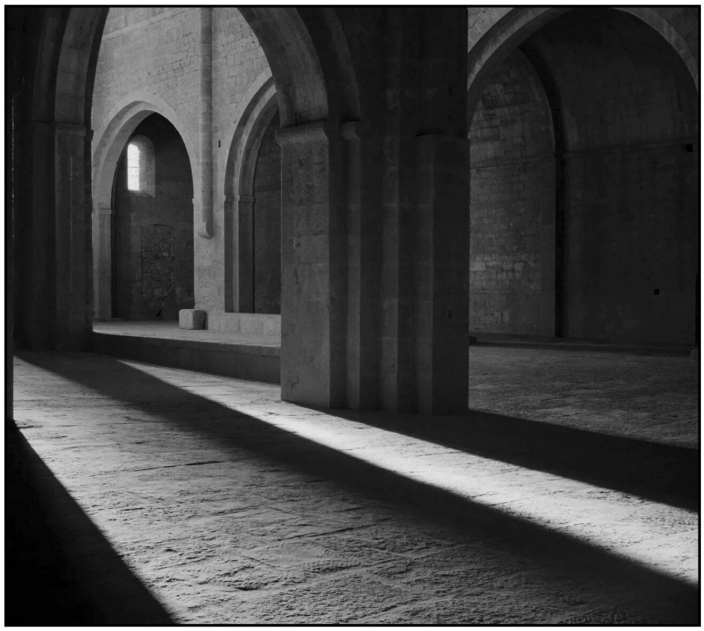
The directives of the early Cistercian Chapters stressed the austerity of the monastery buildings. Everything unnecessary was to be rejected: “towers, ornate pavements, coloured-glass windows , figurative paintings, sculpture, bells, images (except that of Christ) and ornaments” (Coomans, 2013).

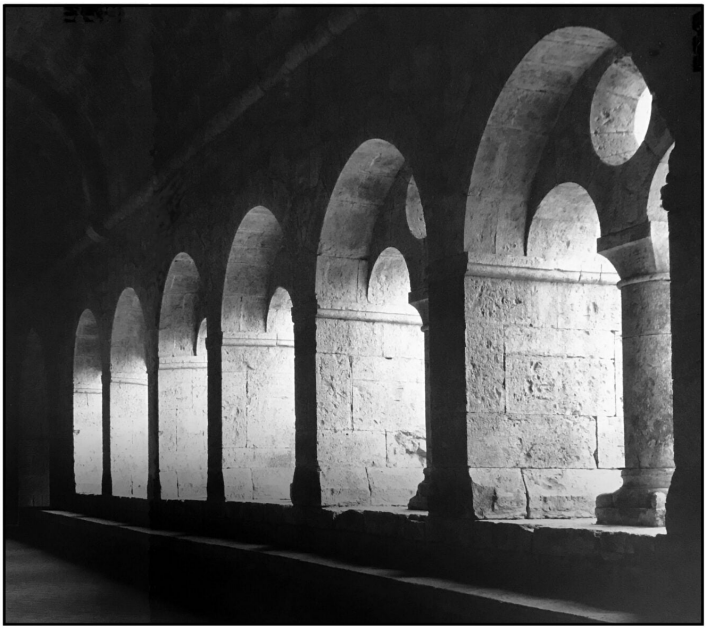
The early Cistercian abbeys built following these directives have a simplicity that appeals strongly to modern sensibilities. The architecture is one where the space is defined by light and where the acoustic is highly reverberant. The following is from John Pawson’s afterword to Lucien Hervé’s 2001 book on Le Thoronet called *The Architecture of Truth*:

> The abbey offers a sublime example of what happens when gratuitous visual distraction is removed. The intrinsic beauty of materials is revealed; one sees with incredible clarity. Where there is embellishment – an enriched moulding, a carved capital –every detail is graphically registered. Light also finds its perfect context. Great shards of light carve out spaces in the interior, pools spill across tiled floors and finer, but no less dramatic. threads of light catch in mouldings, tracing semicircular arches, making them appear to be carved not out of stone but etched in solid luminescence. This light is more than a beautiful effect. It symbolizes the physical presence of the divine and it directs attention. In the morning, light is introduced into the church so that one’s gaze is drawn always forward, to the curved apse and the altar within it. ‘The soul must seek light,’ observed St Bernard, ‘by following light’. The designer of Le Thoronet (a man of whom, sadly, we know nothing) was shaping more than stones and vaults – he was reinforcing a code of behaviour, confirming a habit of contemplation. Further evidence of this is to be found in the acoustics of the church. A Cistercian monk passes most of each day in silence. The

> times when he does utter acquire extra significance in consequence. The acoustics at Le Thoronet, with its extraordinarily protracted reverberation, dictates a particular style and discipline of singing. Singers must sing slowly and in perfect unison. Comply, and the effect is ethereally beautiful. Deviate only a little in either respect, and the consequence is acoustic chaos.

And the following illustration shows some of Hervé’s photographs:



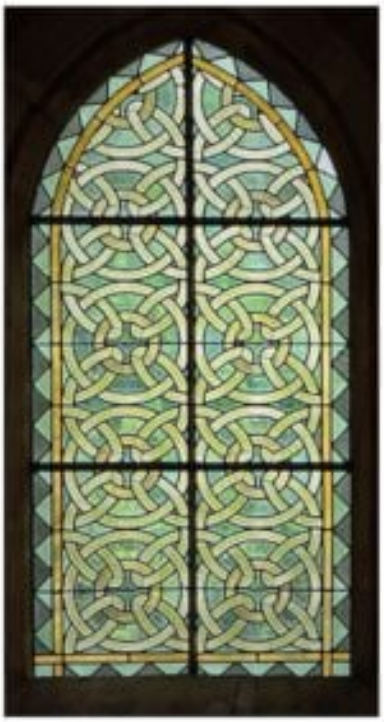


The prohibition of unnecessary decoration was not absolute, and the stone masons often provided simple non-figurative carvings on the capitula of the columns, as shown in the cloister of Sénanque, a sister abbey to Le Thoronet:

Central to the life of the monastery is the cloister (Latin *claustrum*, enclosure), a covered walkway surrounding a quadrangular or trapezoidal central space or "garth," closed and separated from the external world (Brooke, 2003).

Cloisters originated in the 8th Century in Europe when monasteries began to interact with the rest of society and felt the need to separate their monks from the outside world (Horn, 1973). Earlier monasteries, which had been built far from civilization and did not use lay brothers, had covered arcades, but these were not closed off from the world. The following illustration shows the cloister and chapter house at the Abbey of Fontenay in Burgundy.

In northern abbeys the cloister was typically nestled in the southern wall of the east-facing church so as to give the monks the benefit of the sunshine in winter. In some southern abbeys such as Le Thoronet the cloister is to the north so that the monks could find shade in the summer.



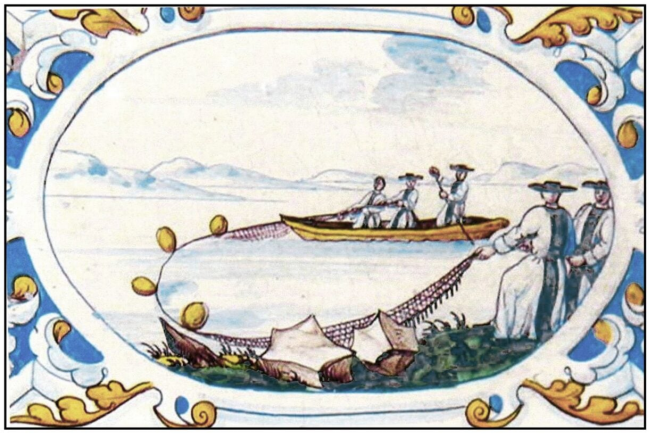
The earliest Cistercian buildings followed the general

precepts of Romanesque architecture, with the exception that decoration was minimized. The ideas of Gothic architecture were worked out in the mid 12th-Century, particularly at the Benedictine Abbey Saint Denis just north of Paris. This style of architecture with its ribbed vaulting, flying buttresses, pointed arches and stained-glass windows soon spread across Europe. The Cistercians accepted many of these changes and some of their abbeys are beautiful examples of the Gothic style (as illustrated by the two views of the ruins of Rievaulx Abbey in Yorkshire shown below: the presbytery from the south, and the flying buttresses on the north side of the presbytery). However, the Cistercians still followed their principles of restraint: the abbey walls remained bare, and the glass windows were geometric and almost monochromatic (as illustrated in the restored window at Fontenay Abbey shown on the right). Designs in shades of light green (*verdaille*) were characteristic of Cistercian windows.

Economy

The Cistercians followed the rule of Saint Benedict which required that all the monks participate in manual labor. The monks divided their time between singing psalms, copy

manuscripts and actual work in the abbey holdings. Their labor is illustrated on the tiles painted by Daniel Meyer in 1733 for a stove in Salem Abbey in southern Germany.




However, the Cistercians soon controlled estates far larger than could be taken care of by monks alone. More than in other monastic orders, Cistercians used lay-brothers to work the land, and over time the monks largely retreated to being managers rather than manual laborers.

In order to manage their extensive agricultural holdings, the Cistercians set up multiple small communities of lay-brothers each centered around a central “grange” or storage barn. The following illustration shows front and side views of the Cistercian Grange de Vaulerent (*val de Laurent*), which was built in 1220 by the monks at the Abbey of Chaalis in Northeastern France. The grange, which is 72 m long and 25 m wide, is still in use. The large square door on the left of the façade was added in the late 18th Century. The tower at the

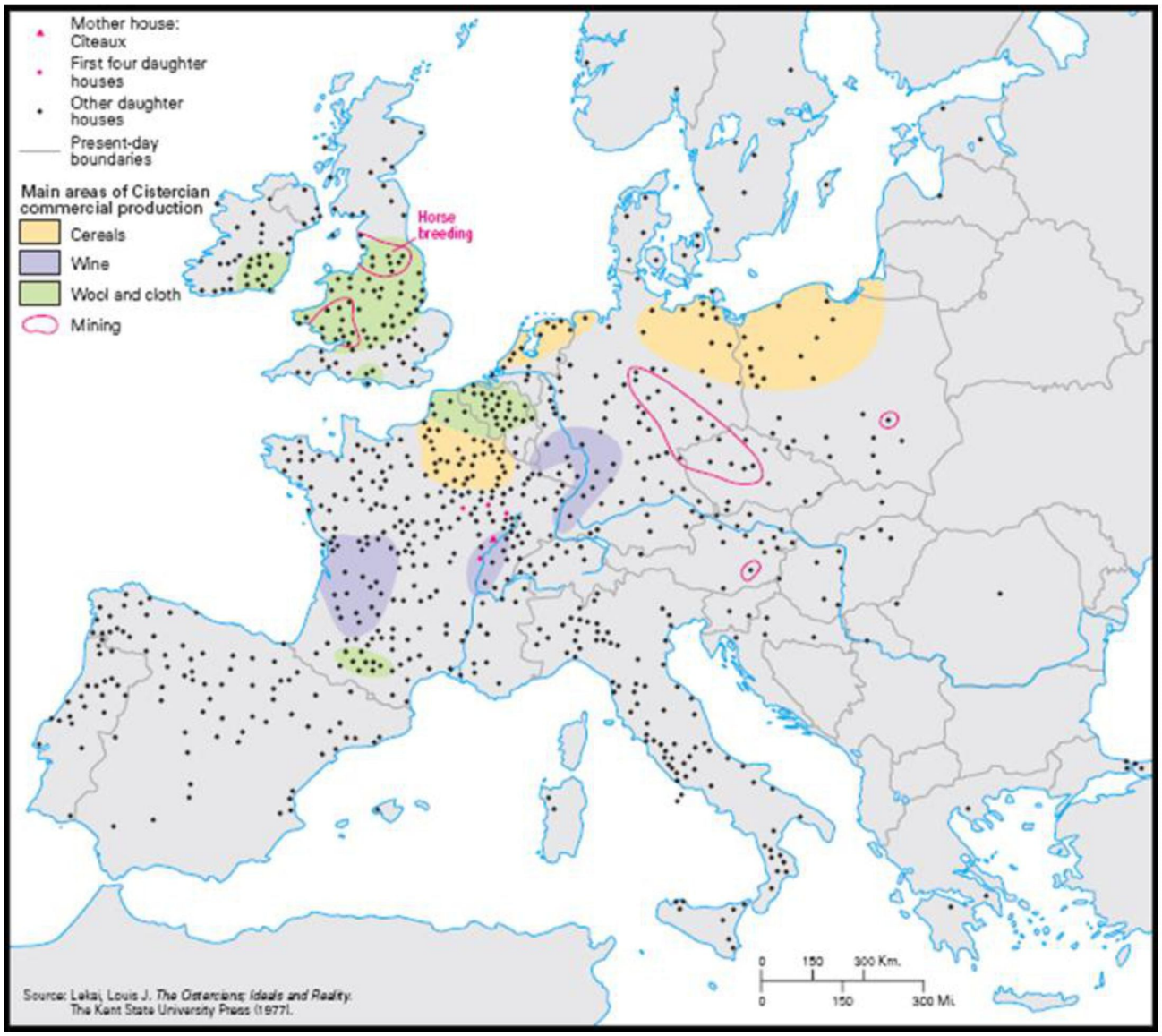
front contained a circular staircase that ascended to the quarters of the lay brother who managed the grange (Tobin,1995, p 41).

The Cistercians took advantage of the developing medieval technology. Their location on rivers and streams allowed the to use water power for milling grain. They also participated in the growing use of windmills. The illustration below from the frieze in the Rievaulx shows a farmer bringing a donkey laden with grain to a post-mill – one that was able to rotate as the wind changed its direction.

Most monks operated their own forges for metalwork. By the time of their dissolution by Henry VIII in the 16th Century, the monks at Rievaulx Abbey in Yorkshire apparently also had a functioning blast-furnace for smelting iron – over two centuries before the Industrial Revolution. (McDonnell, 1999).

The monks created their own kilns. These provided them with tiles for the floor, glass for the windows, and tableware for meals.

The following map (derived from information in Lekai, 1977) shows the Cistercian abbeys at the apogee of their European expansion (around 1500) and indicates the various industries in which the monks were involved. The Cistercians began to participate in the production of wine very early in their history – the Abbey of Cîteaux founded Clos de Vougeot, the largest Grand Cru vineyard on the Côtes de Nuits in 1115. The English abbeys became Medieval Europe's the most important source of wool.



The economy of the Cistercians thus ensured that they were intricately related to the rest of medieval society. Maximilien Sternberg (2013, p 3) points out that their mode of existence was thus paradoxical:

> On one hand, they sought salvation through a radical renunciation of the world. On the other hand, they were engaged in a dense web of relations with the very world they 'renounced'. The white order effectively presented the culmination of this paradox of simultaneous withdrawal from, and engagement with, medieval society.

Bruun and Jamroziak (2013, p 3) also remark on "the tension between withdrawal and engagement, between the wilderness and

the world”

In Retrospect

With the reformation of the early 16th Century the cistercian abbeys began their slow decline. In England, Henry VIII ordered the dissolution of the English monasteries in various directives from 1536 to 1541. His minister Thomas Cromwell had reviewed the abbeys and found them havens of superstition, idleness and undeserved luxury. After the dissolution, some of the English abbeys became parish churches or teaching colleges but most subsided into ruin. In continental europe the decline was for a while less abrupt. Then the French Revolution (1789-1799) ended most of the independent monasteries in France. Saint Bernard’s Abbey of Clairvaux was converted into a high-security prison.

The Cistercian Order persists though its numbers are much less than in the days of its success. At present it has two main divisions: the Cistercians of the Common Observance, and the Cistericans of the Strict Observance. The latter are also known as the Trappists, from their founding Abbey of La Trappe in Northern France.

Why did so many people flock to the Cistercian monasteries during their first three centuries? Monks clearly followed a spiritual calling. But why would a lay-brother join a monastery? Medieval life was hard and the monastic community provided accommodation and fellowship. Stephen Tobin (1995, p 45) suggests

> Employment as a lay brother meant a guarantee of a roof over one’s head, a dry if somewhat uncomfortable bed, and two meals a day. In exchange for such otherwise unattainable security, all that was required of the lay brother was to work probably no harder than would have been necessary on his own or his feudal lord’s land, to attend church services perhaps a little more frequently, which can hardly have been

much of a sacrifice in an age where belief in God was seldom questioned, and to forgo the company of women, which was possibly a little more taxing.

The main reason for the success of the Cistercians, however, was the promise of salvation. Aristocrats donated lands to the order with the tacit agreement that such donations would guarantee a place in heaven. The literate joined as monks because there was no other easy route to both knowledge and salvation. Peasants joined as lay-brothers so that they would be preferred in any judgement after death.

This link between vocation and salvation has been demonstrated in recent Catholic history. The Second Vatican Council in 1962 proposed that contrary to previous teaching, all Christians were called to holiness simply by being baptized and that those who pursued a religious vocation could no longer aspire to a superior state of holiness. This was followed by an immediate and catastrophic decline in the number of individuals taking religious vows (Stark & Fine, 2000, pp 169-190).

Nevertheless, the achievements of the Cistercians were impressive. They fostered new developments in agriculture and industry, developments that would not have happened so rapidly without the size of the Cistercian community. They built abbeys that are often considered the epitomes of spiritual architecture – places of respite from the suffering of the world, and homes where the search for truth could be followed. They established a style of life that some still long for. Many of us might yearn to grow lavender and tend to the honey-bees at a place like the Abbey of Sénanque (below) Almost everyone desires respite from the world – some for a lifetime and some only for brief periods. One hopes that the abbeys be preserved as places for quiet thought, independent of any dogmatic belief.

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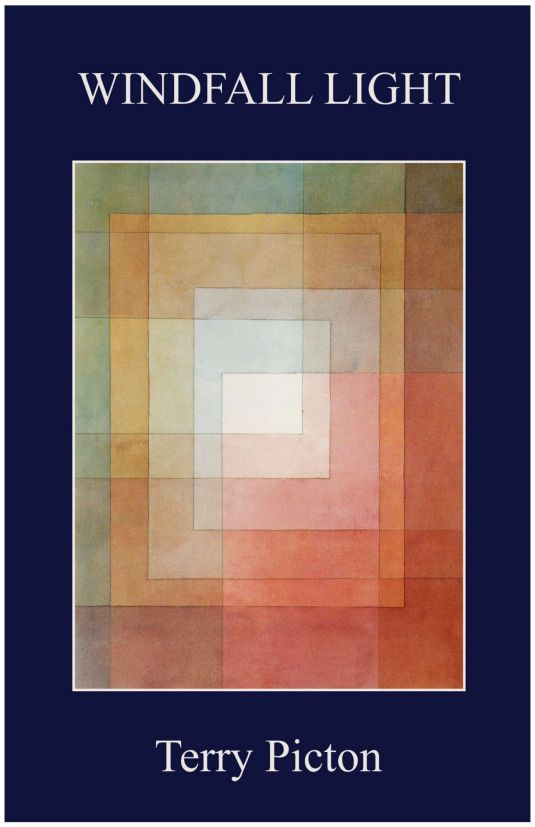
Windfall Light



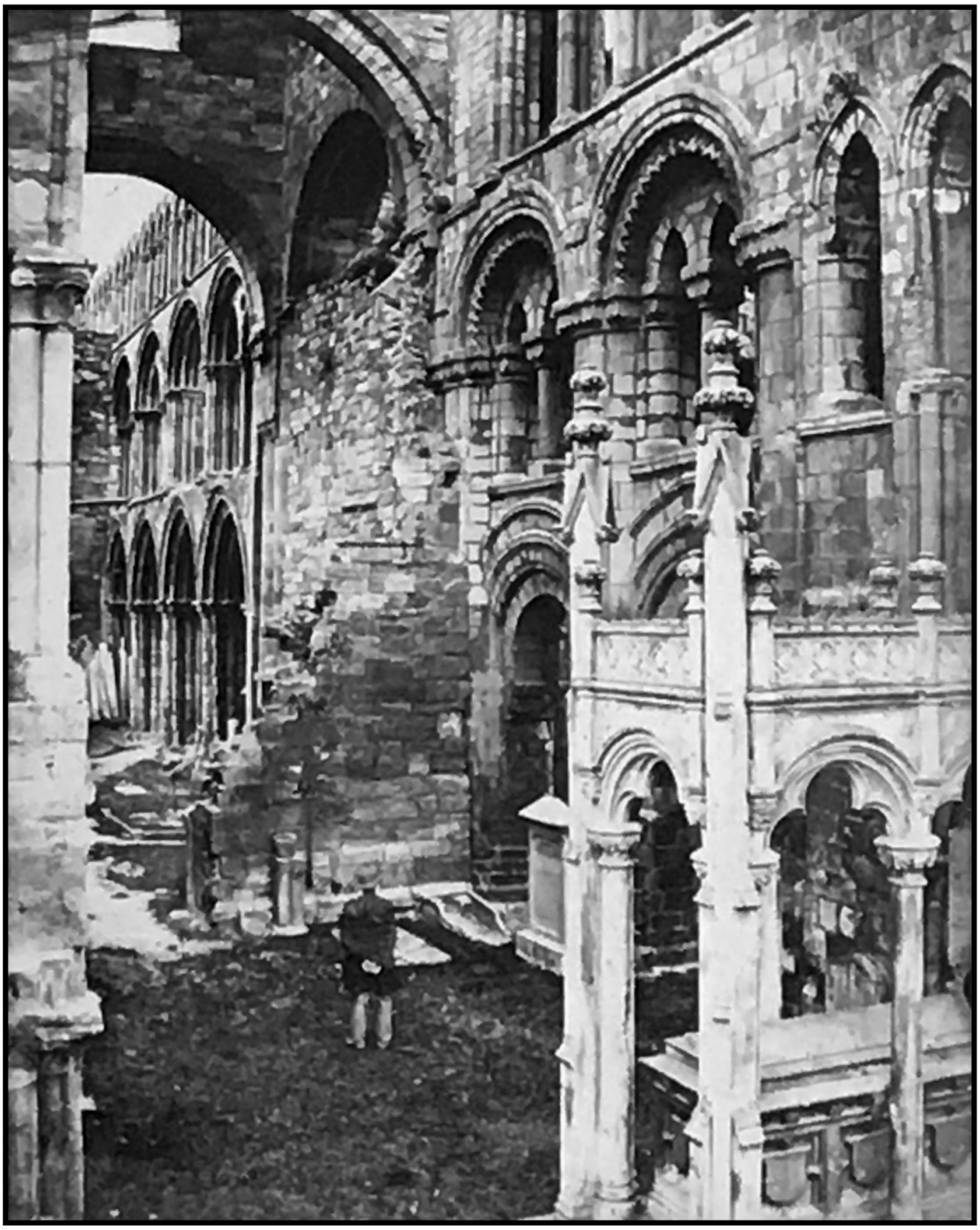
Windfall Light is an old man’s self-indulgence: a small book of poems written over the course of my life. The cover shows a painting by Paul Klee. The title comes from a poem by Dylan Thomas. Most of the poems are formal in style, although the rhymes are as often slant as regular. This post presents three poems from the book.

This poem is about a mother comforting her child

Hush

A mother picks
Up her fussy child
And slowly rocks
From side to side
Gently jogging
Up and down
Thrice each swing
Above the ground
Lightly patting
Baby’s back
With a descant
Melody
That finds a meter
For the why
And resolves the need
To cry.

The following poem is about a photogravure of the ruins of Jedburgh Abbey (below). One can see through the photographer the outline of the grave before which he stands.



Francis Frith at Jedburgh

In the early days of photography,
and ever since, to catch a light that’s low

or change a sparkle into sheen,
the exposure of the film was very slow,
and in this passing time the photographer
could come into the field of view
and wait unmoving for a while, before
covering the lens to start anew.

The walking-in and walking-out were all
too fast to cause a lasting trace
upon the film, but the standing still
would leave upon the record of the place
a clear, faint outline of the person,
through whose quiet transparency
the ruined abbey, in all its undone
truthfulness, we now can see.

The roof is open to the sky, the walls
arrayed in sunlight, a grassy floor
now covers the crumbled tiles,
and through the camera's open door
the old light of graves and broken stone
takes through time a gentle passage
through the fading record of the man
who caught himself within his image.

The following sonnet is about the meeting in Emmaus after the crucifixion between two disciples and someone who they thought was Jesus (*Luke* 24:13-32)

Emmaus

I am not the one who died upon the cross –
You really do not recognize me.
That easy way to remedy your loss
Is just what your sorrow wants to see.

> Look not for miracles to stop your grief –
> Death is not followed by resurrection,
> And mystery is not solved by false belief.
> You heard him clearly say that “It is done.”
> We should simply remember what he taught:
> I fill with wine our glasses to the brim
> And new bread now break for us to eat;
> Blessed be our life, though it be far too short.
> And if you truly would remember him,
> Love each and every one that you will meet.

If you wish to obtain a physical copy of this book, I can send you one for 10 CAD (mainly to cover mailing costs) if you give me your mailing address. Payment can be made through an **Interac e-Transfer** to terry.picton@gmail.com. If **Interac** is not possible, please contact me to suggest some other method of payment. Or if you would like a pdf copy of the book, just send me your email address.

Michelangelo: The Late Pietàs

Toward the end of his life, Michelangelo (1475-1564) attempted to sculpt a marble representation of the *Pietà* – the moment when Christ’s lifeless body is taken from the cross and held by his mother. In this endeavour he was returning to the subject of the sculpture that first brought him fame – the *Rome Pietà* of 1499. The ageing sculptor was unable to complete his task. One of his efforts – the *Florentine Pietà of* – he broke into pieces in 1555. A second attempt – the *Rondanini Pietà* – was still unfinished when he died in 1564. Both

sculptures have an intense emotional power.

The Deposition

The gospels provide only a few details about what happened between the death of Jesus on the cross and his entombment. Joseph of Arimathea requested permission from Pilate to bury the body. After the body was taken from the cross, Nicodemus helped to anoint the body with spices in preparation for burial. The body was then placed in an empty tomb, which was sealed with a great stone before the dawn of the Sabbath.

As the centuries passed, believers filled in what must have happened in those hours. Christian iconography describes four episodes. The body is taken down from the cross: the *Deposition*. Then Mother Mary, the disciples, and various angels weep over the body: the *Lamentation*. After this period of general grief, Mary alone holds her dead son in her arms: the *Pietà*. The body is then anointed and placed in the Tomb: the *Entombment.*

The following is a description of the Deposition from an anonymous 14th-Century *Meditations on the Life of Christ,* popular in Italy in Michelangelo's time:

> Two ladders are placed on opposite sides of the cross. Joseph ascends the ladder placed on the right side and tries to extract the nail from His hand. But this is difficult, because the long, heavy nail is fixed firmly into the wood; and it does not seem possible to do it without great pressure on the hand of the Lord. Yet it is not brutal, because he acts faithfully; and the Lord accepts everything. The nail pulled out. John makes a sign to Joseph to extend the said nail to him, that the Lady might not see it. Afterwards Nicodemus extracts the other nail from the left hand and similarly gives it to John. Nicodemus descends and comes to the nail in the feet. Joseph supported the body of the Lord: happy indeed is this Joseph, who deserves thus to

> embrace the body of the Lord! Then the Lady reverently receives the hanging right hand and places it against her cheek, gazes upon it and kisses it with heavy tears and sorrowful sighs. The nail in the feet pulled out, Joseph descends part way, and all receive the body of the Lord and place it on the ground. The Lady supports the head and shoulders in her lap, the Magdalen the feet at which she had formerly found so much grace. (translation Ragusa & Green, 1961).

In the 1520s (or perhaps later), Michelangelo made a drawing of *The Deposition* that is now in the Teyler Museum in Haarlem (Nagel, 1995). A small gesso relief now in the Victoria and Albert Museum was likely derived from the drawing by one of Michelangelo's students or apprentices (Chapman, 2005):

The Florentine Pietà

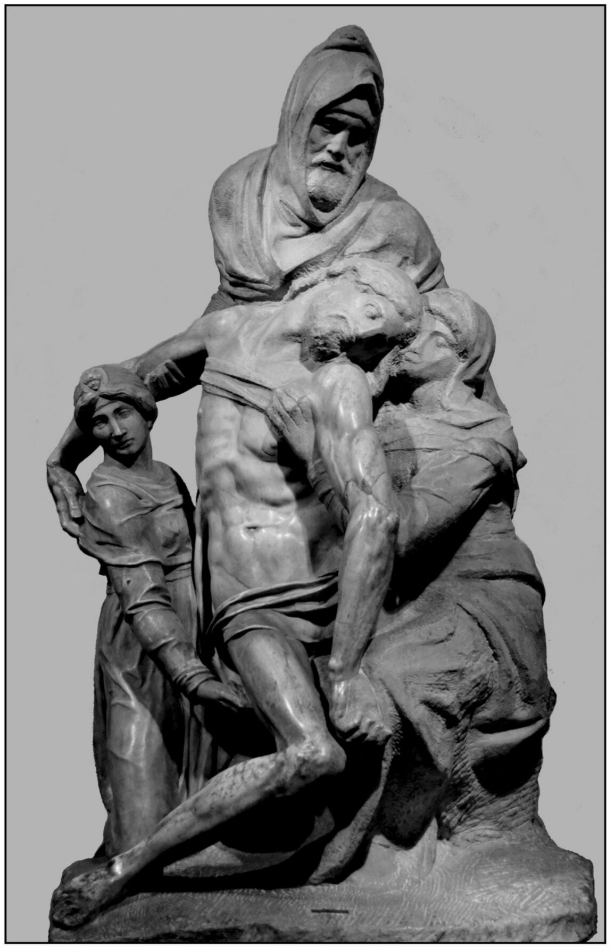
After completing *The Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel in

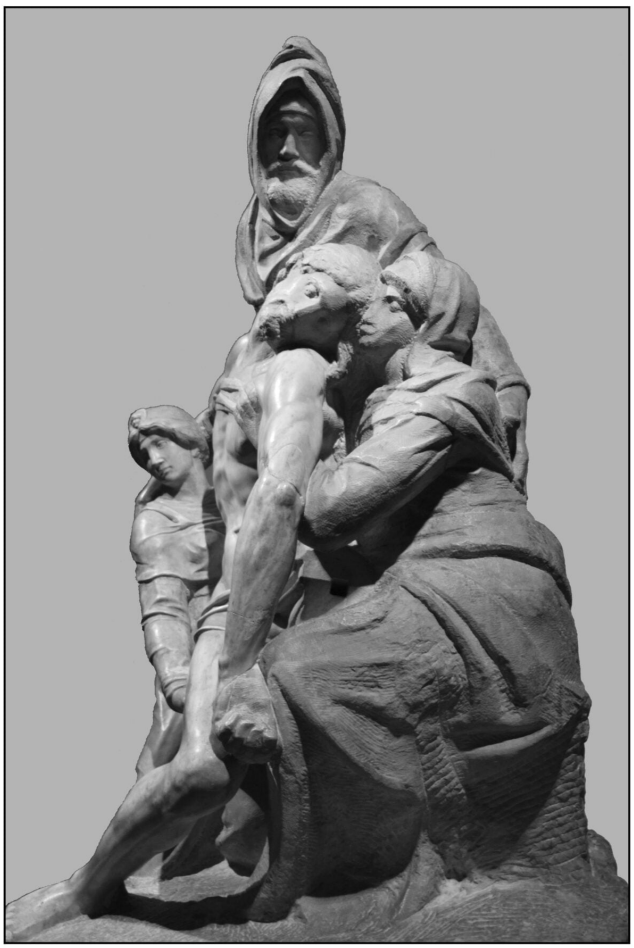
1541, and the frescos of *The Crucifixion of Peter* and *The Conversion of Paul* in the Pauline Chapel in 1549, Michelangelo wished to return to sculpture, and he soon began work on what later became known as *The Florentine Pietà.* At this time Michelangelo was 75 years old. Sculpting was demanding work even for a young man. Nevertheless, he had become fascinated by the Greek statue of *Laocoön and his Sons* that had been unearthed in Rome in 1506. This work, likely sculpted in the 1st-Century CE, portrayed three interacting figures. Michelangelo wished to see whether he could carve four interacting figures in the round, and whether he could surpass the ancients by using only one block of marble for this. According to Vasari (1568/1965):

> The spirit and genius of Michelangelo could not remain idle; and so, since he was unable to paint, he set to work on a piece of marble, intending to carve four figures in the round and larger than life-size (including a dead Christ) to amuse and occupy himself and also, as he used to say himself, because using the hammer kept his body healthy. This Christ, taken down from the cross, is supported by Our Lady, by Nicodemus (planted firmly on his feet as he bends down and assists and by one of the Marys who also gives her help on perceiving the failing strength of his mother, whose grief makes the burden intolerable. Nowhere else can one see a dead form compare with this figure of Christ; he is shown sinking down with his limbs hanging limp and he lies in an attitude altogether different not only from that of any other of Michelangelo's figures but from that of any other figure ever made. This work, the fruit of intense labour, was a rare achievement a single stone and truly inspired; but, as will be told later on, it remained unfinished and suffered many misfortunes, although Michelangelo had intended it to go at the foot of the altar where he hoped to place his own tomb.

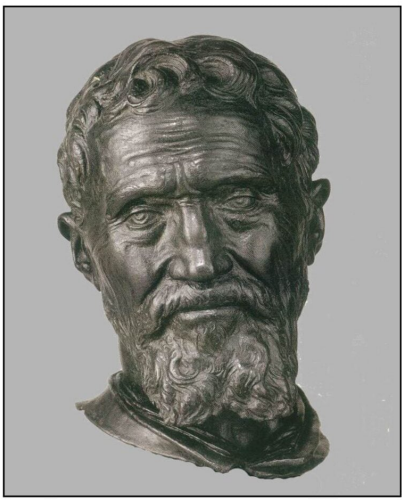
The illustration below shows the sculpture as viewed from the

front and from the right. It probably represents the lowering of Christ's body from the cross: a *Deposition* rather than a true *Pietà* (Fehl, 2002). However, as Finn and Hartt (1975) point out, the Italian word *pietà,* with its double meaning of "pity" and "piety," accurately conveys the emotional power of the work.





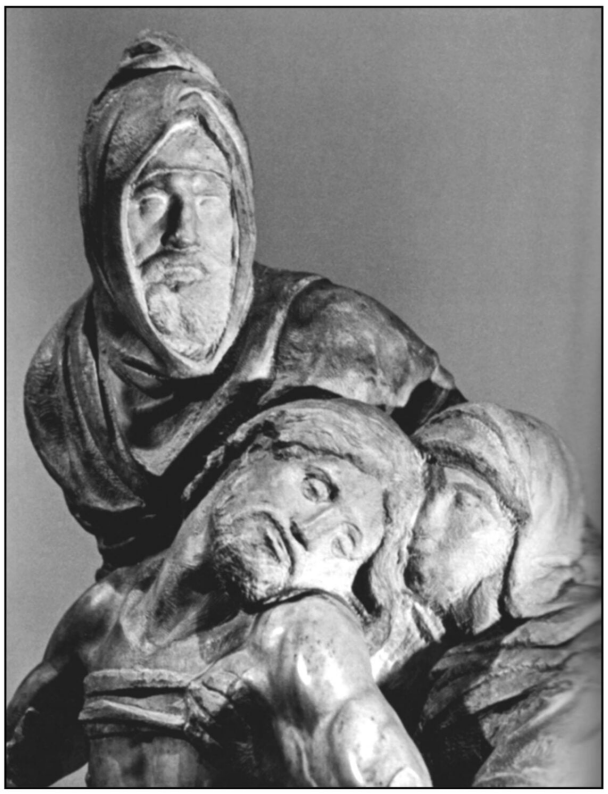
Christ's lifeless body is gently lowered from the cross by Nicodemus. Tuscan legends describe Nicodemus as the sculptor who had originally carved the *Volto Santo* (Sacred Face) in the Cathedral of Lucca, bought there from the Holy Land in the 8th Century CE. Vasari pointed out that the face of Nicodemus in Michelangelo's sculpture was a self-portrait. The following illustration compares it to a 1545 portrait of Michelangelo, and to a 1560 bust, both by Daniele de Volterra:


Michelangelo worked on the sculpture for several years, but could not make it conform to what he envisioned. The first problem was with Christ's right leg, which was meant to rest on the lap of the Virgin Mary. The leg did not sit right. Exasperated, he broke the leg off. A later wax model of the sculpture (below, right) shows where the leg would have been. Other problems with the sculpture were that the face of the Virgin Mary was too close to the edge of the marble block to finish properly, and that the figure of Mary Magdalen had to be made smaller than desired. Finally, in 1555, a frustrated Michelangelo broke off the both arms of Christ and the left arm of Mother Mary. The pieces (except for Christ's leg which has never been found) are shown in the illustration below (left) from a virtual model of the sculpture (Bernardini et al., 2002; Wasserman et al., 2003):

Michelangelo gave the damaged sculpture to his servant Urbino, who sold the pieces to the banker Francesco Bandini. Bandini arranged for Tiberio Calcagni to put the sculpture back together as best he could. Calcagni finished the face of the Magdalen, but not the other figures, which remain as Michelangelo left them. The Florentine Pietà is currently in the Museum of the Cathedral of Florence.

Although maimed, the sculpture still has a tremendous emotional power. This resides mainly in the beautifully sculpted body of the Christ, and in the interaction between the heads of Nicodemus, Christ and the Virgin Mary (the latter from Garoglio et al, 2018):



The Rondini Pietà

A little while after giving away his failed Pietà, Michelangelo started to create another sculpture on the same theme. Some preparatory sketches, now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, are illustrated on the right (Murray, 1980). Michelangelo restricted the new sculpture to just two figures: the Virgin Mary and Christ. The two figures seem to be

floating upward toward heaven rather than grounded in the world. The arrangement not realistic: Mary could not support the lifeless body of her son in this manner. The sculpture seems rather to represent the yearning for union between mother and son, a lifelong concern of Michelangelo, who had lost his mother when he was 6 years old.

Initially, the head and torso of Christ would likely have been similar to that of *The Florentine Pietà*, as suggested by Veres (2019) in the illustration on the right. Michelangelo may have thought the body of Christ too heavy, or perhaps the marble was flawed. Whatever the reason, he erased much of the original body and separated it from its beautifully carved right arm. The head of Christ was removed and recarved in the shoulder of the Virgin.

Irving Stone (1961) imagines:

> He rose, picked up his heaviest hammer and chisel and removed the head of Christ, carving a new face and head from what had been the Virgin's shoulder. He then dissected Christ's right arm from the body, just above the elbow, though the detached arm and hand remained as part of the supporting marble that went down to the base. What had previously been the left shoulder and part of the chest of

> Christ he converted into the left arm and hand of the Virgin. Christ’s magnificent long legs were now out of proportion, constituting three fifths of the entire body. The new attenuation created an emotional effect of limpidity, youth and grace. Now he began to be satisfied. Through the distortion of the elongated figure he felt that he had achieved a truth about man: the heart might tire but humanity, carried on its ever-young legs, would continue t move across the face of the earth.

Michelangelo kept the isolated arm, probably as a model for recarving the arm more posteriorly. Two parallel arms can be seen when viewing the sculpture from the left. Michelangelo worked on the sculpture right up to his death, but it remained unfinished:

Barricelli (1993) describes the final form of the sculpture:

> Two disquieting figures, not without fear, groping their way out of stone, suggesting in Christ's upright yet falling pose that death is not a final solution; his feet set outward, in no way sustaining his legs which pull with them a body that clings to the rock as to its sole security. He can neither stand nor fall, breathe nor expire; he shrinks away from his previous vital arm and shows legs that do not seem to belong to his chest, and above these limbs he presents a distorted, unformed face. Here anguish makes no sound, and, except for her eyes, Mary is mute. Her eyes, though, relate a long and painful story; her arm and hand are not poised in an act of giving.

After Michelangelo's death, his final Pietà somehow wound up in the Palazzo Rondanini in Rome, and has since then been known as *The Rondanini Pietà.* It is presently housed in the Sforza Castle in Milan.

The Poetry

At the height of his fame, Michelangelo believed that he could accurately depict the human body in marble. Time might later distort the representation, but, even then, one would still be able to see what he had perceived. The following is an unfinished sonnet from 1545:

> Molto diletta al gusto intero e sano
> l'opra della prim'arte, che n'assembra
> i volti e gli atti, e con più vive membra,
> di cera o terra o pietra un corp' umano.
>
> Se po' 'l tempo ingiurioso, aspro e villano5
> la rompe o storce o del tutto dismembra,
> la beltà che prim'era si rimembra,
> e serba a miglior loco il piacer vano.

> To one whose taste is healthy and unspoiled, the work of the first art brings great delight: in wax or clay or stone it makes a likeness for us of the face, the gestures, the whole

human body, and indeed gives greater life to the body's members.

If destructive, harsh and boorish time then breaks, distorts or dismembers such a work, the beauty which first existed is remembered, and keeps for a better place the pleasure that here proved vain. (# 237, translation, Ryan, 1996)

A few years later, Michelangelo became more aware of his limitations. No longer was he able to represent in marble what he had envisioned. The following is one of his last poems:

Giunto è già 'l corso della vita mia
Con tempestoso mar per fragil barca
Al comun porto, ov' a render si varca
Giusta ragion d'ogni opra trista e pia:

Onde l'affettuosa fantasia,
Che l'arte si fece idolo e monarca,
Conosco ben quant' era d'error carca;
Ch' errore è ciò che l'uom quaggiù desia.

I pensier miei, già de' mie' danni lieti,
Che fian or, s' a due morti m'avvicino?
L'una m' è certa, e l'altra mi minaccia;

Nè pinger nè scolpir fia più che queti
L'anima volta a quell' amor divino,
Ch' aperse a prender noi in croce le braccia.

My life's journey has finally arrived, after a stormy sea, in a fragile boat, at the common port, through which all must pass to render an account and explanation of their every act, evil and devout.

So I now fully recognize how my fond imagination which made art for me an idol and a tyrant was laden with error, as is that which all men desire to their own harm.

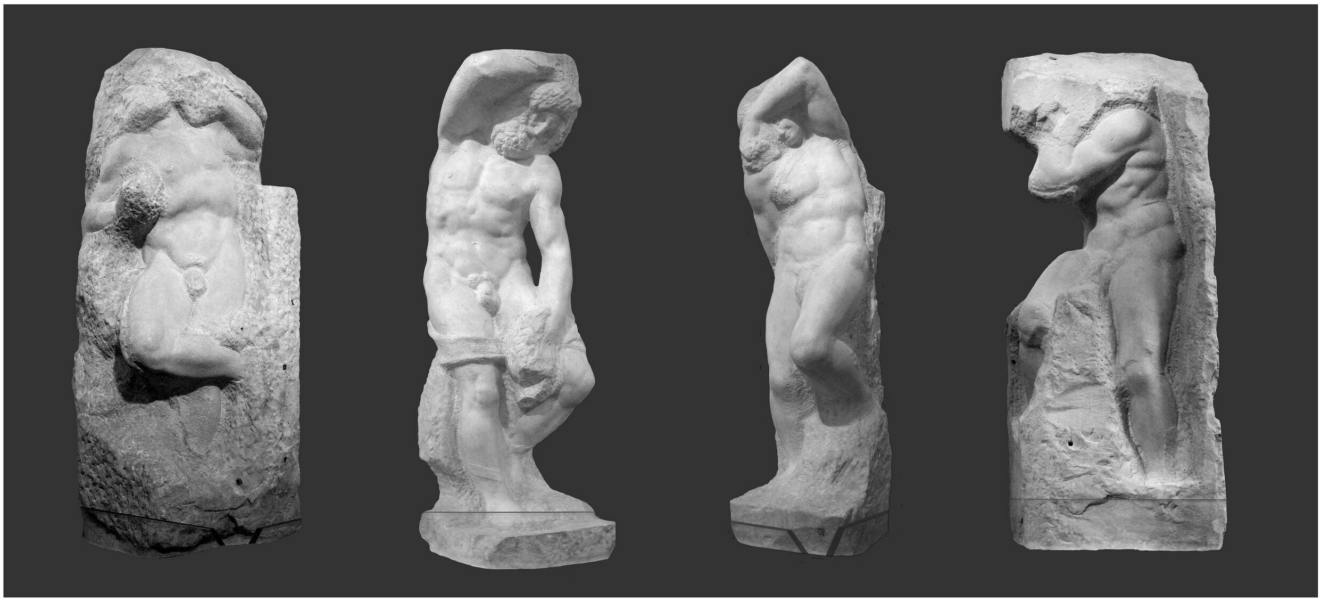
What will now become of my former thoughts of love, empty

> yet happy, if I am now approaching a double death? Of one I am quite certain, and the other threatens me.
>
> Neither painting nor sculpting can any longer quieten my soul, turned now to that divine love which on the cross, to embrace us, opened wide its arms. (# 285, translation, Ryan, 1996)

(The "double death" is of the body and of the soul. The body must grow old and die; the soul is destined for annihilation without the grace of God.)

Non Finito

During his lifetime, Michelangelo left several works in an unfinished (*non finito*) state: most importantly, the four *Slaves/Prisoners* originally sculpted for the tomb of Pope Julius II, and currently in the Accademia Museum in Florence. Many have suggested that Michelangelo deliberately left these incomplete to represent the "eternal struggle of human beings to free themselves from their material trappings" (Accademia website).



However, Michelangelo certainly did not choose to leave his two last *Pietàs* unfinished. He deliberately broke the

Florentine Pietà into pieces. He was still working on the Rondanini Pietà a few days before he died (Bull, 1995). Nevertheless, to the modern eye the defects of these last *Pietàs* add to their beauty. The viewer imagines what the artist sought to portray, but because of physical limitations or the passage of time, was unable to complete.

One of Michelangelo's early sonnets considers the role of the sculptor in releasing an ideal form from unformed matter. He realizes that this activity is directed by some force greater than the artist, who is only a transient intermediary in the process of creation:

> Se 'l mie rozzo martello i duri sassi
> forma d'uman aspetto or questo or quello,
> dal ministro che 'l guida, iscorge e tiello,
> prendendo il moto, va con gli altrui passi.
>
> Ma quel divin che in cielo alberga e stassi,5
> altri, e sé più, col propio andar fa bello;
> e se nessun martel senza martello
> si può far, da quel vivo ogni altro fassi.
>
> E perché 'l colpo è di valor più pieno
> quant'alza più se stesso alla fucina,10
> sopra 'l mie questo al ciel n'è gito a volo.
>
> Onde a me non finito verrà meno,
> s'or non gli dà la fabbrica divina
> aiuto a farlo, c'al mondo era solo.

> If my rough hammer, in shaping the hard stones into the form of this or that human appearance, derives its motion from the master who guides, directs and sustains it, then it moves as another would have it do.
>
> But that divine hammer, which lodges and abides in heaven, with its own movement makes others beautiful, and all the more itself; and if no hammer can be made without a hammer,

> then every other hammer is made from that living one.
>
> And since every blow is of greater strength the higher the hammer is raised at the forge, this one has flown to heaven above mine.
>
> So mine will remain unfinished for me, if the divine smith will not now give help to make it to him who was on earth my only help. (# 46, translation, Ryan, 1996)

Hibbard (1978) considered the unfinished *Rondanini Pietà* as an indication of Michelangelo's failing abilities:

> But this final statue is the result of old-age debility, and although it is strangely moving, its interest is chiefly autobiographical. Unlike Michelangelo's other unfinished works, this is hardly a potential work of art. It is a record of the old man's solitary need to express something more in stone, his beloved enemy. … The Gothic, formless, anti-physicality of this wreck is unbearably pathetic.

Wallace (2009) presents a far more romantic notion of Michelangelo's last unfinished work:

> Michelangelo has carved a miracle, transforming stone first into flesh and then into spirit. Sculpture, the most physical of the arts, is made to express the ineffable.

Barricelli (1993) suggests that *The Rondanini Pietà* could never have been completed. It depicts the human need to transcend mortality. And we can never know whether or how such a need will be fulfilled.

In *The Florentine Pietà* the sculptor himself supports the mother and son. In the final *Rondanini Pietà,* the artist is no longer necessary. The sculpture has become a *Resurrection* rather than a *Deposition.* Mary and Jesus rise heavenward by the grace of God. And even if we might now believe in neither God nor Christ, the sculpture still conveys to us the need for

human transcendence.

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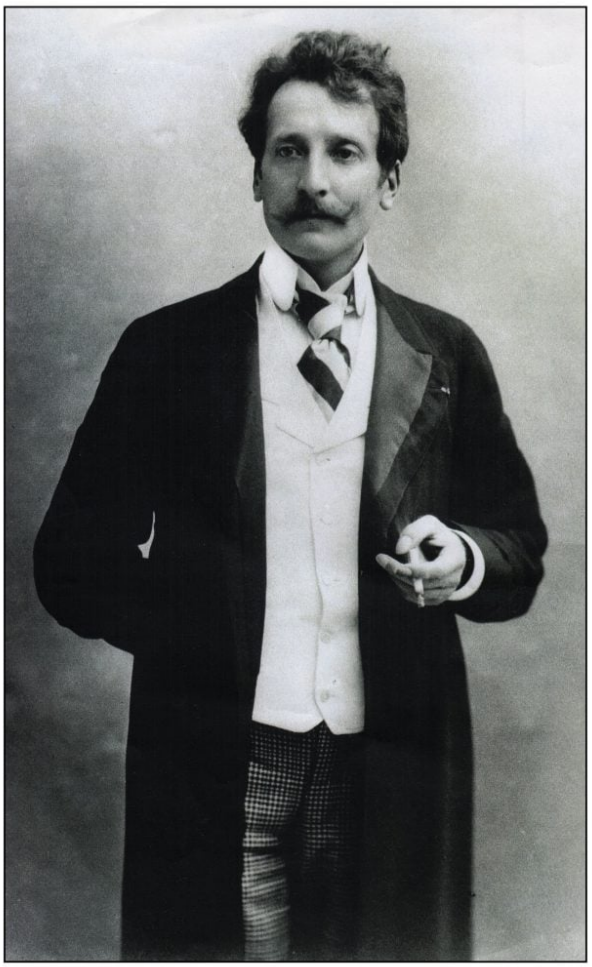
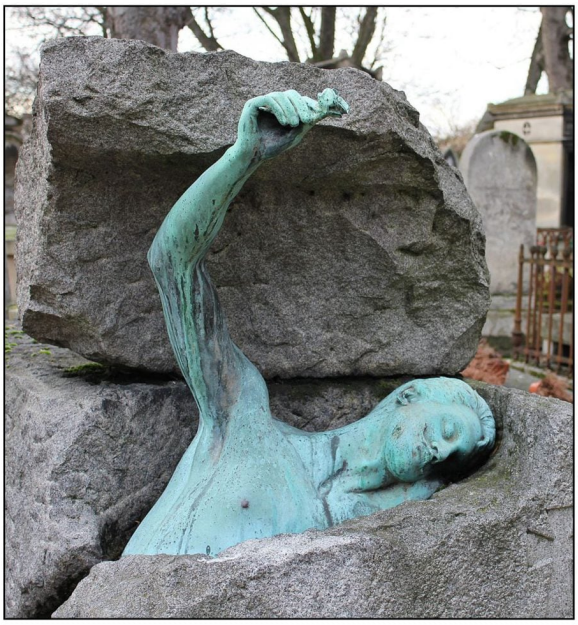
Bruges-la-Morte

In 1892 Georges Rodenbach published a short novel entitled *Bruges-la-Morte* ("Bruges, Dead City"). Although the book deals more with internal emotions than external reality, Rodenbach included in his book 35 photographs of the city of Bruges (Flemish, *Brugge*). The city thus plays as much a part in the novel as its human characters. This was the first time that a work of fiction had been photographically illustrated.

The Author



Georges Raymond Constantin Rodenbach (1855–1898) was born in Tournai, Belgium. His French mother and German father soon moved to Gand (Flemish *Gand,* English *Ghent*) in the Flemish northern region of Belgium, not far from Bruges. Rodenbach studied law at the University of Ghent and practiced briefly before turning to poetry and journalism. He moved to Paris in 1888, where he married a fellow journalist, wrote for the *Figaro* and served as a correspondent for the *Journal de Bruxelles*, He became friends with the symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, and participated in the literary salons of the day, where he met Edmond de Goncort, Auguste Rodin, the young Marcel Proust, and Odilon Redon. As the 1894 photograph by Nadar shows, Rodenbach became quite the dandy. Bruges-la-Morte was initially serialized in the *Figaro* and then published in book form by Flammarion.



Rodenbach died in 1898 from the complications of an appendicitis. He was buried in Père-Lachaise cemetery. His monument by sculptor Charlotte Dubray (1902) is outrageously romantic. A bronze likeness of the dead poet emerges from the shattered grave holding aloft a rose. Beauty triumphs over death! Joël Goffin suggests that the tomb alludes to various occult and gnostic ideas promoted by the *Salon de la Croix+Rose* (1892-1897) established by Joséphin Péladan.

The City

Bruges was a major city in the medieval County of Flanders in the northern coastal plain of what is now Belgium. Connected to the North Sea by the estuary of the River Zwin, Bruges became an important trading center, closely associated with England through the wool trade, and with Scandinavia and the Baltics through the Hanseatic League, which maintained a major office (*Kontor*) in the city.

The city promoted religion as well as trade. The Church of Our Lady has one of the tallest spires in Europe. The Basilica of the Holy Blood enshrines a relic of Christ’s blood brought back from the Holy Land after the Second Crusade. The city was home to one of the larger Béguinages, communities of lay religious women. Some say that these housed women of the middle and upper classes whose fathers or husbands had died in the crusades.

Religion and trade both fostered art. Two great Flemish

painters of 15th Century, Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling, lived in Bruges. Within the Church of Our Lady is a sculpture of *The Virgin and Child* by Michelangelo, bought in 1504 by two wealthy merchants from Bruges.

Flanders changed hands several times during its golden age from the 12th to 15th centuries. At various times allegiance was paid to France, Burgundy, the Holy Roman Empire, and Spain.

However, by the 16th century, the River Zwin had become too silted to allow the passage of merchant ships. Wars of religion and succession devastated the countryside and the city lapsed into obscurity.

In the late 19th century Bruges returned into the public eye as a center for tourism. Most of its medieval buildings remained intact. Most striking is the medieval bell tower on the main square with its carillon. The atmosphere of past glories evoked by the canals and cobblestones fit well to the melancholy sensitivity of the fin-de-siècle.

Bruges remains to this day a beautiful city. The following photograph (Emmanuel Parent, 2013, Flickr, cropped) shows the Spiegelrei canal looking toward the Jan van Eyck square and the Burghers' Lodge (*Poorterloge*)

The Book

A brief summary of the plot of *Bruges-la-Morte* follows, with occasional quotations (from the Mosley translation) to illustrate the book's poetic style.

Five years after the death of his beautiful young wife in Paris, Hugues Viane remains in mourning. He has moved to the city of Bruges, whose quiet melancholy suits his persisting sadness. He tries to remember all he can about his wife. He does little else. Every day he walks around the city:

> In the mute atmosphere of the lifeless waters and streets Hugues felt his heartache less, and he could think more calmly about his wife. In the line of the canals, he was better able to see and hear her again, to discover her

> Ophelia face floating along, to listen to her voice in the high-pitched song of the carillon. (p. 18)

In a special room in his house Hugues keeps mementos of his wife: several portraits, furniture on which she had sat, cushions that she had embroidered, curtains that she had hung. The most treasured of these objects is a plait of her golden hair, displayed in a crystal case.

On one of his walks, Hugues sees a young woman who looks exactly like his dead wife. Entranced he follows her until she enters the theater. She turns out to be Jane Scott, a dancer in the opera *Robert le Diable* (Meyerbeer, 1831). She plays the spirit of the abbess Helena who comes back to life in the graveyard of the cloister along with her nuns. Tools of the devil, they convince Robert to steal the sacred branch from the tomb of Saint Rosalie. This will give him magical but unholy powers.

Hugues meets Jane, and she soon becomes his mistress. Hugues installs her in a pleasant house on the outskirts of Bruges. The people of Bruges and Hugues' housekeeper are scandalized by this affair. However, Hugues cares not. His sadness lessens. His memories have become a person.

> When he took her head in his hands and brought it close to him it was to look into her eyes, searching them for something he had seen in others: a nuance, a reflection, pearls, even some flowers with roots in the soul. (p. 42)

After a while Jane tires of her sad and serious lover. She takes up with her old friends, though she keeps Hugues as her lover and financial support. One day she decides that she should visit his house, to assess his fortune and see what jewelry she might acquire. She cajoles him with

> that tempting voice possessed by all women at certain times, a crystal voice that sings, swells into haloes, in eddies where men surrender, whirl around and let themselves go. (p.

88)

She visits Hugues on the day of the Procession of the Holy Blood through the streets of Bruges. Hugues is enthralled by the color and the music. Jane is bored, and jests about the mementos of Hugues' wife. She pulls the golden braid out of the crystal case and plays with it, winding it around her neck like a scarf. Hugues tries to retrieve it. Jane resists. Hugues becomes incensed. He pulls the braid taut and strangles her.

> She was dead – for having failed to guess the Mystery and that one thing there was not to be touched on pain of sacrilege. She had laid a hand on the revengeful hair, that hair which, as emblem for those who soul is pure and in communion with the Mystery – implied that the minute it was profaned, it would itself become the *instrument of death.* (p. 101)

The procession returns. The bells ring.

> Hugues repeated incessantly, "*Morte… morte… Bruges-la-Morte*," with a mechanical look, in a slack voice, trying to match "*Morte… morte… Bruges-la-Morte*," to the cadence of the last bells: slow, small, exhausted old women who seemed languishingly – is it over the city, is it over a tomb? – to be shedding petals of flowers of iron. (p. 102)

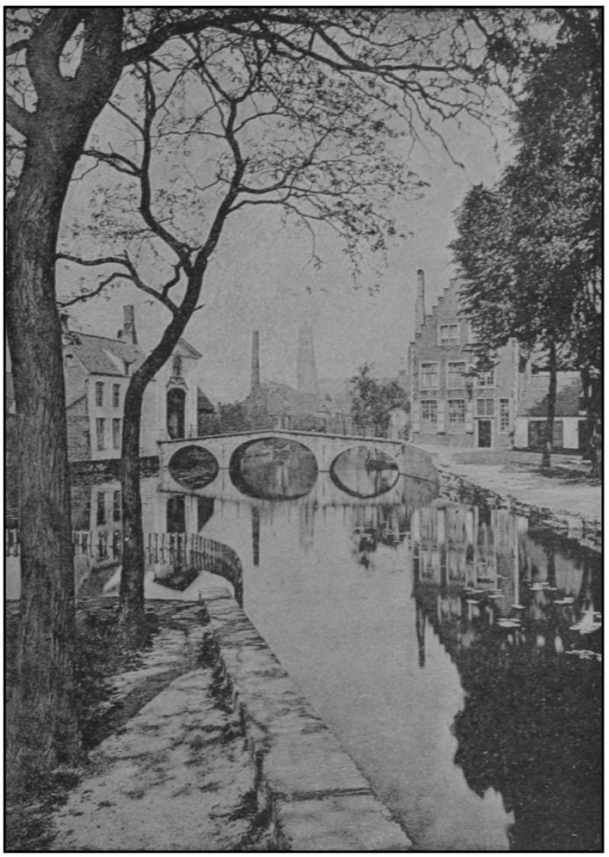
The Photographs

Rodenbach considered the photographs an essential part of his book. In his foreward he states that Bruges acts as a "main character, a city associated with states of mind, one that is able to advise, dissuade, induce action." Since Bruges was not simply a back-drop but a force in the action, Rodenbach thought is essential to have the city "reproduced visually within the text: the quays, deserted streets, old residences,

canals, Béguinage, churches, belfries, cult objects."

The illustrations for *Bruges-la-Morte* were chosen from the catalogue of Lévy and Neurdein, who specialized in touristic photographs used for postcards, souvenirs and stereographs. Most of the chosen images contain no people.

The photographs are loosely associated with events occurring in the text. They show the reader with what Hugues might be seeing while the text describes what he is feeling. For Hugues, Bruges had become the incarnation of his lost love. Like his wife Bruges was once but is no more alive and beautiful.

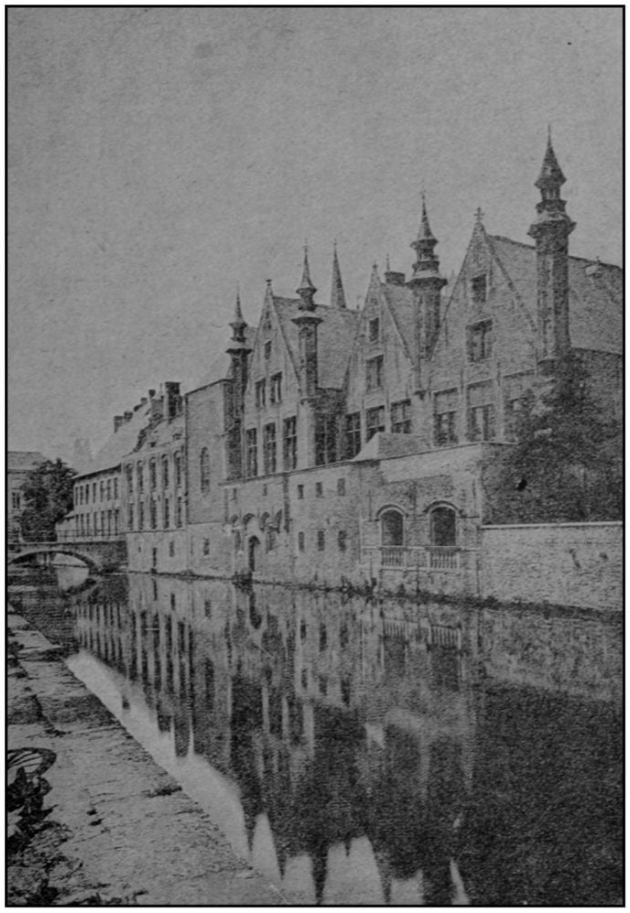


> But as evening fell, he liked to wander about, looking for resemblances of his sorrow in the lonely canals and the religious quarters of the city. (p. 18)

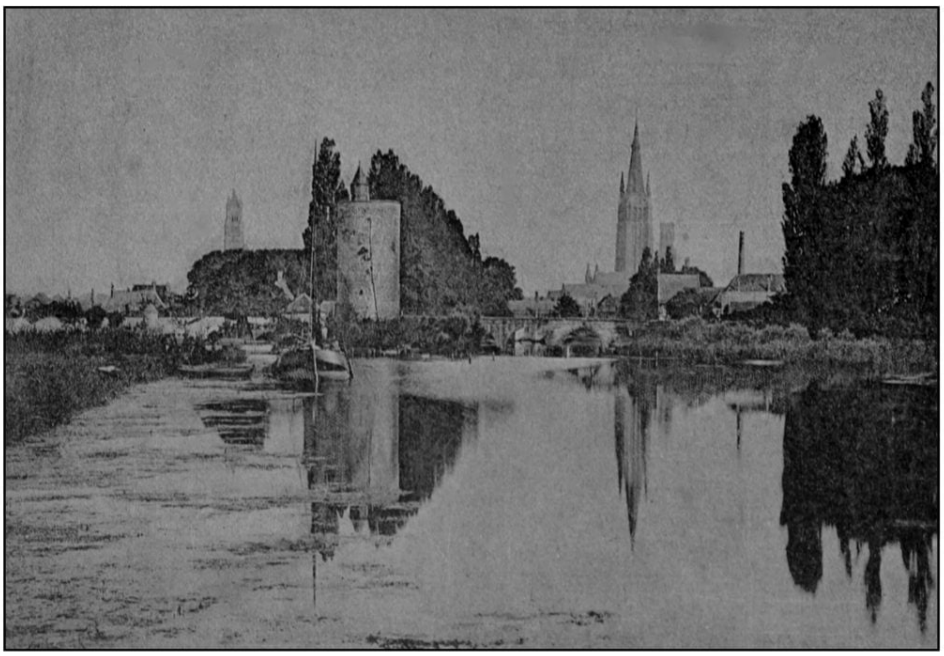
On the right is the illustration that faces the page containing this quotation. It shows the canals and the bridge leading to the entrance to the Béguinage.

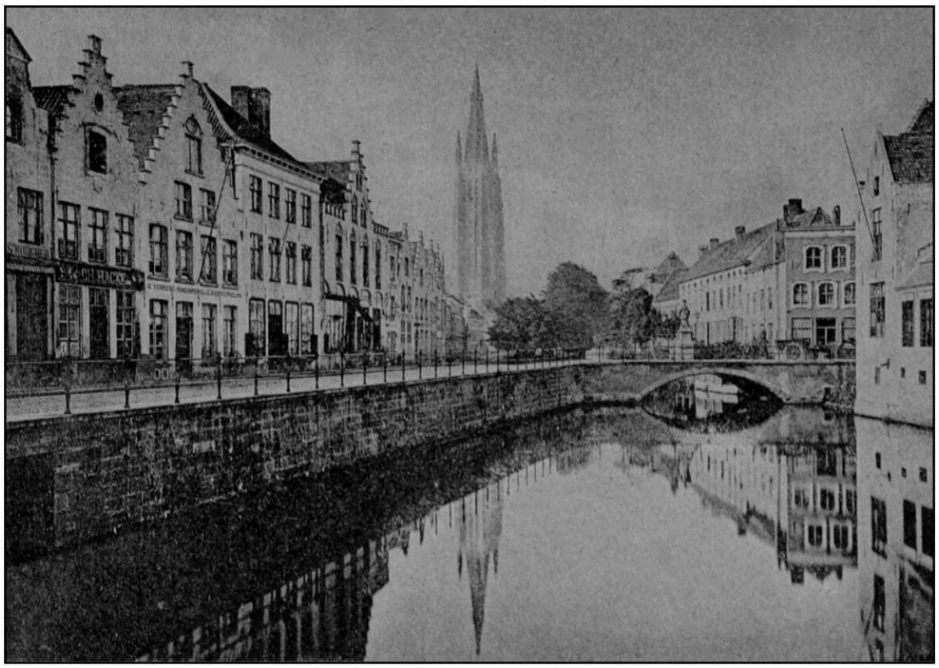
The new art of photography was a way of fixing forever the essence of a person or a place – a way of stopping time. One of the main themes of the novel is that time can neither be stopped nor reversed. The dead do not return. *Bruges-la-Morte* is a novel about memory and representation. Does Jane

represent Hugue’s lost wife or is she simply a resemblance? Photography is intimately related to memory. Old photographs are an aid to remembering the when and where of our past. Sometimes the photographs become our memories.



The canals in Bruges are a boon to the photographer. They allow the real and the reflected to be captured simultaneously. The images suggest another world in the reflection beneath the real.





The use of photographs in novels did not catch on. Readers thought that it was the writer's responsibility to describe in words where things occurred as well as what was thought. Rodenbach himself noted in a later discussion about the concept of an illustrated novel that "even a mildly astute reader would always prefer to imagine the characters, since a book is only a point of departure, an excuse and a canvas for dreams." (Dossier in Flammarion edition of *Bruges-la-Morte*, 1998, pp. 331-332). However, I believe he is more concerned in this comment with illustrations that depict the events and

characters in a novel rather than just its setting.

Recently, W. G. Sebald has used photographs in his books *Vertigo* (1990), *The Emigrants* (1992), *The Rings of Saturn* (1999) and *Austerlitz* (2001). Like *Bruges-la-Morte* these writings deal mainly with states of mind. The low-resolution photographs provide a setting for the emotions.

Fernand Khnopff

Flammarion engaged the Belgian symbolist painter Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921) to provide an illustration for the frontispiece of *Bruges-la-Morte*. Khnopff had spent his early childhood in Bruges. His etching shows Hugues' dead wife lying upon the waters of Bruges before the bridge leading to the Béguinage.

Her pose recalls the 1852 painting of Ophelia by John Everett Millais. This fits with the text

> In the line of the canals, he was better able to see and hear her again, to discover her Ophelia face floating along, to listen to her voice in the high-pitched song of the

carillon. (p. 18)

Secret-Reflet (“Secret Reflection”), one of Khnopff’s later works (1902), is in the Groeningemuseum in Bruges. It combines two images. The upper circular picture shows Khnopff’s sister and muse Marguerite touching a mask of Hermes, the messenger of the gods. The lower shows a pastel drawing of the houses of Bruges reflected in the canals. This is similar to the illustrations in *Bruges-la-Morte*. The painting alludes to a secret life beyond or beneath our transient reality. The symbolists were fond of the tradition of hermeticism, deriving from the writings of the mythical Hermes Trismegistus. These brought together various strands of mysticism and Gnosticism to suggest the idea of a secret world, of which only the esthetically sensitive were aware.

Meanings

Bruges-la-Morte can be read as a simple story of how a young dancer was murdered by her lover. As such it vividly depicts the mental and emotional state of the murderer. Most importantly it shows how the atmosphere of a place – the mist, bells, reflections, loneliness, and religious processions of Bruges – can accentuate the emotions of love and grief, and allow them to change into rage.

This is a prototypical symbolist novel. Literary symbolism was a reaction against the naturalism of Balzac and the realism of Zola. Rather than dealing with the external forces that control one's life, the symbolists focused on the internal emotions and motivations that cause action. The protagonist is typically a solitary and sensitive individual, a precursor of the existential hero of the mid-20th century. And the story looks less at the events and settings and more at their effects on the mind. As Stéphane Mallarmé remarked the goal was 'to depict not the thing but the effect it produces.'

A symbol is a way of representing the invisible. It combines concealment with revelation: an idea is reproduced only through allusion, and yet this allusion increases our

understanding of the idea. The Symbolist Movement tended to spiritualism and the occult. More concerned with the ideal than with the specific, it was perhaps literature's way of replacing the religion that science and realism had defeated.

In his introduction to *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899/1919), Arthur Symons concluded

> Here, then, in this revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric, against a materialistic tradition; in this endeavour to disengage the ultimate essence, the soul, of whatever exists and can be realized by the consciousness; in this dutiful waiting upon every symbol by which the soul of things can be made visible; literature, bowed down by so many burdens, may at last attain liberty, and its authentic speech. In attaining this liberty, it accepts a heavier burden; for in speaking to us so intimately, so solemnly, as only religion had hitherto spoken to us, it becomes ltself a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual. (p. 9)

Much, then, rides below the surface in Rodenbach's novel. The story alludes to various myths that tell of the return of loved ones after death, most importantly that of Orpheus and Eurydice. In the canonical version of the myth, Orpheus succeeds in convincing the gods to release Eurydice, but then disobeys their injunction not to look back to see that she is following him out of Hades, and she vanishes. Other versions (e.g. Plato) suggest that the returning Eurydice was only an apparition.

Rodenbach's story is also related to the magical golden bough that mortals need to descend into Hades (e.g. Aeneid, Book VI, ll 171-203). Jane dances as one of the demonic nuns in *Robert le Diable* who convince the hero of that opera to take the magic branch from the tomb of the saint. The golden plait of his wife's hair that Hugues has preserved has both magical and murderous properties. It maintains the memory of his love and

acts as an instrument of death

Die Tote Stadt

Erich Wolfgang Korngold was impressed after reading a dramatic adaptation of *Bruges-la-Morte* that had been translated into German as *Die stille Stadt* (“Silent City”) or *Der Trugbild* (“Mirage”). In 1920 he completed an operatic version of the play – *Die tote Stadt* (“Dead City”). The libretto, attributed to a fictional Paul Schott, was actually written by Korngold and his father.

The operatic story differs for that of the novel. Hugues becomes Paul (**P**) and Jane becomes Marietta (**M**). Paul’s first assignation with Marietta occurs at his residence. She plays the lute and sings an old song, sounding exactly like his dead wife. The song itself is concerned with how love should persist after death. The singing becomes an ecstatic duet:

: Glück, das mir verblieb, rück zu mir, mein treues Lieb. Abend sinkt im Hag bist mir Licht und Tag. Bange pochet Herz an Herz Hoffnung schwingt sich himmelwärts.	Joy, that near to me remains, Come to me, my true love. Night sinks into the grove You are my light and day. Anxiously beats heart on heart Hope itself soars heavenward.
P: Wie wahr, ein traurig Lied.	How true, a sad song.
M: Das Lied vom treuen Lieb, das sterben muss.	The song of true love, that must die.
P: Ich kenne das Lied. Ich hört es oft in jungen, in schöneren Tagen.	I know the song. I heard it often in younger, in better days. It has yet another verse– Do I know it still?

Es hat noch eine Strophe— weiß ich sie noch?	Though sorrow becomes dark, Come to me, my true love.
M & P: Naht auch Sorge trüb, rück zu mir, mein treues Lieb. Neig dein blaß Gesicht Sterben trennt uns nicht. Mußt du einmal von mir gehn, glaub, es gibt ein Auferstehn	Lean (to me) your pale face Death will not separate us. If you must leave me one day, Believe, there is an afterlife.

Paul falls passionately in love with Marietta. The rest of the story – the loss of love, the desecration of the golden plait, and Marietta's ultimate murder – follow in a similar fashion to the novel. However, in the opera these events turn out to be a dream rather than reality, and Paul awakens to find that Marietta is still alive. His dream finally reconciles him to the death of his wife. He sings a new verse to the lute song, bidding her farewell until they meet again – not in this world but in the afterlife.

arre mein in lichten Höhn – hier gibt es kein Auferstehn	Wait for me in heaven's plain – here we shall not meet again.

The opera conveys the intense emotions of the original. However, the addition of music attenuates the sadness, and makes the story far more sensuous.

The following is a 1924 version of the duet *Glück das mir verblieb* with Richard Tauber and Lotte Lehman.

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Lotte-Lehmann-Richard-Tauber-George-Szell-Gluck-das-mir-verblieb.mp3

The duet is often sung as a solo concert aria. The following

is a 1994 version by Anne Sofie von Otter with the accompaniment adapted for piano quintet.

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Mariettas-Lied-a-s-von-otter-forsberg-piano-quintet.mp3

Aria

In 1987, Don Boyd asked ten different directors to produce short films based on famous opera arias. These were put together to make the feature film *Aria*. Bruce Beresford visualized *Glück das mir verblieb* as an intensely erotic engagement between two young lovers (Elizabeth Hurley and Peter Birch) in the city of Bruges. The soundtrack is from the first recording (1975) of the full opera with Carol Neblett and René Kollo. Enjoy!

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ARIA_Die-Tote-Stadt.mp4

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and also at Archives et Musée de la Littérature.

The 1998 Flammarion version reproduces the original text and photographs and contains extensive notes by J.-P. Bertrand and D. Grojnowski.

The illustrations are reproduced in Wikipedia Commons

My quotations are to the English translation by Philip Mosley, originally published in 1986, and reprinted in 2007 by University of Scranton Press. This has no photographs. Another English translation by Will Stone and Mike Mitchell, published by Dedalus Press in 2009, includes a series of photographs of present-day Bruges. Since the original illustrations were an essential part of the book, this seems inappropriate.

Bruges-la-Morte Website

Joël Goffin runs an impressive website *Bruges-la-Morte,* which is packed with information about the book and its author, and which presents his own book (2017) about the novel: *Le Secret de Bruges-la-Morte*.

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