

Du Fu: Poet, Sage, Historian

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Du Fu (712-770 CE) was a poet during a time of great political upheaval in China. He was born near Luoyang and spent much of his young adulthood in the Yanzhou region, finally settling down to a minor official position in Chang'an, the imperial capital. In 755 CE, An Lushan, a disgruntled general, led a rebellion against the Tang dynasty. The emperor was forced to flee Chang'an (modern Xian), and chaos reigned for the next eight years. For more than a year Du Fu was held captive in Chang'an by the rebels. After escaping, he made his way south, living for a time in a thatched cottage in Chengdu, and later at various places along the Yangtze River. His poetry is characterized by an intense love of nature, by elements of Chan Buddhism, and by a deep compassion for all those caught up in the turmoil of history. This is a longer post than usual. I have become fascinated by Du Fu.

Failing the Examinations

Du Fu (Tu Fu in the Wades Gilles transliteration system, the family name likely deriving from the name of a pear tree) was born in 712 CE near Luoyang, the eastern capital of the Tang Dynasty (Hung, 1952; Owen, 1981). The following map (adapted from Young, 2008, and Collet and Cheng, 2014) shows places of importance in his life:



Du Fu's father was a minor official. His mother appears to have died during his childhood, and Du Fu was raised by his stepmother and an aunt. Du Fu studied hard, but in 735 CE he failed the *jenshi* (advanced scholar) examinations. No one knows why: politics and spite may have played their part. He spent the next few years with his father who was then stationed in Yanzhou,

Du Fu met Li Bai (700-762 CE) in 744 CE. Despite the difference in their ages, the two poets became fast friends. However, they were only able to meet occasionally, their lives being separated by politics and war.

Du Fu attempted the *jenshi* examinations again in 746, and was again rejected. Nevertheless, he was able to obtain a minor position in the imperial civil service in Chang'an. This

allowed him to marry and raise a small family.

Taishan



We can begin our examination of Du Fu's poetry with one of the early poems written during his time in Yanzhou: *Gazing on the Peak* (737 CE). The peak is *Taishan* (exalted mountain), located in Northeastern China. Taishan is one of the Five Great Mountains (*Wuyue*) of ancient China. Today one can reach the summit by climbing up some 7000 steps (see illustration on the right), but in Du Fu's time the climb would have been more difficult. The following is the poem in printed Chinese characters (*Hànzì*) and in Pinyin transliteration:

望嶽

wàng yuè

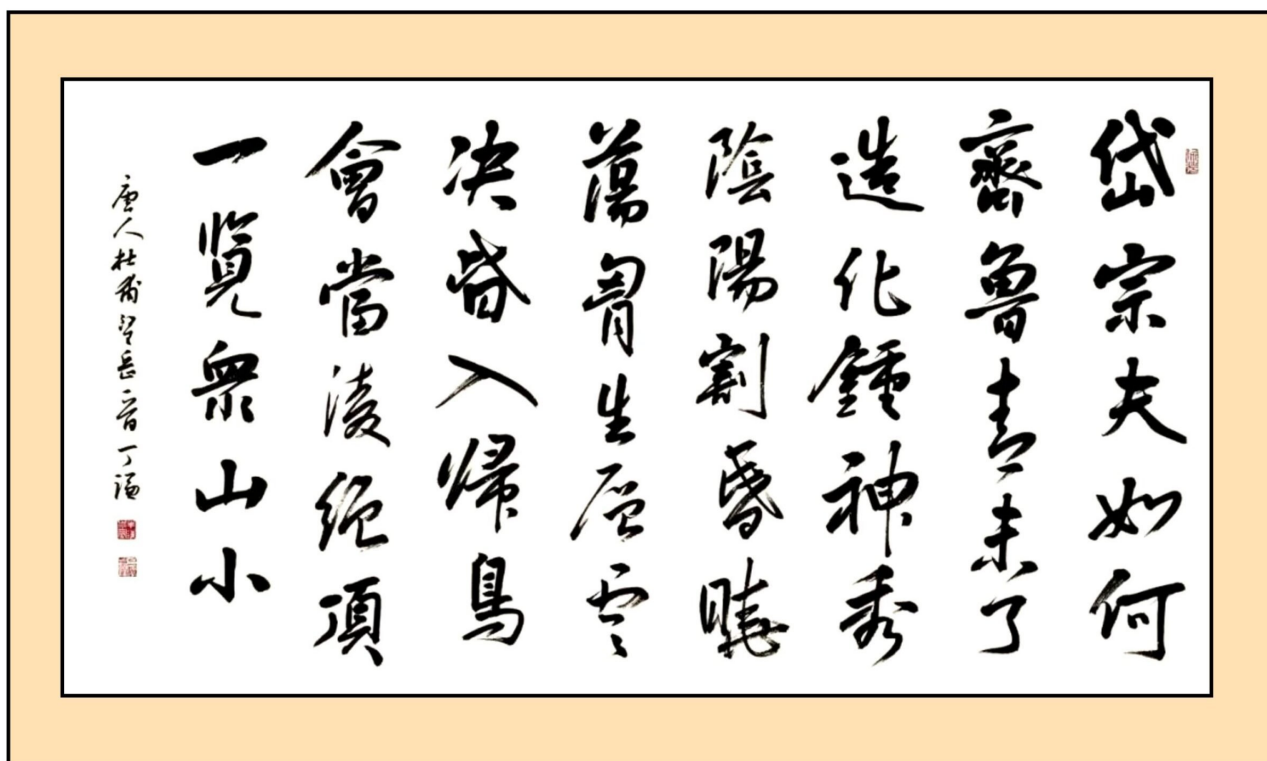
岱宗夫如何，
齊魯青未了。
造化鍾神秀，
陰陽割昏曉。
盪胸生曾雲，
決眴入歸鳥。
會當凌絕頂，
一覽眾山小。

dài zōng fū rú hé
qí lǚ qīng wèi liǎo
zào huà zhōng shén xiù
yīn yáng gē hūn xiǎo
dàng xiōng shēng céng yún
jué zì rù guī niǎo
huì dāng líng jué dǐng
yī lǎn zhòng shān xiǎo

The poem is in the *lǜshī* (regulated verse) form which requires eight lines (four couplets), with each line containing the same number of characters: 5- or 7-character *lǜshī* are the most common. Each line is separated into phrases, with a 5-character line composed of an initial 2-character phrase and a final 3-character phrase. The last words of each couplet rhyme. Rhyme in Chinese is based on the vowel sound. Within the lines there were complex rules for the tonality of the sounds (Zong Qi Cai, 2008, Chapter 8; Wai-lim Yip, 1997, pp 171-221). These rules do not always carry over to the way the characters are pronounced in modern Chinese. The following is a reading of the poem in Mandarin (from Librivox).

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/wang-yue-from-librivox.mp3>

Chinese poetry is directed at both the ear and the eye, and fine calligraphy enhances the appreciations of a poem. Ding Qian has written out Du Fu's *Wàng yuè* in beautiful cursive script (going from top down and from left to right):



The following is a character-by-character translation (adapted from Hinton, 2019, p 2):

gaze/ behold mountain

Daizong (ancient name for Taishan) then
like what

Qi *Lu* (regions near Taishan) green/blue
never end

create change concentrate divine beauty

Yin *Yang* (Taoist concepts of dark and light)

cleave dusk dawn

heave chest birth layer cloud

burst eye enter return bird

soon when reach extreme summit

one glance all mountain small.

And this is the English translation of Stephen Owen (2008, poem 1.2):

Gazing on the Peak

And what then is Daizong like? –
over Qi and Lu, green unending.
Creation compacted spirit splendors here,
Dark and Light, riving dusk and dawn.
Exhilarating the breast, it produces layers of cloud;
splitting eye-pupils, it has homing birds entering.
Someday may I climb up to its highest summit,
with one sweeping view see how small all other
mountains are



The interpretation of the poem requires some knowledge of its allusions. In the fourth line, Du Fu is referring to the *taijitu* symbol of Taoism (illustrated on the right) that contrasts the principles of *yin* (dark, female, moon) and *yang* (light, male, sun). Du Fu proposes that Taishan divides the world into two ways of looking. Some have suggested that the *taijitu* symbol originally represented the dark (north) side and the light (south) side of a mountain, and this idea fits easily with the poem.

All translators have had difficulty with the third couplet (reviewed by Hsieh, 1994). My feeling is that Du Fu is noticing layers of clouds at the mountain's upper reaches – the chest if one considers the mountain like a human body – and birds swooping around the peaks – where the eye sockets of the body would be. However, it is also possible that Du Fu is breathing heavily from the climb and that his eyes are

surprised by the birds. Perhaps both meanings are valid, with Du Fu and the mountain becoming one. Du Fu may have been experiencing the meditative state of Chan Buddhism, with a mind was “wide-open and interfused with this mountain landscape, no distinction between subjective and objective” (Hinton, 2019, p 6). One might also consider Du Fu’s mental state: at the time he wrote this poem he had just failed the *jenshi* exams. This might have caused some breast-beating and tears, as well as his final resolve to climb the mountain and see how small all his problems actually were.

The last couplet refers to Mencius’ description of the visit of Confucius to Taishan (Mengzi VIIA:24):

He ascended the Tai Mountain, and all beneath the heavens appeared to him small. So he who has contemplated the sea, finds it difficult to think anything of other waters, and he who has wandered in the gate of the sage, finds it difficult to think anything of the words of others.

Zhang’s Hermitage

During his time in Yanzhou Du Fu visited a hermit named Zhang near the Stonegate Mountain, one of the lesser peaks near Taishan. Zhang was likely a follower of the new Chan Buddhism, which promoted meditation as a means to empty the mind of suffering and allow the universal life force to permeate one’s being. Buddhism first came to China during the Han dynasty (206BCE – 220CE). Since many of the concepts of Buddhism were similar to those of Taoism, the new religion spread quickly (Hinton, 2020). A type of Buddhism that stressed the role of meditation began to develop in the 6th Century CE, and called itself *chan*, a Chinese transcription of the Sanskrit *dhyana* (meditation). In later years this would lead to the Zen Buddhism of Japan. There are many allusions to Buddhism and especially to Chan ideas in Du Fu’s poetry (Rouzer, 2020; Zhang, 2018)

Du Fu reportedly wrote the following poem on one of the walls of Zhang's hermitage. The poem is a seven-character *lǜshī*. The following is the poem in Chinese characters (Owen, 2008, poem 1.4) and in pinyin:

題張氏隱居

tí zhāng shì yǐn jū

春山無伴獨相求

chūn shān wú bàn dú xiāng qiú

伐木丁丁山更幽。

fá mù dīng dīng shān gēng yōu

澗道餘寒歷冰雪，

jiàn dào yú hán lì bīng xuě

石門斜日到林丘。

shí mén xié rì dào lín qiū

不貪夜識金銀氣，

bù tān yè shí jīn yín qì

遠害朝看麋鹿遊。

yuǎn hài zhāo kàn mí lù yóu

乘興杳然迷出處，

chéng xīng yǎo rán mí chū chǔ

對君疑是泛虛舟。

duì jūn yí shì fàn xū zhōu

The following is a character-by-character translation (adapted from Hinton, 2019, p 22):

inscribe	Zhang	family	recluse	
house				
spring	mountain	absence	friend	alone
you	search			
chop	tree	crack	crack	mountain
mystery				again
creek	pathway	remnant	cold	pass
ice	snow			
stone	gate	slant	sun	reach
place				forest
no	desire	night	know	gold
breath/spirit				silver
far	injure	morning	see	deer
wander				deer

ride burgeon dark thus confuse leave
place
facing you suspect this drift empty
boat.

And this is a translation by Kenneth Rexroth (1956):

Written on the Wall at Chang's Hermitage

It is Spring in the mountains.
I come alone seeking you.
The sound of chopping wood echos
Between the silent peaks.
The streams are still icy.
There is snow on the trail.
At sunset I reach your grove
In the stony mountain pass.
You want nothing, although at night
You can see the aura of gold
And silver ore all around you.
You have learned to be gentle
As the mountain deer you have tamed.
The way back forgotten, hidden
Away, I become like you,
An empty boat, floating, adrift.

Notable in the poem is the idea of *wú* (third character) which can be translated as "absence, nothing, not" (Hinton, 2019, p 24) This is an essential concept of Chan Buddhism – the emptying of the mind so that it can become a receptacle for true awareness. The third and fourth characters of the first line might be simply translated as "alone (without a friend)," but one might also venture "with absence as a companion" or "with an empty mind." This fits with the image of the empty boat at the end of the poem.

Zheng Qian, a drinking companion of Li Bai and Du Fu, suggested the idea of combining poetry, painting and

calligraphy. The Emperor was impressed and called the combination *sānjué* (three perfections) (Sullivan, 1974). Li Bai and Du Fu likely tried their hand at painting and calligraphy but no versions of their *sānjué* efforts have survived. The Ming painter and calligrapher Wang Shimin (1592–1680 CE) illustrated the second couplet of Du Fu's poem from Zhang's hermitage in his album Du Fu's Poetic Thoughts now at the Palace Museum in Beijing.



澗道餘寒歷冰雪
石門斜日到林止

乙巳臘月寫

少陵詩意十

二幀似

旭成賢甥時年

七十有四時敘



The An Lushan Rebellion

Toward the end 755 CE, An Lushan, a general on the northern frontier rebelled against the empire and captured the garrison town of Fanyang (or Jicheng) located in what is now part of Beijing. Within a month the rebels captured Luoyang. The emperor and much of his court fled Chang'an, travelling through the Qinling Mountains to find sanctuary in the province of Shu. The city of Chang'an fell to the rebels in the middle of 756 CE.

Below is shown a painting of *Emperor Ming-Huang's Flight to Shu*. Though attributed to the Tang painter Li Zhaodao (675-758 CE), this was actually painted in his style several hundred years later during the Song Dynasty. Shu is the ancient name for what is now known as Sichuan province. This masterpiece of early Chinese painting is now in the National Palace Museum in Taipei. Two enlargements are included: the emperor with his red coat is shown at the lower right; at the lower left advance members of his entourage begin climbing the mountain paths.



The rebellion lasted for eight long years. The northern part of the country was devastated. Death from either war or famine was widespread. Censuses before and after the rebellion suggested a death toll of some 36 million people, making it one of the worst catastrophes in human history. However, most scholars now doubt these numbers and consider the death toll as closer to 13 million. Nevertheless, it was a murderous time.

Moonlit Night

At the beginning of the rebellion, Du Fu managed to get his family to safety in the northern town of Fuzhou, but he was himself held captive in Chang'an. Fortunately, he was not considered important enough to be executed, and he finally managed to escape in 757 CE. The following shows a poem from 756 CE in characters (Owen, 2008, poem 4.18), pinyin transcription, and character-by-character translation (Alexander, 2008):

月夜	yuè yè	moon night
今夜鄜州月，	jīn yè fū zhōu yuè	this night Fu Zhou moon
閨中只獨看。	guī zhōng zhǐ dú kàn	woman's room only alone watch
遙憐小兒女，	yáo lián xiǎo ér nǚ	far pity little boy girl
未解憶長安。	wèi jiě yì cháng ān	not understand remember Chang'an
香霧雲鬟濕，	xiāng wù yún huán shī	fragrant mist cloud hair wet
清輝玉臂寒。	qīng huī yù bì hán	clear brightness jade arm cold
何時倚虛幌，	hé shí yǐ xū huǎng	what time lean empty curtain
雙照淚痕乾。	shuāng zhào lèi hén gān	pair shine tears trace dry

The following is a reading of the poem from Librivox:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/yue-y-e-from-librivox.mp3>

Vikam Seth (1997) translated the poem keeping the Chinese rhyme scheme: the last character rhymes for all four couplets:

Moonlit Night

In Fuzhou, far away, my wife is watching
The moon alone tonight, and my thoughts fill
With sadness for my children, who can't think
Of me here in Changan; they're too young still.

Her cloud-soft hair is moist with fragrant mist.
In the clear light her white arms sense the chill.
When will we feel the moonlight dry our tears,
Leaning together on our window-sill?

Alec Roth wrote a suite of songs based on Vikam Seth's translations of Du Fu. The following is his setting for Moonlit Night with tenor Mark Padmore:

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/06-Songs-In-Time-of-War_-Moonlit-Nig.mp3

David Young (2008) provides a free-verse translation:

Tonight
in this same moonlight
my wife is alone at her window
in Fuzhou
I can hardly bear
to think of my children
too young to understand
why I can't come to them
her hair
must be damp from the mist
her arms
cold jade in the moonlight
when will we stand together
by those slack curtains
while the moonlight dries
the tear-streaks on our faces?

The poem may have been written or at least conceived during the celebration of the full moon in the autumn. Families customarily viewed the moon together and Du Fu imagines his wife viewing the moon alone. The mention of the wife's chamber in the second line may refer to either her actual bedroom or metonymically to herself as the inmost room in Du Fu's heart (Hawkes, 1967). David Young (2008) remarks that this may be

“the first Chinese poem to address romantic sentiments to a wife,” instead of a colleague or a courtesan.

David Hawkes (1967) notes the parallelism of the third couplet:

‘fragrant mist’ parallels ‘clear light,’ ‘cloud hair’ parallels ‘jade arms,’ and ‘wet’ parallels ‘cold’

Spring View

Spring View (or *Spring Landscape*), the most famous poem written by Du Fu in Chang’an during the rebellion, tells how nature persists despite the ravages of effects of war and time. Subjective emotions and objective reality become one. The character *wàng* (view, landscape) can mean both the act of perceiving or what is actually perceived. In addition, it can sometimes mean the present scene or what is to be expected in the future (much like the English word “prospect”). The illustration below shows the text in Chinese characters (Owen, 2008, poem 4.25), in pinyin and in a character-by-character translation (adapted from Hawkes, 1967, Alexander, 2008, and Zong-Qi Cai, 2008):

春望	chūn wàng	spring view
國破山河在，	guó pò shān hé zài	country broken mountain river remain
城春草木深。	chéng chūn cǎo mù shēn	city spring grass trees deep
感時花濺淚，	gǎn shí huā jiàn lèi	feel moment flower splash tear
恨別鳥驚心。	hèn bié niǎo jīng xīn	regret/hate parting bird startle heart
烽火連三月，	fēng huǒ lián sān yuè	beacon fires join three months
家書抵萬金。	jiā shū dǐ wàn jīn	family letters worth ten-thousand gold
白頭搔更短，	bái tóu sāo gèng duǎn	white head scratch become thin
渾欲不勝簪	hún yù bù shēng zān	simply about not bear hairpin

The following is a reading of the poem from the website

associated with *How to Read Chinese Poetry* (ZongQi-Cai, 2008, poem 8.1):

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/c8.1-spring-scene.mp3>

The next illustration shows the poem as written by three calligraphers. All versions read from top down and from right to left. On the left is standard script by Anita Wang; on the right the calligraphy by Lii Shiuh Lou is gently cursive. At the bottom the calligraphy by an anonymous calligrapher is unrestrained: it accentuates the root of the growing grass (8th character) and the radicals that compose the character for regret/hate (16th character) fly apart.

國破山河在城春草木深感時花濺
淚恨別鳥驚心烽火連三月家書抵
萬金白頭搔更短渾欲不勝簪
部春望 乙酉春尾 姜裕緒書於亞城

國破山河在城春草木深感時花濺
淚恨別鳥驚心烽火連三月家書抵萬
金白頭搔更短渾欲不勝簪

杜甫春望 辛丑臘月五心銘



國破山河在
城春草木深
感時花濺
淚恨別鳥
驚心烽火
連三月家
書抵萬金
白頭搔更
短渾欲不
勝簪

杜甫春望
歲次壬子
無道書

The following are two translations, the first by David Hinton, which uses an English line of a constant length to approximate the Chinese 5-character line (2020a):

The country in ruins, rivers and mountains
continue. The city grows lush with spring.

Blossoms scatter tears for us, and all these
separations in a bird's cry startle the heart.

Beacon-fires three months ablaze: by now
a mere letter's worth ten thousand in gold,

and worry's thinned my hair to such white
confusion I can't even keep this hairpin in.

A second translation, with preservation of the rhyme scheme and phrasal structure, is by Keith Holyoak (2015)

The state is in ruin;
yet mountains and rivers endure.
In city gardens
weeds run riot this spring.

These dark times
move flowers to sprinkle tears;
the separations
send startled birds on the wing.

For three months now
the beacon fires have burned;
a letter from home
would mean more than anything.

I've pulled out
so many of my white hairs
too few are left
to hold my hatpin in!

The second couplet has been interpreted in different ways.

Most translations (including the two just quoted) consider it as representing nature's lament for the evil times. For example, Hawkes (1967) suggests that "nature is grieving in sympathy with the beholder at the ills which beset him." However, Michael Yang (2016) proposes that "In times of adversity, nature may simply be downright uncaring and unfriendly, thereby adding to the woes of mankind." He translates the couplet

Mourning the times, I weep at the sight of flowers;
Hating separation, I find the sound of birds
startling.

The last two lines of the poem refer the hair-style of the Tang Dynasty: men wore their hair in a topknot, and their hats were "anchored to their heads with a large hatpin which passed through the topknot of hair" (Hawkes, 1967). Most interpreters have been struck by the difference between the solemn anguish of the poem's first six lines, and the self-mockery of the final couplet (Hawkes, 1967, p 46; Chou, 1995, p 115). This juxtaposition of the tragic and the pitiable accentuates the poet's bewilderment.

The Thatched Cottage

Disillusioned by the war and by the politics of vengeance that followed, Du Fu and his family retired to a thatched cottage in Chengdu, where he lived from 759-765. A replica of this cottage has been built there in a park celebrating both Du Fu and Chinese Poetry:





Many of the poems that Du Fu wrote in Chengdu celebrated the simple joys of nature. He often used isolated quatrains to find parallels between his emotions and the world around him. This brief form called *juéjù* (curtailed lines) was widely used by his colleagues Li Bai (701–762) and Wang Wei (699–759). The form consists of two couplets juxtaposed in meaning and rhyming across their last character (Wong, 1970; Zong-Qi Cai, 2008, Chapter 10). The following poem (Owen, 2008, poem 9.63) describing willow-catkins (illustrated on the right) and sleeping ducks gives a deep feeling of peace. These are the Chinese characters and pinyin transcription followed by the character-by-character translation (Alexander, 2008):

糝徑楊花鋪白氈，
點溪荷葉疊青錢。
筍根雉子無人見，
沙上鳧雛傍母眠。

sǎn jìng yáng huā pū bái zhān
diǎn xī hé yè dié qīng qián
sǔn gēn zhì zǐ wú rén jiàn
shā shàng fú chú bàng mǔ mián

grain	path	poplar/willow	blossom	pave		
white	carpet					
little	stream	lotus	leaves	pile	green	
money						
bamboo	shoot	root	sprout	no	person	see
sand	on	duckling	beside	mother	sleep	

The following translation is by Burton Watson (2002):

Willow fluff along the path spreads a white carpet;
lotus leaves dot the stream, plating it with green
coins.

By bamboo roots, tender shoots where no one sees them;
on the sand, baby ducks asleep beside their mother.

Shui Chien-Tung provided the following calligraphy for the poem (Cooper, 1973). He used aspects of the ancient scripts (circles, curves and dots) in some of the characters to give a sense of simplicity and timelessness. The illustration shows the calligraphy of the poem on the left and the evolution of the characters *yáng* (willow, poplar) and *fú* (duck) on the right.

鳬鵲傍母眼
 疊青錢
 筍根稚子無人見
 沙上
 糝徑楊花鋪白氈
 點溪荷葉

yáng
(willow)

楊

楊

楊

杨

Bronze
Inscription

Seal
Script

Traditional

Simplified

fú
(duck)

𩇛

𩇛

鳬

鳬

Another quatrain from Chengdu describes a night scene on the river. The following shows the poem in Chinese characters (Owen, 2008, poem 13.61), in pinyin, and in a character-by-character translation (mine):

江動月移石, jiāng dòng yuè yí shí
 溪虛雲傍花。 xī xū yún bàng huā
 鳥棲知故道, niǎo qī zhī gù dào
 帆過宿誰家。 fān guò sù shuí jiā

river move moon change rock
 stream empty cloud beside flower
 bird perch understand old Dao
 sail pass stay(lodge) who home

This is the translation by J. P. Seaton (Seaton & Cryer,

1987):

The River moves, moon travels rock,
Streams unreal, clouds there among the flowers.
The bird perches, knows the ancient Tao
Sails go: They can't know where.

As the river flows by, the moon's reflection slowly travels across the rocks near the shore. The water reflects the clouds between the lilies. A bird on a branch understands the nature of the universe. A boat passes, going home we know not where.

The poem conveys a sense of the complexity of the world where reflections and reality intermingle, a desire to understand the meaning of our life, and a fear that time is passing and we do not know where it will take us. All this in twenty characters. Such concision is extremely difficult in English. An attempt:

River and rocks reflect the moon
and clouds amid the lilies
resting birds understand the way
sails pass seeking home somewhere.

The following shows a painting by Huang Yon-hou to illustrate the poem. This was used as the frontispiece (and cover) of the book *Bright Moon, Perching Bird* (Seaton & Cryer, 1987). On the right is calligraphy of the poem by Mo Ji-yu.



江動月移石溪虛雲傍花鳥樓知
故道帆過宿誰家
桂林同源書

Above the Gorges

In 765 CE Du Fu and his family left Chengdu and travelled eastward on the Yangtze River. The region of Luoyang had been recently recovered by imperial forces and Du Fu was perhaps trying to return home (Hung, 1952). He stayed for a while in Kuizhou (present day Baidicheng) at the beginning of the Three Gorges (*Qutang, Wu and Xiang*).

While there Du Fu wrote a series of meditations called *Autumn Thoughts* (or more literally *Stirred by Autumn*). This is the second of these poems in Chinese characters and in pinyin:

夔府孤城落日斜，
每依北斗望京華。
聽猿實下三聲淚，
奉使虛隨八月槎。
畫省香爐違伏枕，
山樓粉堞隱悲笳。
請看石上藤蘿月，
已映洲前蘆荻花。

kuí fǔ gū chéng luò rì xié
měi yī běi dòu wàng jīng huá
tīng yuán shí xià sān shēng lèi
fèng shǐ xū suí bā yuè chá
huà shěng xiāng lú wéi fú zhěn
shān lóu fěn dié yǐn bēi jiā
qǐng kàn shí shàng téng luó yuè
yǐ yìng zhōu qián lú dí huā

A character-by-character translation (Alexander, 2008) is:

Kui prefecture lonely wall set sun slant
Every rely north dipper gaze capital city
Hear ape real fall three sound tear
Sent mission vain follow eight month raft
Picture ministry incense stove apart hidden pillow
Mountain tower white battlements hide sad reed-
whistle
Ask look stone on [Chinese wisteria] moon
Already reflect islet before rushes reeds flowers

The following is Stephen Owen's translation (Owen, 2008 poem 17.27):

On Kuizhou's lonely walls setting sunlight slants,
then always I trust the North Dipper to lead my gaze to
the capital.
Listening to gibbons I really shed tears at their third
cry,
accepting my mission I pointlessly follow the eighth-
month raft.
The censor in the ministry with portraits eludes the
pillow where I lie,
ill towers' white-plastered battlements hide the sad reed
pipes.

Just look there at the moon, in wisteria on the rock,
it has already cast its light by sandbars on flowers of
the reeds.

The poem is striking in the difference between the first three couplets and the last. At the beginning of the poem Du Fu is feeling regret that he is not in Chang'an which is located due north of Kuizhou (in the direction of the Big Dipper which points to the North Star). Owen notes that "There was an old rhyme that a traveler in the gorges would shed tears when the gibbons cried out three times." The eighth month raft may refer to another old story about a vessel that came every eight months and took a man up to the Milky Way. Owen commented on the third couplet that "The "muralled ministry" is where were located the commemorative portraits of officers, civil and military, who had done exceptional service to the dynasty." Incense was burned when petitions were presented. The final couplet disregards all the preceding nostalgia and simply appreciates the beauty of the moment.

The Ming painter Wang Shimin illustrated this final couplet in one of the leaves from his album Du Fu's Poetic Thoughts.

請看石上藤蘿月
已映洲前蘆花



Later in Kuizhou, Du Fu entertained a librarian named Li who was returning north to take up an appointment in Chang'an. The following is the beginning of a poem (Owen, 2008, poem 19.34) describing Li's departure in Chinese characters and in pinyin:

青簾白舫益州來，	qīng lián bái fǎng yì zhōu lái
巫峽秋濤天地回。	wū xiá qiū tāo tiān dì huí
石出倒聽楓葉下，	shí chū dǎo tīng fēng yè xià
櫓搖背指菊花開。	lǔ yáo bèi zhǐ jú huā kāi

A character-by-character translation is:

blue/green	curtain	white	boat/raft	Yizhou
arrive				
Wu	gorge	autumn	waves	heaven/sky
earth/ground	turn (around)			
stone/rock	leave/exit	fall	listen	maple
leaf	down			
scull/oar	swing	carry	point	chrysanthemum
flower	open/blume			

The following is Stephen Owen's translation:

When the white barge with green curtains came from Yizhou,
with autumn billows in the Wu Gorges, heaven and earth were
turning.

Where rocks came out, from below you listened to the leaves
of maples falling,
as the sweep moved back and forth you pointed behind to
chrysanthemums in bloom.

The Ming painter Wang Shimin illustrated the second couplet in one of the leaves from his album Du Fu's Poetic Thoughts. The painting shows the bright red leaves of the maples. In front of the riverside house one can see the multicolored chrysanthemums that Li is pointing to. Harmony exists between

the wild and the cultivated.

石出倒懸楓葉下
櫓搖背指菊苔開



On the River

After his sojourn in Kuizhou, Du Fu and his family continued their journey down the Yangtze River. However, the poet was ill and was unable to make it beyond Tanzhou (now Changsha) where he died in 770 CE. No one knows where he is buried. In the 1960's radical students dug up a grave purported to be his to "eliminate the remaining poison of feudalism," but found the grave empty.

One of Du Fu's last poems was *Night Thoughts While Travelling*. The following is the poem in Chinese characters (Owen, 2008, poem 14.63) and in pinyin (Alexander, 2008):

旅夜書懷	lǚ yè shū huái	journey night write think
細草微風岸，	xì cǎo wēi fēng àn	gently grass soft wind shore
危檣獨夜舟。	wēi qiáng dú yè zhōu	tall mast alone night boat
星垂平野闊，	xīng chuī píng yě kuò	star fall flat fields broad
月湧大江流。	yuè yǒng dà jiāng liú	moon rises great river flows
名豈文章著，	míng qǐ wén zhāng zhù	name not literary works mark
官應老病休。	guān yīng lǎo bìng xiū	official should old sick stop
飄零何所似，	piāo piāo hé suǒ sì	flutter flutter what place seem
天地一沙鷗。	tiān dì yī shā ōu	heaven earth one sand gull

The following is a reading of the poem from Librivox:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/night-thoughts-from-librivox.mp3>

Holyoak (2015) provides a rhymed translation:

The fine grass
by the riverbank stirs in the breeze;
the tall mast
in the night is a lonely sliver.

Stars hang
all across the vast plain;
the moon bobs
in the flow of the great river.

My poetry
has not made a name for me;
now age and sickness
have cost me the post I was given.

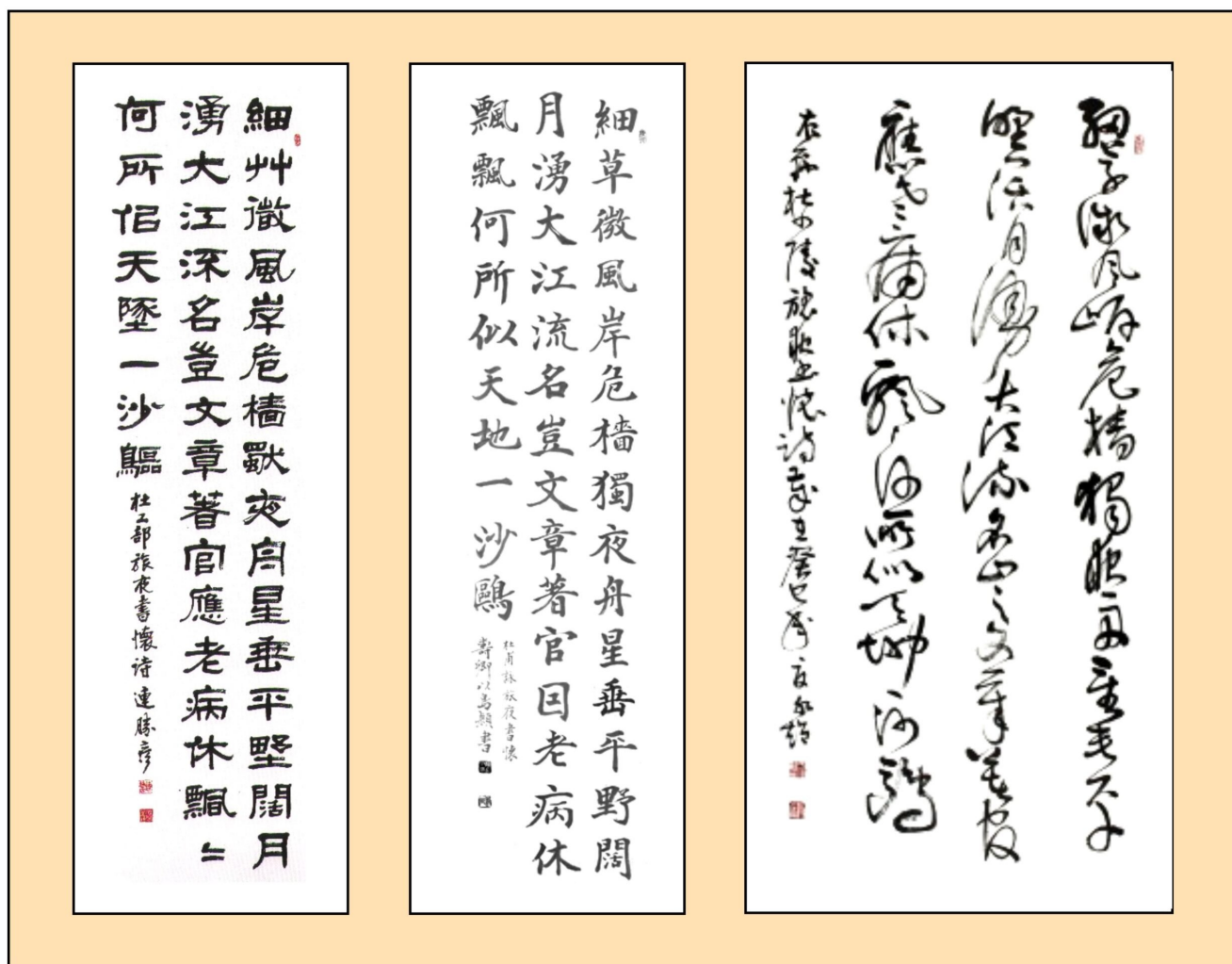
Drifting, drifting,
what do I resemble?
A lone gull
lost between earth and heaven.

Kenneth Rexroth (1956) translates the poem in free verse:

Night Thoughts While Travelling

A light breeze rustles the reeds
Along the river banks. The
Mast of my lonely boat soars
Into the night. Stars blossom
Over the vast desert of
Waters. Moonlight flows on the
Surging river. My poems have
Made me famous but I grow
Old, ill and tired, blown hither
And yon; I am like a gull
Lost between heaven and earth.

The following shows the poem in calligraphy with three styles. On the left the poem is written in clerical script, in the center in regular script and on the right is unrestrained cursive script. All examples were taken from Chinese sites selling calligraphy.



Changing Times

During the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) the role of literature, and poetry in particular, in society changed dramatically (Owen, 2011):

In the 650s, literature was centered almost entirely in the imperial court; by the end of the era literature had become the possession of an educated elite, who might serve in government, but whose cultural life was primarily outside the court.

During Du Fu's lifetime, poetry became no longer a part of the ancient traditions; rather it began to be concerned with the present and with the personal. Lucas Bender (2021) describes the traditional role of poetry in a society following the

precepts of Confucianism:

Most people ... would be incapable on their own of adequately conceptualizing the world or perfectly responding to its contingency, and therefore needed to rely on the models left by sages and worthies. Many of these models were embodied in texts, including literary texts, which could thus offer an arena for ethical activity. Poetry, for example, was understood to offer models of cognition, feeling, and commitment that would ineluctably shape readers' understanding of and responses to their own circumstances. One way of being a good person, therefore, involved reading good poetry and writing more of it, thereby propagating the normative models of the tradition in one's own time and transmitting them to the future. (p 317)

Du Fu found himself bewildered by the state of the world. He sought to convey this confusion rather than explain it:

Du Fu doubts the possibility of indefinitely applicable moral categories. The conceptual tools by which we make moral judgments, he suggests, are always inherited from a past that can – and, in a world as various and changeable as ours has proven to be, often will – diverge from the exigencies of the present. As a result, not only are our values unlikely to be either universal or timeless; more important, if we pay careful attention to the details of our experience, they are unlikely to work unproblematically even here and now. (Bender, 2021, p 319)

The complexity of Du Fu's poetry – the difficulty in understanding some of his juxtapositions – becomes a challenge. The past provides no help in the interpretation. We must figure out for themselves what relates the mountain, the clouds and the poet's breathing in the first poem we considered. And in the last poem we must try to locate for ourselves the place of the gull between heaven and earth.

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The Divine Feminine

All the major religions of the present world are androcentric in nature and misogynistic in practice. The following are some typical injunctions in the Christian scriptures:

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law.

And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. (*I Corinthians* 14: 34-35)

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority

over the man, but to be in silence. (*1 Timothy* 2: 11-12)

These rulings are in spite of (or perhaps because of) women being more attentive to religious teachings, and participating more often in religious services than men (Pew Research Foundation, 2016). The two passages nevertheless serve a purpose – they provide clear evidence that the New Testament does not always represent the word of God.

The androcentricity of organized religion differs completely from prehistoric religious beliefs, wherein God was more likely female than male (Stone, 1978). Over recent centuries, however, female aspects of the godhead have become more and more recognized. This posting briefly considers some of the manifestations of the divine feminine, and mentions what might be involved in a feminist theology.

The Primordial Mother

In prehistoric families, the most amazing and incomprehensible event was the birth of a child. The role of the father was little understood, and mothers were revered as the primary source of this new life. A female force was therefore naturally thought to be behind the creation of the universe, and was worshipped as a mother goddess (Graves, 1948; Neumann, 1963; Stone, 1978). Between 30,000 and 10,000 years BCE, small votive offerings to the mother goddess – “Venus figurines” – were created throughout Europe. The illustration below shows (from left to right) the ceramic Venus of Dolni Vestonice in the Czech Republic, the limestone Venus of Willendorf in Austria and the serpentine Venus of Savignano in Italy:



Barstow (1983) describes these figurines:

The goddess was faceless, as if to accentuate her universality, her ability to “stand for the power of the female. Lacking feet, she appeared to come straight up out of the earth, with which she was identified. Unclothed, her every body seem to have an efficacy. Often – but not always – she was big-breasted, and her hands were frequently placed under her breasts as if to display them. Many figurines show her entire body as ample, with huge breasts, belly and buttocks, as if the very plenitude of her body would ensure plentiful crops and hers. Sometimes she is pregnant, her enlarged belly emphasized by special markings.

In neolithic times, most societies began to worship multiple divinities, though female forces were among the most important – Ishtar in Mesopotamia, Astarte in Canaan, Persephone in Greece. and Isis in Egypt. These goddesses often displayed two aspects: one related to life and fertility and the other to death and war.

These goddesses were widely worshipped, with their followers often participating in extended rites called the “mysteries.” Apuleius’ Latin novel *The Golden Ass* (2nd Century CE) tells the story of Lucius who, while dabbling in the magic arts, inadvertently turned himself into an ass. At the end of the book, he attends one of the mysteries, and is changed back to human form through the power of Isis. The goddess announces herself:

I am here before you, Lucius, moved by your prayers—mother of the natural world, mistress of all the elements, firstborn offspring of the ages, highest of the deities, queen of the dead, first among the gods, the manifestation in a single body of all the gods and goddesses. I control by my will the luminous summits of the sky, the salubrious breezes of the sea, and the mournful silence of the underworld. I am the single divine being, worshipped the world over in different forms, with varying rites and under a multitude of names. Some call me Juno, others Bellona, some Hecate, and yet others Rhamnusia. But the people on both sides of Ethiopia who are lit by the first rays of the rising sun, and the Egyptians, pre-eminent for their ancient knowledge, worship me with the proper rituals and by my true name: Queen Isis. (Translation of Singer and Finkelpearl, 2021, pp 158-60)

The illustration below shows a pectoral ornament in the form of a winged Isis from the Museum of Fine Art in Boston. In her right hand, she holds an *ankh*, the symbol for “life”; in her left hand she holds what may be the hieroglyph for a sail, the symbol for the breath of life. On her head is a throne, indicating her majesty.



Judaism – Wisdom and Shekhinah

In the Hebrew scriptures Jahweh is most definitely male, and there is little mention of any female aspect to the deity. However, in *Proverbs* there are several passages spoken by the female figure of Wisdom (*Hokhmah*), one of which reads

I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water.

Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:

While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world.

When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth:

When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep:

When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations

of the earth:

Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men. (*Proverbs*, 8 22-31)

Christians have interpreted this passage as referring to Christ the Son, who they believe was with God the Father before the world began. Christ is described as “the power of God and the wisdom of God” in *I Corinthians* 1:24.

This female figure of Wisdom in *Proverbs* is closely associated with *Sophia*— the goddess of wisdom and the creator of the world in Gnostic scriptures (Perkins, 1985).

Wisdom also became related to the concept of the *Shekhinah* – God’s “presence” or “immanence” in the world. This concept was initially used to describe the holiness of the Ark of the Covenant, but expanded to include the idea of God’s dwelling with his people. *Shekhinah* is manifest when believers gather to study the Torah, celebrate the Sabbath, or pray together. The Mishnah (probably derived from Jewish oral tradition in the centuries BCE) states

If two sit together and there are words of Torah spoken between them, then the Shekhinah abides among them (*Pirkei Avot*, 3:2)

In the medieval period, the presence of God in the world was conceived as in terms of the ten *Sephiroth* of the *Kabbalah*. The tenth *Sephirah* is known either as *Malkuth* (“kingdom”) or *Shekhinah* (“presence”). In Kabbalistic writings the *Shekhinah* became the female aspect of the Godhead (Smith, 1985; Scholem, 1991; Devine, 2014; Laura, 2015).

In the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (13th Century CE), the *Shekhinah* is considered as the intermediary between God and his people:

Every message the King requires goes forth from this Lady’s

house. Any message from below that is sent to the King arrives first at the house of His Lady, and from there proceeds to the King. The Lady is thus the universal go-between, from above to below and from below to above. (*Zohar* 2:51a quoted by Green, 2002).

Scholem (1965) describes the uneasy status of *Shekhinah* in Jewish religious thought:

This discovery of a feminine element in God, which the Kabbalists tried to justify by gnostic exegesis, is of course one of the most significant steps they took. Often regarded with the utmost misgiving by strictly Rabbinical, non-Kabbalistic Jews, often distorted into inoffensiveness by embarrassed Kabbalistic apologists, this mythical conception of the feminine principle of the Shekhinah as a providential guide of Creation achieved enormous popularity among the masses of the Jewish people, so showing that here the Kabbalists had uncovered one of the primordial religious impulses still latent in Judaism. (p. 105).

Christianity – Mother Mary

Mary, mother of Jesus, is not considered extensively in the Christian scriptures. Outside of five main episodes – the angelic annunciation of the forthcoming virgin birth, the visitation with Elizabeth, the nativity of Christ, presentation of Jesus in the temple, and the crucifixion, she is scarcely mentioned. In one brief episode she visited her son while he was teaching and was ignored (Mark 6: 31-34). However, Christ did acknowledge her at the crucifixion, telling John, “Behold thy Mother!” (John 19: 26-27).

Mary was not mentioned in the first version of the Nicene Creed of 325 CE, but acknowledged as the virgin mother of Christ in the revised version of the creed in 381 CE:

Jesus Christ who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost and of

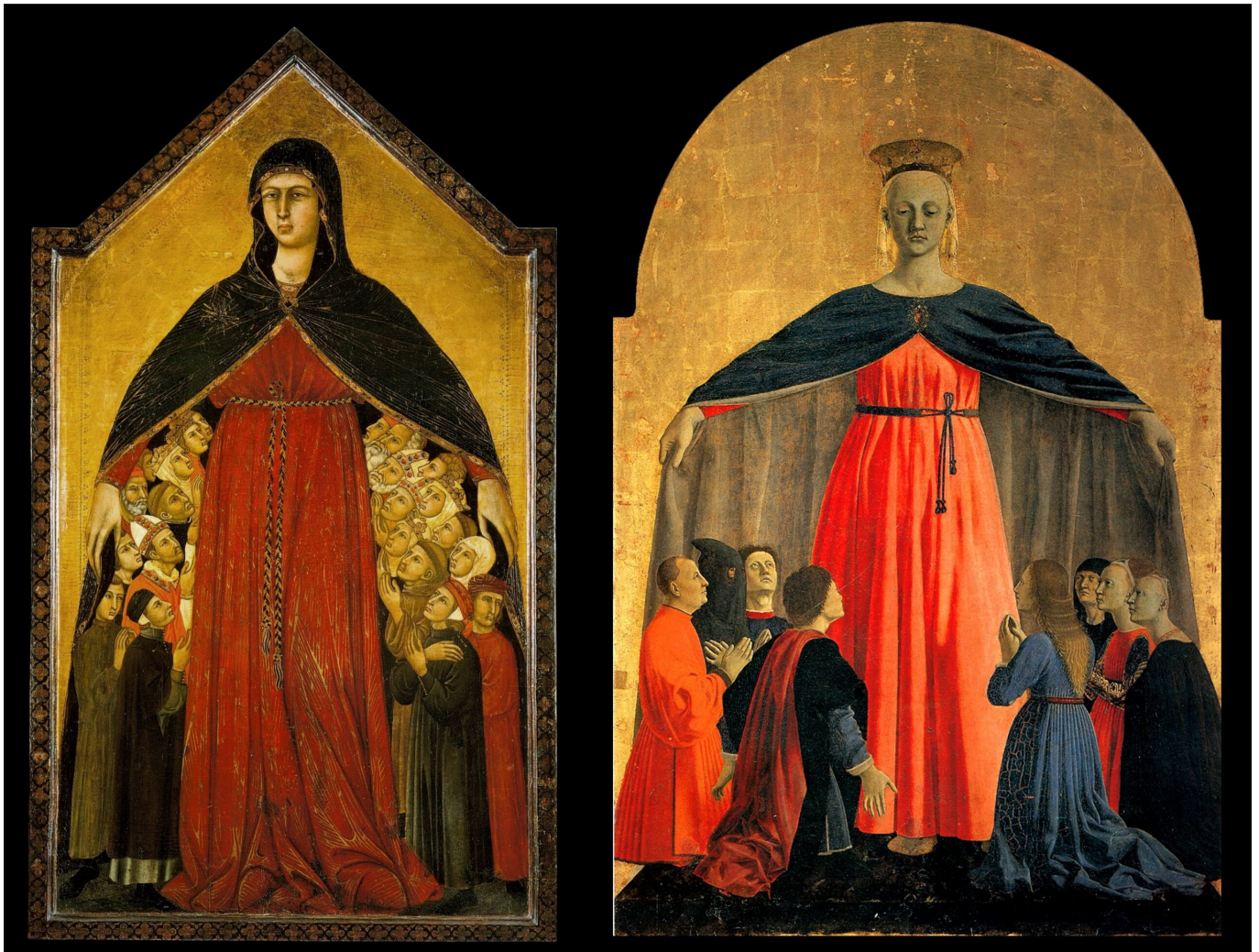
the Virgin Mary, and was made man

Since Christ was both God and Man, his mother was special – *Theotokos*, the bearer of God. This was first pronounced at the council of Ephesus in 431 CE. Mary the mother of God has been long venerated in the Eastern churches. The illustration below shows the mosaic (9th Century CE) in the cathedral (now mosque) of the *Hagia Sophia* (Holy Wisdom) in Constantinople, and the icon of Mary and the Infant Jesus of Vladimir (1131 CE).



After the turn of the 1st Millennium CE, Mary began to be more and more honored in the Western Church. No one really understands this change in religious feeling. Most of the new Gothic Cathedrals in France were dedicated to *Notre Dame* ("our Lady"), and special Lady Chapels were built in English cathedrals. Believers thronged to images of Mary for consolation and for mercy. The following illustration shows two representations of the *Madonna della Misericordia* ("Lady

of Mercy”), by Simone Martini (1310) and Piero della Francesca (1462).



Various traditions and beliefs have accumulated over the years so that now Marianism is an acknowledged subset of Christian beliefs, particularly in the Eastern and Roman Catholic Churches (Johnston, 1985; Leith, 2021; Matter, 1983; Rubin, 2009). In 1568 the *Ave Maria* was included in the Roman Catholic Breviary. The most famous setting of the prayer is by Gounod (1859) based on Bach's Prelude No 1 (1722).

Ave Maria, gratia plena,
Mary, full of grace,
Dominus tecum
is with thee
benedicta tu in mulieribus
thou amongst women,

Hail

the Lord

Blessed art

et benedictus fructus ventris tuis, Jesu	and blessed is
the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.	
Sancta Maria, Mater dei,	Holy Mary,
Mother of God,	
ora pro nobis peccatoribus	pray for us
sinner,	
nunc et in hora mortis nostrae.	now and at
the hour of our death.	

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/13-Ave-Maria.m4a>

Theologians have long argued that Mary must have been herself conceived without sin so that she might carry the incarnation of God within her womb. This doctrine of the “immaculate conception” was discussed for many years, but only finally accepted by the Vatican in 1854. Since Mary was without sin, there was no need for her to die. Theologians therefore proposed that before her death she was instead taken up directly into heaven – “the assumption of the Virgin.” This idea finally becoming Catholic doctrine in 1950. Protestants reject both these doctrines. When it comes to Mary, the Christian churches have been loathe to allow their members the beliefs they long for.

Hinduism

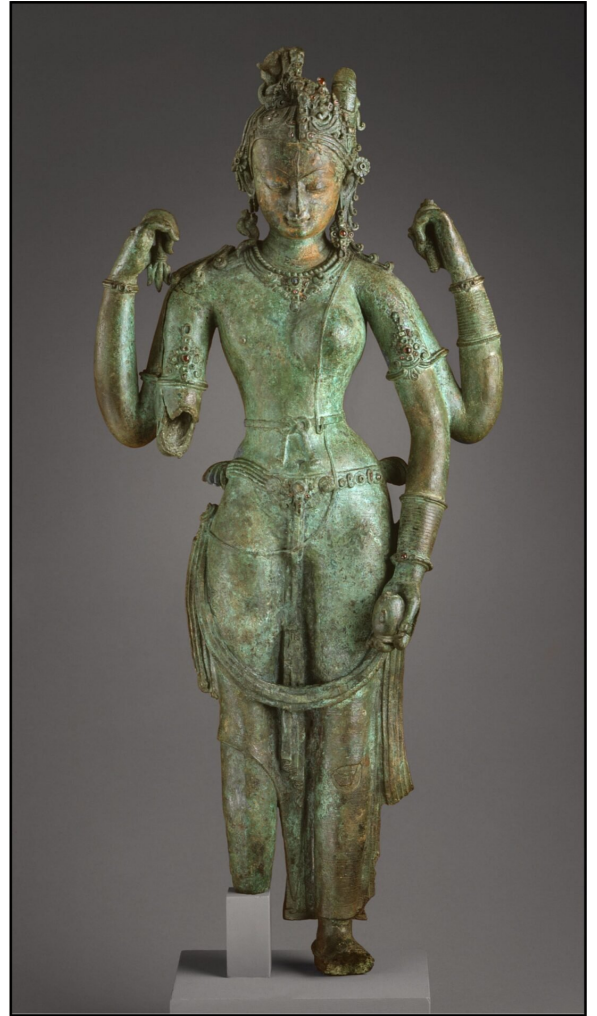
In contrast with the Western (or Abrahamic) religions, Hinduism is adorned with goddesses of many types and purposes (Kinsley, 1986; Pattanaik, 2000). Eroticism is an acknowledged part of divinity.

The supreme goddess *Mahadevi* is widely venerated. She changes form at will and goes by many names. She can exist alone as *Shakti*, the goddess of cosmic energy, or as Kali, the goddess

of time and change. The illustration below shows a bronze statue of *Bhudevi*, the “Goddess of the Earth” (13th Century CE) from the Los Angeles Museum of Art



The female goddess often serves as the consort of a male divinity – *Parvati* with *Shiva*, and *Lakshmi* with *Vishnu*. Sometimes these pairs become unified into one deity – the androgynous *Ardhanarishvara*, whose right side is feminine and left side male. The illustration below shows a sandstone relief of *Shiva and Parvati* (11th Century CE) from the Dallas Museum of Art, and a bronze *Ardhanarishvara* (circa 1000 CE) from the Los Angeles Museum of Art.



Buddhism

Buddhism is often considered as a religion without the need for gods or goddesses. Since the universe has existed forever there is no need to postulate a divine force that once created it. However, the Buddha in his various manifestations and many of his enlightened followers (the *Bodhisattvas*, from *bodhi*, knowledge, and *sattva*, being) are revered as sincerely as any of the gods in more definitely theistic religions.

The Buddha and most of the Bodhisattvas are male. The hierarchy of priests and monks in Buddhism are male (Faure, 2008). However, over the centuries the feminine has made its appearance.

One of the most important of the Bodhisattvas was known as *Avalokitasvara* – “the lord (*isvara*) who gazes (*lokita*) down (*ava*) at the world.” This Bodhisattva of Compassion is

described as the “Regarder of the Cries of the World” (Reeves, 2008) in Chapter 25 of the *Lotus Sutra* (the Sanskrit original deriving from the 1st century CE, Chinese translations occurring in the third to sixth Centuries CE).

As the centuries passed and as Buddhism spread from its origin in India to Tibet, China and South East Asia, *Avalokitasvara* changed into female form (Yü, 2000). In Tibet, the Bodhisattva became *Tara* (Blofeld, 1979; Shaw, 2006). Tara herself is manifest in many different ways. Among them are white Tara, the goddess of Compassion, and green Tara, the goddess of Enlightenment. The illustration below shows an Indian stone sculpture of *Avalokitasvara* (9th Century CE) and a gilt copper-alloy casting of *Tara* (14th Century CE) from Tibet or Nepal and now in the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena. *Avalokitasvara* is holding a lotus flower. Tara’s left hand shows the *mudra* (gesture) of teaching and her right hand the *mudra* of charity.



In China *Avalokitasvara* evolved into *Guanshiyin* (the Chinese translation of “the one who perceives the sounds of the world”) or *Guanyin* (pinyin; Kuan Yin in the Wade-Giles romanization). In Japan *Guanyin* became Kannon, re-assuming a male identity. The illustrations below shows a painted wooden carving of Guanyin (circa 1100 CE) in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas, and a colossal statue of Guanyin (2015) in the Tsz Shan Monastery in Hong Kong.



The Jesuits first arrived in China in the 16th Century. Christian concepts soon became part of life and culture in Southern China. One particular effect was the syncretism (from Greek *syn* together and *krassis* mixture) of *Guanyin* and the Virgin Mary (Paul, 1983; Reis-Habito, 1993). The illustration below from Pham (2021) shows two ivory carvings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York: a European representation of Mary (13th Century) and a Chinese representation of Guanyin (16th Century).



The Eternal Feminine

With the Scientific Revolution and the Age of the Enlightenment, reason began to exert itself in the affairs of the soul. The existence of God was either denied, or considered only in the abstract. However, cold reason could not handle the emotions, which came to the fore in the Romantic Movement. Feminine forces were the means to handle feelings.

At the end of Goethe's *Faust Part II* (1831), Faust, who had sold his soul to the devil in order to achieve knowledge and power, is saved from damnation by the intercession of female heavenly powers. Their final chorus in the play celebrates the power of the "Eternal Feminine."

Alles Vergängliche
Ist nur ein Gleichnis;
Das Unzulängliche
Hier wird's Ereignis;
Das Unbeschreibliche

All that has happened
Is only a parable;
The insufficient
Is now fulfilled;
The indescribable

Hier ist's getan;
Das Ewig-Weibliche
Zieht uns hinan.

Is now realized;
The Eternal Feminine
Leads us upward.

The chorus has been set to music by Schumann in his Scenes from Goethe's Faust (1853), Liszt in his Faust Symphony (1880) and by Mahler in his Symphony No 8 (1910). The following is the Mahler version:

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/9-12-Mahler_-Symphony-8-In-E-Flat.m4a

Theosophy



From 1875 to the middle of the 20th Century the Theosophical Movement exerted an uneasy influence on our thinking. Under

the initial direction of Helena Blavatsky (1831 -1891), the movement combined Western esotericism and spiritualism with Eastern religious thought, and added a dash of charlatanism. Theosophy did promote of peace in a world enamoured of war and it did increase Western understanding of Eastern spiritual ideas. However, it ultimately foundered on its own fakery. The illustration on the right shows a painting of *The Mother of the World* (1937) by the Theosophist painter and explorer Nicholas Roerich.

The Gaia Hypothesis

In the 1970s, studies of how the Earth's atmosphere constantly maintained parameters of temperature and pH that were optimum for the continuation of life led to the Gaia hypothesis, named after the Greek Goddess of the Earth, the primordial mother of all life:

the total ensemble of living organisms which constitute the biosphere can act as a single entity to regulate chemical composition, surface pH and possibly also climate. The notion of the biosphere as an active adaptive control system able to maintain the Earth in homeostasis we are calling the 'Gaia' hypothesis (Lovelock and Margulis, 1974)

According to the Gaia hypothesis, human life is just a component of a larger self-regulating organism, the planetary biosphere. Some are skeptical of this hypothesis, claiming it describes the Earth's process as determined by its future ends – teleological – rather than by its antecedent causes – mechanistic. However, just because science does not easily accommodate purpose does not mean that there is no underlying purpose to the universe.

The Gaia hypothesis has gained much recent support from the modern environmental movement. In some sense humanity has become a cancer on the life of the planet. Unchecked climate change threatens the homeostasis of the world and the life of

everyone.

Feminist Theology

During the past few decades, feminist philosophers have challenged the androcentricity of the Christianity and Judaism (Anderson, 1998; Christ, 2003; Goldenberg, 1979; Johnson, 1984, 1992). These thinkers have pointed out the unfairness and inappropriateness of restricting the priesthood to men. And they have criticized mainstream theology for its focus on logic at the expense of intuition. One cannot prove the existence of God, but one can feel it.

Many people handle the unknowns of life by believing in the ethical instructions and the explanatory narratives that are available in religion. Science does not teach us what to do and does not always get us through the night. By providing a purpose to life and by promising ways to approach suffering and death, religion can help. Feminist religion – “theology” (Goldenberg, 1979) with its stress on grace and compassion promises to be far more effective than present mainstream theology.

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Story of Job

Everyone knows the story of Job. A righteous man is tested by God. All that Job owns is taken away, all his children are killed, and he is struck down by disease. Job's friends advise him to seek God's forgiveness since he must have somehow offended Him. However, Job insists on his own righteousness. He does not repent. He demands an explanation for why he is being unjustly punished. An angry God appears unto Job in a whirlwind. He proclaims His workings to be far beyond the understanding of Job. He talks of Behemoth and Leviathan. He castigates Job's friends. He grants Job happiness and prosperity. He neither explains nor justifies what happened.

Everyone knows the story of Job. No one fully understands its meaning.

The Land of Uz

איש היה בארץ־עוץ
איוב שמו והיה
האיש ההוא תם וישר
וירא אלהים וסר
מֵרָע:

There was a man in the land
of Uz, whose name was Job;
and that man was perfect
and upright, and one that feared
God, and eschewed evil.

(Job 1:1)

Thus begins the story of Job. The text was likely written in the 6th or 5th Century BCE (Crenshaw, 2011; Pope, 1965). Job was a righteous man who worshipped God. The God he worshipped went by the name “Elohim” (אלהים). Job was not Jewish; his god was not Yahweh (Sawyer, 2011). Job made all of the appropriate sacrifices. A Byzantine illumination from the 11th Century CE (Papadaki-Oekland, 2009) shows him making a sacrifice and receiving a blessing from the hand of God.



No one is sure about the Land of Uz (Pope, 1965). Some have suggested that it is equivalent to the land of Edom to the south and east of Israel. This fits with the idea voiced in the later *Testament of Job* written in the 1st Century BCE (James, 1897) that Job was descended from Esau, the son of Isaac who ceded his birthright to his brother Jacob, and left to found the nation of Edom. Others have suggested that Uz is located in the Hauran district of Southern Syria. Arabic traditions consider the town of Sheikh Saad (also called Karnaim or Dair Ayyub – “monastery of Job”) as the home of Job and site of his tribulations. A third possibility is raised in one of the Dead Sea scrolls called the *War Scroll*, which mentions Uz as one of the lands “beyond the Euphrates” (Vermes, 2000, p. 124).

I prefer the third explanation since stories similar to that of Job existed in the ancient literature of Mesopotamia – the land between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. The oldest story, written in cuneiform on clay tablets, comes from Sumer and may date from 2500-2000 BCE (Pritchard, 2011, pp 352-357; Kramer, 1956/81, Chapter 15). In this story the author laments his undeserved suffering. Ultimately, God hears his cries and

turns "the man's suffering into joy." A later story, the *Babylonian Theodicy*, dated to 1500-1000 BCE is even more similar to the Hebrew story (Lambert, 1960, pp 63-91; Pritchard, 2011, pp 374-379). In it the persecuted man tells his troubles to a friend who, rather than offering comfort, accuses him of blasphemy. The following is an excerpt (Lambert, 1960, ll 72-80) in translation and in cuneiform:

Sufferer: In my youth I sought the will of my god;
With prostration and prayer I followed
my goddess

But I was bearing a profitless corvée
as a yoke

My god decreed instead of wealth
destitution

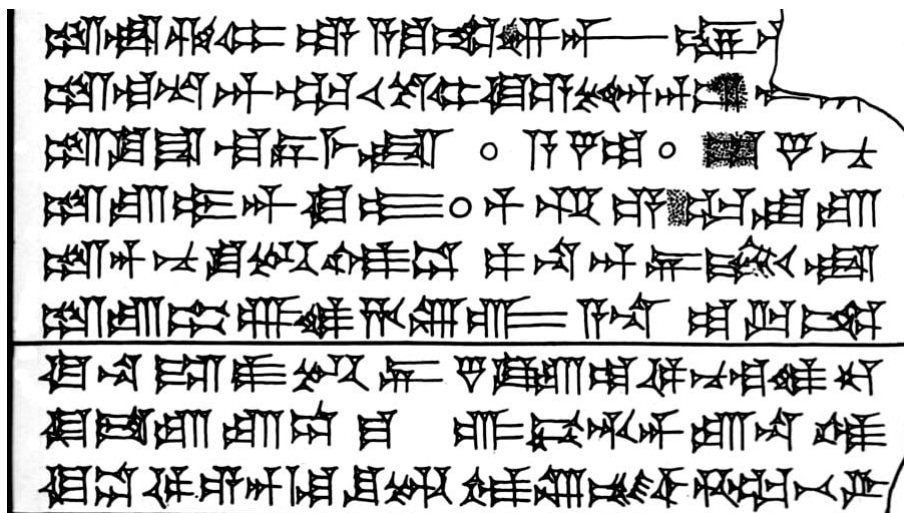
A cripple is my superior, a lunatic
outstrips me

The rogue has been promoted, but I
have been brought low.

Friend My reliable fellow, holder of knowledge,
your thoughts are perverse

You have forsaken right and blaspheme
against your god's designs.

In your mind you have an urge to
disregard the divine ordinances.



The Hebrew *Book of Job* is a far more complex and poetic creation than these Mesopotamian stories. The writer of Job may have heard these tales during the period of the Babylonian Captivity (597-539 BCE), and worked them into a poetic whole then or on his or her return to Jerusalem. The *Book of Job* does not directly mention the exile of the Jews. However, it might subtly reflect the idea that the people of Israel were for a while completely forsaken by their God.

Maimonides (1190, Chapter 22) considers the Land of Uz a fantasy. He points out that “uz” is the Hebrew verb “take counsel.” The name Uz is therefore an exhortation to study well this story.

... its basis is a fiction, conceived for the purpose of explaining the different opinions which people hold on Divine Providence.

Job’s name is as ambiguous as the land he lived in. On the one hand, it might derive from the root ‘yb meaning “enmity”; on the other hand, it might come from the root ‘ab indicating “repentance” (Pope, 1965). Is Job the enemy of God, or His repentant servant?

The Council of the Gods

After introducing us to its main character, the *Book of Job* takes us to Heaven where God has called a council. Amongst those gathered is one they call the “Adversary” (Alter, 2010) or the Satan, someone who is part the Lucifer of Isaiah, and part the Devil of later scriptures. The following is an illustration of the council from a Byzantine manuscript of the 11th century CE. God is represented only by his hand; the Adversary is dark and has been defaced.



God indicates his servant Job to the Adversary:

Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? (Job 1:8)

The Adversary claims that Job is only good because God treats him well. If he were not so well taken care of, he would curse God to his face. God refuses to believe this, and allows the Adversary to take away all that Job has, and ultimately to strike Job himself.

The Ruination of Job

The Adversary arranges for all Job's holdings to be stolen or killed and for his children to die. Job is bereft but curses not God. He accepts his fate in a verse that has become the focus of the Judeo-Christian funeral rites (Eisenberg & Wiesel, 1987, p 13).

Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. (Job 1: 21).

Although Job is not Jewish, this verse comes from the Jewish tradition. The Lord whose name is blessed is Yahweh.

Ultimately the Adversary strikes Job with a terrible disease. Job's wife urges him to curse God, but he rebukes her. Covered with boils he sits disconsolately "among the ashes" (Job 2:8). The Greek Septuagint and the 14th Century Wycliff Bible translate this as a "upon a dunghill," but this appears poetic license.

From ancient times human beings in mourning have covered themselves with ashes to signify bereavement and repentance. Ashes are particularly significant in Jewish history – the ashes of the first temple destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, the ashes of the second temple destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, and the ashes of the millions of Jews murdered and cremated by the Nazis in the 20th Century CE. Dust and ashes go back to Genesis. Adam is expelled from Eden with the words "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19), and Abraham admits to God that he is "but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27). Dust and ashes return later as the final words of Job.

The peace and prosperity of Job and his family at the beginning of the story is well characterized in the first of William Blake's illustrations for the *Book of Job* (Blake, 1821/1995). The cataclysm leading to the death of his children is the subject of his third illustration:



Job's Comforters

Three friends of Job – Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar – come to comfort him in his grief. They spend seven days and seven nights in silence with him. Only when Job finally speaks do they say anything. This is the way that those in mourning should be comforted: visitors should allow the bereaved to be quiet, and only speak when he or she initiates conversation.

After Job begins to talk, however, multiple debates follow. These form the bulk of the Book of Job – Chapters 3 to 27. Job describes the injustice of his situation. His friends attempt to show that it must in some way be his own fault. Job and his friends go through multiple exchanges, which are portrayed in exquisite Hebrew poetry, quite unlike the prose that describes the story of Job's downfall.

Job begins by cursing the day of his birth. For this I shall use the translation of Stephen Mitchell (1987), which is more colloquial than the King James Version:

God damn the day I was born
and the night that forced me from the womb.
On that day—let there be darkness;
let it never have been created;

let it sink back into the void.
Let chaos overpower it;
let black clouds overwhelm it;
let the sun be plucked from its sky.
Let oblivion overshadow it;
let the other days disown it;
let the aeons swallow it up.
On that night—let no child be born,
no mother cry out with joy.
Let sorcerers wake the Serpent
to blast it with eternal blight.
Let its last stars be extinguished;
let it wait in terror for daylight;
let its dawn never arrive.
For it did not shut the womb's doors
to shelter me from this sorrow.

Job's curse is remarkably similar to that of Jeremiah the prophet who lamented the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian Captivity (Eisenberg & Wiesel, 1987, p 60).

Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day
wherein my mother bare me be blessed.
Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying,
A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad.
(Jeremiah 20:14-15)

Job's friends attempt to demonstrate to Job that what has happened to him is just. He must have sinned in some way to warrant his misfortune. The illustration below shows Blake's view of Job's comforters casting accusing fingers at their friend. In the background is a large stone monument. Blake placed his land of Uz on the Salisbury plain.



Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar believe firmly in the idea that God rewards the good and punishes the evil. Job must therefore have sinned in some way. Their belief in Divine Providence is clearly expressed in the first of the *Psalms*:

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor

sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Eliphaz' first reply to Job restates this idea of divine justice:

Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?

Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.

By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed. (Job 4:7-9)

Eliphaz then recounts a dream (Job 4:12-21) that warns us not to question the justice of God (Blake's illustration is shown on the right. In 1815 Lord Byron wrote some lyrics for *Hebrew Melodies* that were composed by Isaac Nathan (Byron, 1815; Cochran, 2015). One of these lyrics was a translation of the dream of Eliphaz:

The face of immortality unveiled—
Deep sleep came down on every eye save mine—
And there it stood,—all formless—but divine;
Along my bones the creeping flesh did quake;
And as my damp hair stiffened, thus it spake:

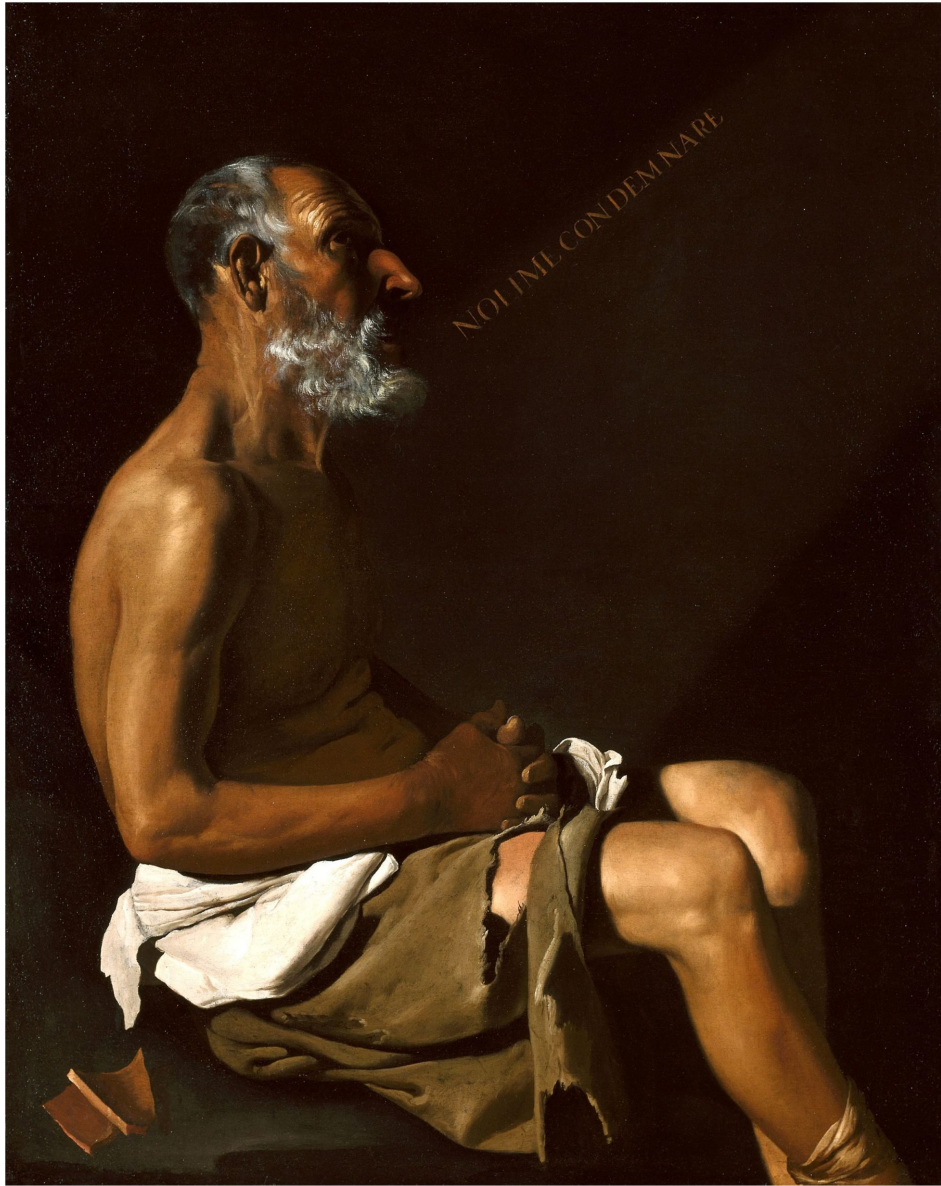


'Is man more just than God? Is man more pure
Than He who deems even seraphs insecure?
Creatures of clay—vain dwellers in the dust!
The moth survives you, and are ye more just?
Things of a day! you wither ere the night,
Heedless and blind to wisdom's wasted light!'

Nathan's music is not memorable. In 1854 the violinist Joseph Joachim wrote *Hebrew Melodies for Viola and Piano*. His music presents an impression rather than a setting of Byron's poems. The sound of the viola suits the pathos of Job. The following is the ending to the second movement played by Anna Barbara Dütschler and Marc Pantillon:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Hebrew-Melodies-II-Grave-ending.mp3>

Job insists that he has done no wrong and that his suffering is therefore unjust. He demands that God confront him with his sin. The illustration below shows a representation of Job attributed to an unknown Spanish painter from the early 17th Century. Some have suggested that the painter might actually have been the young Velasquez (Terrien, 1996). Job says unto God "Noli me condemnare" – "Do not condemn me" (Job 10:2).



Only do not two things unto me: then will I not hide myself from thee.

Withdraw thine hand far from me: and let not thy dread make me afraid.

Then call thou, and I will answer: or let me speak, and answer thou me.

How many are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin. (Job 13: 20-23)

Job describes the transience of human life in verses that recall *Ecclesiastes*, and remonstrates that God should judge him rather than pity him:

Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble.

He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.

And doth thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? (Job 14:1-3)

Then he asks God not to deprive him so much during his brief time on earth that he not be able to accomplish something:

Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;

Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.

For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease.

Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground;

Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. (Job 14:5-9)

Sins of Omission

After a while Job's insistence on his own innocence becomes tiresome. No one is perfect. Indeed, as Wiesel points out a true *Tzadik* ("righteous one") would never proclaim his own goodness (Wiesel & Eisenberg, 1987, p 32). Even if he has done no wrong, he may not have done sufficient good. In one of his speeches (Job 22), Eliphaz accuses Job of not giving water to the weary or bread to the hungry. Job does not immediately reply to this rebuke. Later (Job 29-31) he insists that he always helped the poor and the orphans. But was this sufficient? Job remained rich and the poor remained poor.

Wiesel retells a story from the Midrash that attempts to explain why Job's appeals to God are initially met with

silence (Wiesel & Eisenberg, 1987, p 22-23). When asked by Moses to “let my people go,” the Pharaoh consulted three counselors: Jethro, Billam and Job. Jethro urged the Pharaoh to agree, Billam rejected the proposal, and Job stayed silent. The Midrash insists that when faced with the suffering of others one must not remain neutral. Not to attempt to prevent evil is as great a sin as the evil itself.

The Redeemer

The debates continue between Job and his friends. At one point, Job calls upon a redeemer or a “vindicator” to bear witness to his righteousness.

Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh?

Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book!

That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!

For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God (Job 19: 22-26)

Christians have taken this passage as a prophecy of Christ. George Frideric Handel set the last two of these verses for soprano in his *Messiah* of 1741. The Christian interpretation does not make sense. According to Christian teachings, Christ came to save the sinners not to vindicate the righteous.

Who then is this “vindicator”? Job is appealing to someone in God’s entourage to serve as his advocate. In his *Answer to Job*, Jung (1956/2010) suggests that Job’s god has many aspects. The very name of God – Elohim – is in the plural. God is both good and evil – Satan is as much a part of him as Christ. God is both knowing and unknowing. According to Hebrew traditions, Wisdom or Sophia was part of God from the

beginning. In the Proverbs Wisdom describes herself as being with God from before the creation of the universe:

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.

I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water.

Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:

While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world.

When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth:

When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep:

When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth (Proverbs 8:22-29)

Christians often take this as indicating that God the Father and God the Son were together from the beginning. This fits with the idea that Christ was the word or *logos*, a concept similar to wisdom. However, this is not the meaning of the idea in the Hebrew bible and Christ is not the advocate to whom Job calls.

The *Book of Job* also contains a full chapter devoted to Wisdom (Job 28). Many commentators believe it to be a later interpolation. However, it fits nicely at the end of the disputation between Job and his comforters:

Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding?

Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air.

Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof

with our ears.

God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof.

For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven;

To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure.

When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder:

Then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out.

And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding. (Job 28 :20-28)

After Job makes his final statement of innocence, he is rudely interrupted by Elihu, a brash young man who cannot understand why foolish old Job does not recognize the justice of God. Most commentators consider this section of the book (Chapters 32-37) to be a later interpolation. One possibility is that it is the work of a young scribe who, when copying the initial version of book, became frustrated with Job's refusal to acknowledge justice and inserted more argument for the benefit of the reader. Wiesel (p 390) remarks that some Talmudists have suggested that Elihu might be Satan in disguise, muddying the waters of the argument.

Yahweh's Response to Job

After Elihu's diatribe, God suddenly appears to Job. Yahweh – this is indeed the one true God – describes the creation and maintenance of the universe. This exuberant paean to the wonders of the world is expressed in some of the most beautiful poetry in the Bible.

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?

Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee,
and answer thou me.

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?
declare, if thou hast understanding.

Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who
hath stretched the line upon it?

Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid
the corner stone thereof;

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of
God shouted for joy?

Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as
if it had issued out of the womb?

When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick
darkness a swaddlingband for it,

And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and
doors,

And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here
shall thy proud waves be stayed? (Job 38:1-11)

On the left below is William Blake's illustration of the
appearance of God in the whirlwind, and on the right is his
image of the sons of God. In 1930 Ralph Vaughan Williams set
this latter image to music as part of his *Job, a Masque for
Dancing*. This particular piece is called *Pavane for the Sons
of Morning*, a slow and stately dance appropriate to the
majesty of creation.



https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/vaughan_williams_job_pavane_sons_morning2020.mp3

The Patience of Job

Many different interpretations have been provided for the story of Job. The most common focuses on the patience of Job. In the Epistle of James (5:11) we have

Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

The idea is that if we are patient everything will turn out fine. In the 2011 movie *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* the hotel manager Sonny (Dev Patel) claims "Everything will be all right in the end and if it's not all right, then it's not yet the end." This saying has been attributed to John Lennon, but it is probably just

an old Indian proverb, similar to the thought of *Ecclesiastes* 7:8:

Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

The *Testament*

of *Job* and the mention of Job in the *Qur'an* (sura 21:83) both stress

the idea of Job's patience and God's mercy in his time of adversity. Joseph

Roth's novel *Job* (1931) tells the story of a good and pious Jew from the

Pale of Settlement who undergoes much suffering but is finally rewarded in his old age.

The Justice of God

The interpretation of Job as a man who patiently awaits the mercy of God misses the great poetic center of the book. The debates between Job and his friends deal with theodicy – the justice (*dike*) of God (*theos*). If God is just then righteousness should be rewarded and evil should be punished. This is not the case. Suffering occurs without regard to innocence or guilt.

The term "theodicy" originated with Leibniz's book *Theodicy* (1710), based on his discussion of the problem of suffering with Queen Sophie of Prussia. The understanding of suffering for those who live in comfort differs from the experience of those who survive in poverty (Guttierrez, 1987). Leibniz argued that God chose to create a world with as much good in it as possible. Though this entailed some concurrent evil, the optimal world contained much more good than world completely devoid of evil. Leibniz' idea that this is the "best of all possible worlds" was ridiculed by Voltaire in *Candide* (1759).

The philosophical problems concerning God and justice have been discussed for centuries (Draper, 1989; Laato & de Moor, 2003; Hume, 1799; Illman, 2003; Larrimore, 2013, Chapter 4; Sarot, 2003; Surin, 1986; Tooley, 2015), and are beyond the scope of this posting. The main problem of theodicy has to do with the concept of God as an omnipotent and omnibenevolent entity. In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1799), David Hume states the basic trilemma of theodicy, attributing it to Epicurus:

Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil? (Section X)

Whence then is evil? The question of evil became acute during the 20th Century with the Holocaust (Wollaston, 2011). How could God have allowed this to occur? In his memoir *La Nuit* (1958), Elie Wiesel recounts how in Auschwitz he took Job's part and railed against God. He later described how certain great Talmudic masters convened a rabbinic court in Auschwitz to indict the Almighty for failing to protect His people (Wiesel, 1980). After hearing witnesses, and following due deliberation, the court pronounced a verdict of guilty. After a brief but profound silence, the judges moved on to evening prayer. Wiesel (1978) later wrote a play about *The Trial of God* (1979), though he distanced it from his experience by placing it in the fictional Ukrainian village of Shamgorod in the immediate aftermath of a pogrom that happened there three centuries before.

MacLeish's 1958 play *J.B.* tells the story of the complete ruin and ultimate redemption of a successful American businessman. In a framing story, two out-of-work actors using masks play the parts of God ("Mr. Suss" from Zeus) and Satan ("Nickles" from "Old Nick", an ancient name for the Devil, perhaps coming from "Old Iniquity"). In the Broadway debut these roles were played by Raymond Massey and Christopher Plummer (illustrated on the right). Hume's question about the omnipotence and omnibenevolence of God is presented in in Nickles' song



I heard upon his dry dung heap
That man cry out who cannot sleep:
"If God is God He is not good,
If God is good He is not God;
Take the even, take the odd,
I would not sleep here if I could
Except for the little green leaves in the wood
And the wind on the water."

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/nickles-song-x.mp3>

In *A Masque of Reason* (1945), the American poet Robert Frost has God discuss with Job the meaning of his story. The portrait on the right shows the poet in full didactic mode as photographed by Yousef Karsh in 1958. As Frost points out, the story of Job brings to an end the idea that a Divine Justice rewards and punishes each individual based on his or her behavior. We are not guaranteed our just deserts:

I've had you on my mind a thousand years
To thank you someday for the way you helped me

Establish once for all the principle
There's no connection man can reason out
Between his just deserts and what he gets.
Virtue may fail and wickedness succeed.
'Twas a great demonstration we put on.
I should have spoken sooner had I found
The word I wanted. You would have supposed
One who in the beginning was the Word
Would be in a position to command it.
I have to wait for words like anyone.
Too long I've owed you this apology
For the apparently unmeaning sorrow
You were afflicted with in those old days.
But it was of the essence of the trial
You shouldn't understand it at the time.
And it came out all right. I have no doubt
You realize by now the part you played
To stultify the Deuteronomist
And change the tenor of religious thought.
My thanks are to you for releasing me
From moral bondage to the human race.
The only free will there at first was man's,
Who could do good or evil as he chose.
I had no choice but I must follow him
With forfeits and rewards he understood—
Unless I liked to suffer loss of worship.
I had to prosper good and punish evil.
You changed all that. You set me free to reign.
You are the Emancipator of your God,
And as such I promote you to a saint.

Job is indeed commemorated as a Christian Saint in the Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

A Scent of Water

In his discussion of theodicy in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1799), Hume concludes that the forces that

drive the universe are neither benevolent or malevolent. Rather the original source of all things is indifferent, and has no more regard to good above ill than to heat above cold, or to drought above moisture, or to light above heavy. (Section XI).

These thoughts are remarkably similar to those of Marvin Pope in the conclusion to his introduction to *Job* (1965, p lxxvii)

Viewed as a whole, the book presents profundities surpassing those that may be found in any of its parts. The issues raised are crucial for all men and the answers attempted are as good as have ever been offered. The hard facts of life cannot be ignored or denied. All worldly hopes vanish in time. The values men cherish, the little gods they worship—family, home, nation, race, sex, wealth, fame—all fade away. The one final reality appears to be the process by which things come into being, exist, and pass away. This ultimate Force, the Source and End of all things, is inexorable. Against it there is no defense. Any hope a man may put in anything other than this First and Last One is vain. There is nothing else that abides. This is God. He gives and takes away. From Him we come and to Him we return. Confidence in this One is the only value not subject to time.

But how can a man put his faith in such an One who is the Slayer of all? Faith in Him is not achieved without moral struggle and spiritual agony. The foundation of such a faith has to be laid in utter despair of reliance on any or all lesser causes and in resignation which has faced and accepted the worst and the best life can offer. Before this One no man is clean. To Him all human righteousness is as filthy rags. The transition from fear and hatred to trust and even love of this One—from God the Enemy to God the Friend and Companion—is the pilgrimage of every man of faith. Job's journey from despair to faith is the way each mortal must go.

The description does not differ much from the scientific view of Nature (e.g. Williams, 1993). Is there anything beyond this view? Does God exist in any way other than as an impersonal force? Is there any reason for human beings to have faith in this God or in its goals? Does Nature have a goal toward which it is moving or does everything occur by chance? Can human beings significantly alter the course of Nature?

Perhaps in the poetry of Job we might find some inkling that the universe is proceeding towards something that is good rather than evil (Janzen, 2009). And that we can perhaps contribute in some way to this evolution. As we have already considered, at the center of his story, Job asked God to allow him time to accomplish something:

Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;

Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.

For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease.

Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground;

Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. (Job 14:5-9)

The idea of the rain bringing forth new life recurs throughout the *Book of Job*. Yahweh mentions it in his description of the thunder, and Nickles mentions the “little green leaves” in his song about the nature of God. This continual rebirth makes us wonder whether there is some mindfulness behind Nature’s apparent randomness. And makes us wonder whether we might somehow contribute to this purpose.

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Music of the Viola

The viola is much under-rated. The instrument is difficult to play and its sound box is not optimal for its range of notes. Violists are the butt of numerous jokes maligning their tuning and their timing. Nevertheless, in the hands of a master, the viola has a wonderfully rich sound, melancholy in its low register and silvery in the high. Of all the strings it is perhaps most similar to the normal human voice.

Early History

The modern viola first appeared in the late 16th century (Riley, 1991). Until then string music had been played on viols of various sizes. These had evolved from guitar-like instruments, but were played with a bow rather than plucked. Most viols were held between the legs (*da gamba*), although the smaller ones were occasionally played on the arm (*da braccio*). Viols typically had 6 strings.

In the 16th

and 17th centuries, the luthiers in Cremona, Northern Italy – Andrea

Amati and his sons, Antonio Stradivari, Andrea Guarneri, and others – produced

a new kind of stringed instrument with 4 strings. They used four sizes to fit

the normal vocal ranges: violin (soprano), viola (tenor, alto), cello (baritone)

and bass (bass). Different sized violas were initially made for the tenor and

alto ranges, but as time passed one viola was used for both.

Music for the

viola is written in the alto clef.

The viola is

larger than the violin, with a length that varies between 38cm and 43 cm compared to the

violin's 35.5 cm. The viola bow is a little heavier than that of the violin. The

viola's sound box is smaller than it should be for its range of notes. This can

be seen by comparing the sizes of violin, viola, cello and bass – the viola is

closer in size to the violin than to the cello rather than intermediate between

the two. This is necessary if the instrument is to be played on the arm:



Violin, viola, cello, bass

Because it was difficult to play and largely used to complete the middle notes of the harmony rather than to play the melody, the viola was not popular with string players.

The viola section of the symphony orchestra often came to be filled with failed violinists. The following is a comment from 1766:

The viola is commonly regarded as of little importance in the musical establishment. The reason may well be that it is often played by persons who are either still beginners in the ensemble or have no particular gifts with which to distinguish themselves on the violin, or that the instrument yields all too few advantages to its players, so that able people are not easily persuaded to take it up.

(Quantz, 1766, quoted by Boyden and Woodward, 2001)

In recent years several luthiers have tried to make the viola more resonant and easier to play. An intriguing modern viola is the Viola Pellegrina of David Ravinus, which accentuates the volume of the sound box by using a novel shape and tilts

the board and neck to facilitate the fingering. Rudolf Haken has recorded using a Viola Pellegrina. The following figure compares it to a Stradivari violin named after one of its first owners, the Count of Archinto:



Early Viola Music

The viola serves to play the middle notes in the harmony. Most early string music used it simply for this purpose. Themes were introduced and carried by the violins or the cellos. Several pieces of classical chamber music, such as Mozart's viola quintets, benefit immensely from the subtle harmonizing of the viola, but for the most part the viola is not heard separately from the ensemble. Concertos written for the viola, e.g. by Carl Stamitz, Alessandro Rolla and Franz Anton

Hoffmeister, were few and are unfortunately now rarely played.

The most important piece of classical music for the viola is Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante for violin and viola in E-flat major K.364/320d*, composed in 1779, The following is an excerpt from the Andante movement played by Itzhak Perlman and Pinchas Zukerman, with Zubin Mehta conducting the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Huberman Festival, Tel Aviv, 1982:

Harold in Italy

In the early 1830's the great violinist Niccolò Paganini was very impressed by the *Symphonie fantastique* of Hector Berlioz. Having just acquired a Stradivari viola he commissioned Berlioz to write a concerto for the viola. Berlioz was not familiar with the viola but included it in his *Harold en Italie, Symphonie avec un alto principal*, Op. 16, loosely based on Byron's poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Paganini admired the work but found that the sections for the solo viola were not really sufficient to justify his playing it (Kawabata, 2004). He was right. The work is wonderfully tuneful but the solo viola, playing the part of Harold, makes only occasional comments on the orchestral action. The *cor anglais* plays almost as prominent a solo part in the work as the viola. The following excerpt is the ending to the third movement (*Sérénade d'un montagnard des Abruzzes*), with Harold (Gérard Caussé) meditating on the celebrations.

Cinderella no More

Lionel Tertis

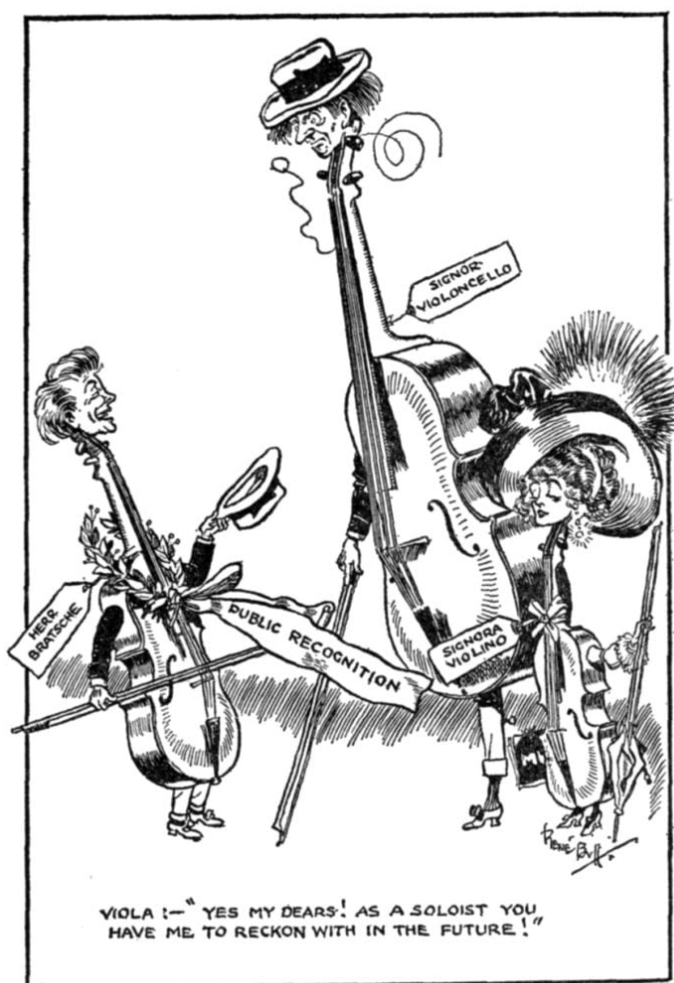
(1876-1975) was the first modern viola virtuoso (Tertis, 1953, 1974; White, 2006). Initially trained in the violin at the Royal Academy of Music in London, he took up the viola toward the end of his studies. He quickly taught himself techniques to enhance the sound of the viola and decided to become the instrument's champion, setting out to challenge the violin's dominance in string music. Interestingly, Pablo Casals who was to become the champion of the cello was born in the same year as Tertis.



Lionel Tertis

At the end of the 19th century, Tertis was widely heard in chamber music concerts, and by 1903 he was the first viola in the Queen's Hall Orchestra. He was popular, and provided his

fans with souvenir postcards signed "Yours very sincerely, Lionel Tertis" (see illustration on the right). At the Royal Academy, he taught many new viola students, among them Rebecca Clarke. At the Royal Academy he also interacted with York Bowen, Benjamin Dale and Arnold Bax, all of whom composed works for the viola. Full of enthusiasm and talent, Tertis quickly brought the viola out of obscurity and made it recognized as a solo instrument. This striking change gave him the title of his first autobiography: *Cinderella no more* (1953).



Cartoon by Rene Bull included in a program for a concert by Lionel Tertis at the Wigmore Hall in 1911

Tertis concertized widely in Britain, Europe and America. In Berlin in 1907, together with York Bowen he played *Brahms Sonata for Viola in E-flat major Opus 120, No 2*, *Dale's Suite for Viola*, and *York Bowen's Viola Sonata Opus 18* to great

applause(White, 2006, p 18). Brahms' viola sonatas were initially written for clarinet but were adapted by Brahms himself for the viola. To give some sense of the Berlin program the following is an excerpts from the beginning of the third movement of the Brahms sonata (*Andante con moto*) as played by William Primrose with Gerald Moore on piano (a 1937 recording). Primrose was Tertis's successor as the world's leading violist:

The beginning of the Bowen Sonata (*Allegro moderato*) as played by Matthew Jones (viola) and Michael Hampton follows:

In Paris in 1920 Tertis found a viola made in 1717 by Domenico Montagnana a master luthier based in Venice. With a body that was 17 1/8 inches (43.5 cm) long, the viola was larger than most other violas. The instrument was in pieces and without a case. Tertis had it repaired and played it from 1920 to 1937. It is currently played by Roger Chase.

Tertis recorded extensively for Vocalion (1919-1923), and for Columbia (1924-1933). Many of the recorded pieces were adapted by Tertis from music originally written for other instruments or for voice. Among the transcriptions was Bach's sacred song *Komm, süßer Tod*, BWV 478. The words are from an unknown poet. The first verse follows; the whole poem is online.

Komm, süßer Tod, komm sel'ge Ruh!
Komm führe mich in Friede,
weil ich der Welt bin müde,
ach komm! ich wart auf dich,
komm bald und führe mich,
drück mir die Augen zu.
Komm, sel'ge Ruh!

Come, sweet death, come, blessed rest!
Come lead me to peace
because I am weary of the world,
O come! I wait for you,
come soon and lead me,
close my eyes.
Come, blessed rest!

This Bach song was
also transcribed for orchestra in 1946 by Leopold Stokowski.
The full
orchestral version is powerful. Tertis' 1925 recording is
heart-breaking. We
have grown to love sad songs and the viola sings them well.

Bach Cello Suites

Bach's *Suites for Solo Cello* have been transcribed many times
for viola (Tatton, 2011). These transcriptions began in 1916.
The music sounds quite different on the viola, but it is still
as fascinating and as beautiful as on the cello. The following
are some excerpts for comparison. First the beginning of the
Sarabande from the 4th Suite as played by Pierre Fournier on
cello and then by Maxim Rysanov on viola:

And then the first *Bourrée* from the same suite:

Rysanov uses the 1998 transcription of Simon Rowland-Jones.
Although I originally thought that the suites were
inextricably bound to the cello, I have grown very fond of the
viola arrangements.

The Berkshire Festival

In 1918 Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, a rich American heiress,
founded the Berkshire Music Festival in the hills of western
Massachusetts. Although it later evolved into the Berkshire

Symphonic Festival at Tanglewood, it was initially devoted to chamber music. Part of the festival involved a competition for composers of new chamber music. In the second year of the festival the chosen instrumentation for the competition was viola and piano. Out of 73 entrants, two tied for first place: Ernest Bloch's *Suite for Viola* and Rebecca Clarke's *Sonata for Viola*. Elizabeth Coolidge herself cast the deciding vote for the Bloch suite.



Ernest Bloch

Ernest Bloch (1880-1959) was born in Switzerland and came to the USA in 1916. The photo on the right is from 1917. After the competition he went on to a very successful career in composition and teaching. His music uses both ancient and modern harmonies, but is immediately appealing. Many of his compositions are related to Jewish traditions, such as the *Suite Hebraïque for viola and piano* of 1951.



Rebecca Clarke

Rebecca Clarke (1889-1979) studied viola at the Royal Academy of Music with Lionel Tertis. She came to the United States in 1916 and supported herself by performing both in chamber ensembles and as a soloist. The photo at the right is from 1919. She also composed music, especially for the viola, and performed her compositions as part of her performances.

The Berkshire Festival competition was the closest that Rebecca Clarke came to appropriate recognition for her compositions. Years later she called it her "one little whiff of success." No one was sure who Rebecca Clarke was. The general opinion was that a woman could not produce such fine music. Some even suggested that the name was a pseudonym for Ernest Bloch! In 1923, Elizabeth Coolidge commissioned a *Trio for Piano, Violin and Cello*. Thereafter she continued her career as a violist and occasionally composed music. Most of Clarke's compositions, however, were performed by her in concerts and not published until after her death. There is an

excellent website about her life and work.

The following excerpts provide a taste of the 1919 Berkshire competition. The first is the *Allegro ironico* movement of Bloch's suite played by Paul Neuberger, accompanied by Margo Garrett:

And the second is the comparable *Vivace* movement from Clarke's sonata, played by Paul Coletti and Leslie Howard.

It has become fashionable to suggest that Clarke probably would have won the competition if she had not been a woman. Myself, I prefer the Clarke. However, I am not sure how much of this is related to the performers rather than to the actual compositions.

The Viola and the Voice

The viola has a particular affinity for the human voice. In 1884 Brahms published *Two Songs for Alto, Piano and Viola*, Opus 91 (Miyake, 2018). The lyrics of the first song (*Gestillte Sehnsucht* – Longing soothed) are from a poem by Thomas Rückert, the first verse of which is given below (and the whole poem is available online).

In gold'nen Abendschein getauchet,
Wie feierlich die Wälder stehn!
In leise Stimmen der Vöglein hauchet
Des Abendwindes leises Weh'n.
Was lispeln die Winde, die Vögelein?
Sie lispeln die Welt in Schlummer ein.

Bathed in golden evening light,
How solemnly the forests stand!

The soft voices of the birds breathe
The wafting of the evening winds
What do the winds and birds whisper?
They whisper the world to sleep.

The following is the
beginning of *Gestillte Sehnsucht* sung
by Janet Baker with Cecil Aronowitz on viola and André Previn
on piano.

The viola beautifully portrays human singing in transcriptions
of folk-songs and carols. The *Sussex Mummers' Carol* was
originally collected in 1880 by Mrs. Lucy Broadwood and
published in 1908. Percy Grainger composed a piano version of
the carol in 1915, and also arranged the piece for viola and
piano. The first two verses are:

When righteous Joseph
wedded was
Unto a virtuous maid
A glorious angel from Heaven came
Unto that virtuous maid.

O mortal man, remember
well
When Christ our Lord was born;
He was crucified betwixt two thieves,
And crownèd with the thorn.

The text of the complete carol is available online. The
following excerpt is the beginning of Grainger's viola
arrangement as played by Paul Coletti and Leslie Howard:

This can be
compared to the how the carol sounds in the voices of the

Choir of St Paul's

Cathedral (directed by John Scott) singing wordlessly:

In 1944 Rebecca Clarke wrote a viola transcription of an old Scottish ballad *I'll bid my heart be still*. The tune is centuries old (Graham, 1849, Volume III, p. 84). The Scottish poet Thomas Pringle (1789-1834) wrote the modern words (Pringle, 1839, p 168). The song laments the death of a lover in battle. The first two verses are:

I'll bid my heart be still,
And check each struggling sigh;
And there's none e'er shall know
My soul's cherish'd woe,
When the first tears of sorrow are dry.

They bid me cease to weep
For glory gilds his name;
But the deeper I mourn,
Since he ne'er can return
To enjoy the bright noon of his fame!

Again, it is interesting to compare excerpts from the vocal and viola versions. The raw *capella* voice is that of Sylvia Tyson from the 1965 Ian and Sylvia album *Early Morning Rain*, and the viola and piano performance is by Philip Dukes and Sophia Rahman.

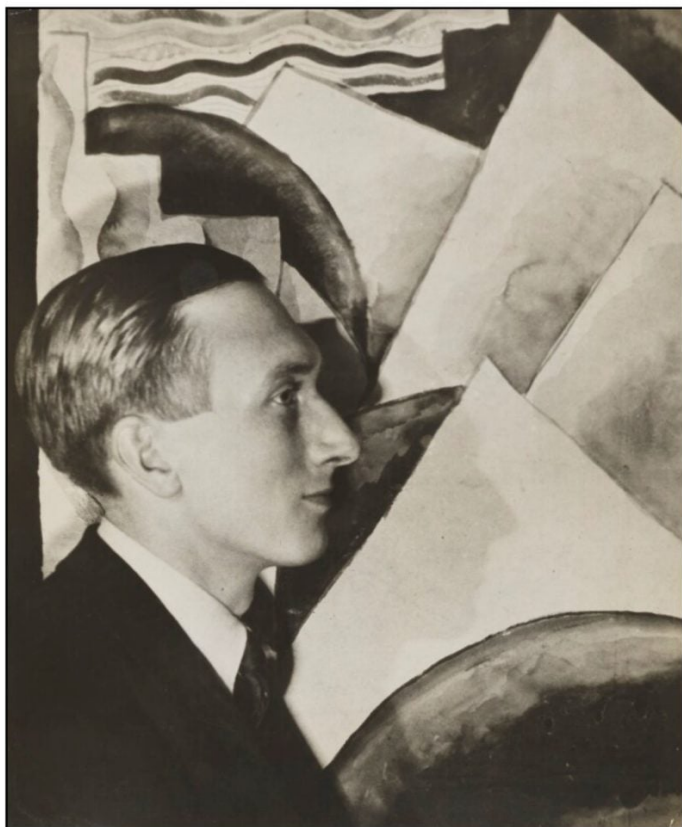
Ralph Vaughan

Williams (1872-1958) used British folk music extensively in his compositions.

The following is the beginning of the *Ballade* movement from his 1934 *Suite for Viola and Orchestra* performed in the composer's own reduction for viola and piano

by Tina Cayouette and Mariane Patenaude. The piece portrays the idea of singing rather than a specific song.

Walton's Concerto



William Walton

Cecil Beaton's 1926 photograph of William Walton (1902-1983) portrays him against a cubist background that Beaton had painted himself. The intent was to present Walton as Britain's modernist composer. And indeed, many of his compositions broke with traditions putting forth new rhythms and harmonics. Yet, at heart he was still a romantic. His music was emotional rather than dry, lush rather than austere – "the reaction of a mind fundamentally romantic to the events in a most unromantic world" (Avery, 1947).

Walton's *Concerto*

for Viola and Orchestra in A minor (1929) is considered by many as his most important composition. The concerto was written for Tertis, but he initially found it too modern and Paul Hindemith played the premiere.

Breaking with tradition, its first movement, is an *Andante comodo*. Walton greatly admired Prokofiev's first violin concerto (1923), which had begun in this way and there are notable similarities between the works. The following is the beginning of the first movement as played by Helen Callus with Marc Taddei conducting the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Against the growling of the orchestra the viola claims its rights and interweaves its song with the flute.

At the end of the concerto's third and final movement the themes of the first are recalled:

Walton had written the concerto for Lionel Tertis, but he thought the music too modern. The soloist at the premiere was Paul Hindemith. Over the years various violists, such as William Primrose and Frederick Riddle worked with Walton to improve the solo viola part, and Walton reduced the size of the orchestra before the concerto came to its final form in 1962 (Dunham, 2006).

Epilogue

After Tertis the viola came into its own as a solo instrument. Composers such as Cecil Forsyth (1903), York Bowen (1908), Paul Hindemith, (1925), Darius Milhaud (1929, 1955), Bela Bartok

(1945), and Arthur Schnittke (1985) have written important viola concertos. The sonata for viola and piano has provided composers with a form especially suited to inner feelings. One of the most powerful of these sonatas was Dimitri Shostakovich's last composition: the *Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 147* (1975). Music for solo viola has also become important. This posting ends with the *Langsam mit viel Ausdruck* (slowly with much expression) movement of Paul Hindemith's 1922 *Sonata for Solo Viola Opus 25, No. 1* played by Kim Kashkashian:

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Antigone

Sophocles' play *Antigone* tells the story of a young woman who defies the laws of the state in order to do what she believes is right. The issues considered in the play remain as important now as they were almost two and a half millennia ago. Should one follow one's conscience or obey the law? Does justice transcend the law? How does one determine what is right?

In the words of Hegel, Antigone is

one of the most sublime and in every respect most excellent

works of art of all time. Everything in this tragedy is logical; the public law of the state is set in conflict over against inner family love and duty to a brother; the woman, Antigone, has the family interest as her 'pathos', Creon, the man, has the welfare of the community as his. (Hegel, 1975, p 464).

The word *pathos* most commonly means the quality of something that evokes pity. However, Hegel uses the word to denote "an inherently justified power over the heart, an essential content of rationality and freedom of will" (p 232). Pathos is the emotional commitment that defines a person – his or her driving passion. Sophocles' play presents the conflict of these passions.

The Theban Myths

In order to understand *Antigone* we need to know what has happened before the play begins. Antigone (441 BCE) was the first of what are now known as Sophocles' three Theban Plays, the others being *Oedipus Tyrannus* (429 BCE) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (409 BCE). The plays were not conceived as a trilogy and *Antigone* was written before the other two. Aeschylus had also written three plays about Thebes but the initial two of these (about *Laius* the father of Oedipus and his version of *Oedipus*) have been lost. Only the third remains: *Seven Against Thebes* (467 BCE), which describes the siege of Thebes by the Argives. *Antigone* begins just after the events described in this play.

From the extant plays we can piece together the mythic narrative that leads to Antigone. Laius, king of Thebes, married to Jocasta, is told by the Delphic Oracle that he can only keep his city safe if he dies childless. After having drunkenly fathered Oedipus, Laius has his son left on Mount Cithaeron to die. However, the boy is found by a shepherd and ultimately adopted as a son by King Polybus of Corinth.

When he comes of age Oedipus is told by the Oracle that he will murder his father and marry his mother. Oedipus flees Corinth to prevent this from happening. On the way to Thebes at a place where three roads meet, he comes upon another traveler. They argue and fight; Oedipus kills the man; the man was Laius.

Oedipus continues on to Thebes. The city has long been plagued by the Sphinx, a monster sent by the gods because of some ancient crime of the Thebans. The Sphinx poses a riddle to all who pass by and devours those that fail to answer correctly: "What goes on four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three at night." The illustration at the right



shows a representation of Oedipus and the Sphinx in a vase from around 500 BCE, now in the Vatican. (The sphinx seems much less monstrous than the legend indicated.) Oedipus solves the riddle – "man, who crawls in infancy, walks as an adult and uses a cane in old age." This releases the city from the monster's power. In gratitude the citizens of Thebes make Oedipus king and grant him the recently bereaved Jocasta as his wife. Oedipus and Jocasta have four children: the boys Polyneikes and Eteokles, and the girls Antigone and Ismene

The gods, displeased at the unrevenged death of Laius, bring a plague down upon Thebes. In order to stop the plague Oedipus searches for his father's murderer. In the course of his investigations he realizes first that he was the killer, and ultimately that Laius was his father and Jocasta his mother. Jocasta hangs herself. Unable to bear the pain of his

knowledge Oedipus blinds himself with Jocasta's brooch pins. Exiled from Thebes he seeks sanctuary in the grove of the Furies at Colonus, a village near Athens. Here Theseus, king of Athens, takes pity on him.

His daughters Ismene and Antigone come to comfort their father in Colonus. In Thebes the sons of Oedipus initially decide to alternate the kingship, but Eteokles then banishes his older brother Polyneikes and becomes sole king of Thebes. Polyneikes visits Oedipus in Colonus to get his blessing for a revolt against his brother, but Oedipus curses both his sons and prophecies that they will die at each other's hand. Oedipus dies. His daughters return to Thebes.

Polyneikes and six other generals raise an army from the rival state of Argos and attack Thebes. The Thebans ultimately defeat the besieging army. Near the end of the siege, Polyneikes and Eteokles fight and kill each other.

The deaths of Polyneikes and Eteokles became a popular motif for sculpture, the illustration below showing a relief on an Etruscan funerary urn from Chiusi (circa 200 BCE).



The following illustration from a 19th century jewel shows a more restrained view of the brothers' deaths.



The Story of Antigone

After the deaths of Polyneikes and Eteokles, Kreon, the brother of Jocasta, becomes king of Thebes. He decrees that Eteokles be given a hero's funeral rites but that the body of the traitor Polyneikes' be left to rot. Anyone who disobeys this ruling will be put to death. Despite the warnings of her sister, Antigone refuses to obey Kreon's commandment and casts earth over Polyneikes' body. The illustration below shows Juliet Binoche in the 2015 production of *Antigone* at the Barbican in London.



Antigone is caught in the act. The following illustration from a Greek vase (circa 400 BCE) shows Antigone, flanked by two guards holding spears, brought before Kreon.



This is the crucial exchange between the two:

Kreon: Now tell me, not at length, but in brief
space,
Knew you the order not to do it?

Antigone:

Yes

I knew it; what should hinder? It was plain.

Kreon: And you made free to overstep my law?

Antigone: Because it was not Zeus who ordered it,
Nor Justice, dweller with the Nether Gods,
Gave such a law to men; nor did I deem
Your ordinance of so much binding force,
As that a mortal man could overbear
The unchangeable unwritten code of Heaven;
This is not of today and yesterday,
But lives forever, having origin
Whence no man knows: whose sanctions I were loath
In Heaven's sight to provoke, fearing the will
Of any man. I knew that I should die –
How otherwise? Even although your voice
Had never so prescribed. And that I die
Before my hour is due, that I count gain.
For one who lives in many ills, as I –
How should he fail to gain by dying? Thus
To me the pain is light, to meet this fate:
But had I borne to leave the body of him
My mother bare unburied, then, indeed,
I might feel pain; but as it is, I cannot:
And if my present actions seems to you
Foolish – 'tis like I am found guilty of folly
At a fool's mouth! (ll 446-470, Young translation)

This is one of the greatest speeches ever spoken on the stage. It comes in four parts. First, Antigone scorns the proclamation of Kreon. Made neither by the gods of Olympus nor by the lords of Hades, this was an "order" rather than a "law." Second, she vaunts the eternal "unwritten code of Heaven" that guides human behavior and that must not be disobeyed. In the third section of the speech, Antigone recognizes that her defiance might bring about her death. However, this will bring relief to one who has already lost father, mother, and two brothers. Finally, she tells Kreon

that she is not the one who is acting foolishly. He who does not understand the code of Heaven is far more fool than she. The following film-clip shows Irene Papas as Antigone and Manos Katrakis as Kreon (Tzavellas, 1961):

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Antigone-and-Creon.mp4>

The chorus is upset by Antigone's defiance. Kreon refuses to grant Antigone mercy and sentences her to be buried alive in a cave. Kreon's son, Haimon, in love with Antigone, pleads with his father, but Kreon remains adamant. In his defense, he states the case for the rule of law:

Obedience is due
To the state's officer in small and great,
Just and unjust commandments; ...
There lives no greater fiend than Anarchy;
She ruins states, turns houses out of doors
Breaks up in rout the embattled soldiery;
While Discipline preserves the multitude
Of the ordered host alive. Therefore it is
We must assist the cause of order.
(ll 665-676, Young translation)

Haimon urges his father not to be so stubborn:

it's no disgrace for a man, even a wise man,
to learn many things and not to be too rigid.
You've seen trees by a raging winter torrent,
how many sway with the flood and salvage every twig,
but not the stubborn—they're ripped out, roots and
all.
Bend or break. The same when a man is sailing:
haul your sheets too taut, never give an inch,
you'll capsize, and go the rest of the voyage
keel up and the rowing-benches under.
(ll 710-717, Fagles translation)

Kreon refuses to listen to his son.

Meanwhile, Antigone bemoans her fate. She accepts that she did what she had to do, but she regrets that she was not able to marry or have children. She does not understand why the gods have not intervened to save one who served them truly. Before she is taken to the cave she asks the Thebans to behold one who has been condemned

τὴν εὐσεβίαν σεβίσασα. (ten eusebian sebisasa) (l 943)

In an act of perfect piety (Carson translation)

For doing reverence where reverence was due. (Brown translation)

The noun *eusebia* means an act of reverence or piety; the verb *sebizo* is to worship or honor. Carson (2015, pp 5-6) remarks about this emphatic conclusion:

Both noun (*eusebia*) and verb (*sebizo*) derive from the Greek root *seb-*, which refers to the awe that radiates from gods to humans and is given back as worship. Everything related to this root has fear in it. But *eusebia* is a fear that moves as devotion – a striving out of this world into another and of another world into this.

Teiresias, the blind seer, tells Kreon that the gods are displeased: they wish Antigone to be freed and Polyneikes properly buried. Kreon orders Antigone's release but she has already killed herself. In grief at her death, Haimon commits suicide. In grief at the death of her son, Kreon's wife Eurydike also commits suicide. Utterly broken, Kreon is led away, his life emptied of any meaning. He is "as a dead man who can still draw breath." (l 1167, Gibbons translation)

The Choral Odes

One of the great attractions of Sophocles' play is the way in which the chorus of Theban elders comment on the action. The play contains six main choral odes. The first is a celebration

of the Theban triumph over the besieging Argives. The most exciting recent translation of this begins

The glories of the world come sharking in all red and gold
we won the war
salvation struts
the streets of sevensated Thebes
(ll 100-102, Carson translation)

The choral odes were sung and danced by a chorus of about fifteen men in the area of the theatre known as the *orchestra* ("place for dancing"). Carl Orff wrote music for the performance of *Antigone* (1949) that suggests how the chorus might have sounded. The following is Orff's music for the introduction of the Chorus and the beginning of this first ode:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/orff-interlude-and-beginning-of-blick-der-sonne.mp3>

The second ode, often known as the *Ode to Man*, considers how wonderful is the creature called man, who can navigate the sea, cultivate the land, tame the animals, build homes for protection against the elements, and find medicine for his ailments. The following translation of the beginning of the ode attempts the rhythms of the Greek:

At many things – wonders
Terrors – we feel awe
But at nothing more
Than at man. This
Being sails the gray-
White sea running before
Winter storm-winds, he
Scuds beneath high
Waves surging over him
On each side
And Gaia, the Earth

Forever undestroyed and
Unwearying, highest of
All the gods, he
Wears away, year
After year as his plows
Cross ceaselessly
Back and forth, turning
Her soil with the
Offspring of horses.
(ll 332-345, Gibbons translation)

The following is Carl Orff's 1949 setting of the opening of the *Ode to Man*. Orff used the words of Hölderlin: *Ungeheuer ist viel. Doch nichts ungeheurer als der Mensch* (Many things are wonderful but nothing more wonderful than man). Orff's music captures the awe at the beginning of the ode, and then gives a driving rendition of human achievements.

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Orff-antigonae-ungeheuer-ist-viel-beginning.mp3>

The Greek word used to describe man at the beginning of this famous ode – *deinos* – usually means “extraordinary” or “wonderful.” It also has connotations of the supernatural or uncanny, the unexpectedly clever, or even the monstrous. The word comes from a Proto-Indo-European root *dwei* denoting fear. An example of this root in English is “dinosaur.” *Deinos* has no obvious equivalent in English. The German *ungeheuer* (enormous, terrible, unnatural) used by Hölderlin captures many of its meanings.

The later choral odes in *Antigone* tell how human hopes often come to naught, describe the power of human passion, console Antigone as she is led away to her fate, and at the end of the play praise the gods who teach us wisdom. The following are three modern translations of the final words of the chorus:

Wisdom is by far the greatest part of joy,

and reverence toward the gods must be safeguarded.
The mighty words of the proud are paid in full
with mighty blows of fate, and at long last
those blows will teach us wisdom
(ll 1347-1353, Fagles' translation)

Wise conduct is the key to happiness
Always rule by the gods and reverence them.
Those who overbear will be brought to grief.
Fate will flail them on its winnowing floor
And in due season teach them to be wise.
(Heaney translation)

There is no happiness, but there can be wisdom.
Revere the gods; revere them always.
When men get proud, they hurl hard words, then suffer
for it.
Let them grow old and take no harm yet: they still get
punished.
It teaches them. It teaches us.
(Paulin translation)

Fagles has the gods teaching all of us, whereas Heaney has them only teaching the proud. Paulin gives both meanings. This section from Orff's *Antigonae* is appropriately otherworldly: *Um vieles ist das Denken mehr denn Glückseligkeit*. (Thought is much greater than happiness).

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Orff-antigonae-acct-5-ending.mp3>

The following is a clip from the ending to Tzavellas' 1961 film with Manos Katrakis as Kreon and Thodoris Moudis as the leader of the chorus:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Antigone-ending.mp4>

Conflict

The heart of the play is the conflict between Kreon and Antigone. Steiner (1984, pp 231-232) notes that

It has, I believe, been given to only one literary text to express all the principal constants of conflict in the condition of man. These constants are fivefold: the confrontation of men and of women; of age and of youth; of society and of the individual; of the living and the dead; of men and of god(s). The conflicts which come of these five orders of confrontation are not negotiable. Men and women, old and young, the individual and the community or state, the quick and the dead, mortals and immortals, define themselves in the conflictual process of defining each other. Self-definition and the agonistic recognition of 'otherness' (of l'autre) across the threatened boundaries of self, are indissociable. The polarities of masculinity and of femininity, of ageing and of youth, of private autonomy and of social collectivity, of existence and mortality, of the human and the divine, can be crystallized only in adversative terms (whatever the many shades of accommodation between them). To arrive at oneself—the primordial journey—is to come up, polemically, against 'the other'. The boundary-conditions of the human person are those set by gender, by age, by community, by the cut between life and death, and by the potentials of accepted or denied encounter between the existential and the transcendent.

In his assessment of the play, Hegel focused on the conflict between a person's kinship-duties and the allegiance owed to the state (Reidy, 1995; Young 2013, pp 110-139). In his mind *Antigone* represented civilization's necessary change from family-loyalty to state-citizenship. This fits with Hegel's general view of history as a sequence of dialectic conflicts between different world-views. Progress occurs as the two competing ideas become reconciled. The tragedy occurs because neither Antigone nor Kreon can see the other side of the conflict. Antigone feels no duty to the state; Kreon pays no

attention to his family, completely disregarding his son's concerns.

The balance between Antigone and Kreon is what makes *Antigone* a tragedy. Albert Camus (1955/1968, p 301) differentiated tragedy from drama:

the forces confronting each other in tragedy are equally legitimate, equally justified. In melodramas or dramas, on the other hand, only one force is legitimate. In other words, tragedy is ambiguous and drama simple-minded. In the former, each force is at the same time both good and bad. In the latter, one is good and the other evil (which is why, in our day and age, propaganda plays are nothing but the resurrection of melodrama). Antigone is right, but Kreon is not wrong.

In the conflict Antigone and Kreon are very similar in character. Steiner (1984, pp 184-5) points out

Both Kreon and Antigone are *auto-nomists*, human beings who have taken the law into their own keeping. Their respective enunciations of justice are, in the given local case, irreconcilable. But in their obsession with law, they come very close to being mirror-images.

The tragedy evolves because neither Antigone nor Kreon is able to compromise. They are both bloody minded – obstinate to the point of bloodshed. However, Kreon is the more reprehensible: his edict forbidding the burial of Polyneikes is not based on either divine rule or reasoned thought.

Three conflicting forces are at play in *Antigone*. One is the law (*nomos*) of the state (*polis*). The second is the set of “unwritten rules” (*agrapta nomima*) that tell us what is right. The third is fate (*moira*) – the working out of what must necessarily happen. Of these only the first is easy to understand.

Natural Law

Antigone's "unwritten code of Heaven" is often considered the same as the "natural law" – that which we know because it is an essential part of our being (Robinson. 1991; Burns, 2002). Natural law is understood by "conscience" – our intuitive sense of what is right and wrong. Regardless of how we are educated or how our society operates, conscience tends to work similarly: murder and incest are wrong; hospitality and compassion are right. Human history has long realized that the laws promulgated to maintain order in particular societies may come into conflict with an individual's conscience. In these cases, the natural law should generally be paramount. This is the basis of civil disobedience. An unjust law – one that is out of harmony with the natural law – need not be obeyed:

How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. (King, 1963).

However, the natural law is often difficult to determine. It is understood by intuition, and followed by inclination (Maritain, 2001, pp 32-38). So when should conscience take precedence over the law? The laws promulgated by a state should be and often are derived from the natural law. However, they sometimes also exist to entrench the status of the powerful.

The laws or commandments proclaimed in religious scriptures are also related to the natural law. However, even this relationship is complex. On the one hand, the natural law can be conceived as independent of divinity. Hugo Grotius famously stated that we know what is right "even if we concede ... that

there is no God" (*etiamsi daremus ... non esse Deum*). Others, such as Maritain (2001, p 46), propose that the natural law as perceived by man derives from the "eternal law" as perceived by God. Human perception of the divine law is as yet imperfect.

The relation between natural law and nature is also complex. Laws of nature (*phusis*) are deduced from experience of the real world. They portray what is rather than what should be. Such laws can be demonstrated, analyzed and tested. The natural laws for human behavior are understood by intuition. We know what is right but we do not understand how we know. Nor can we demonstrate or test the laws that we follow.

If the natural law is the sum of human dispositions, then we might be able to study it in terms of evolution. Since most of human existence was spent in small bands that hunted and gathered on the African Savannah, many human dispositions to behave in particular ways may have been selected to promote the survival of these small groups. Commandments against murder (other than in self-defense) clearly facilitate group-survival. Edicts against incest decrease the probability of deleterious recessive genes becoming homozygous, and by promoting exogamy (marriage outside of the group) enlarge and strengthen the group.

If natural causes such as evolution are the basis for our morality, perhaps we can determine what is right by what is considered natural. Many people consider homosexuality "unnatural." In the Abrahamic religions, early laws expressly prohibited homosexual relations on pain of death.

If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them."
(*Leviticus* 20:13).

Aquinas argued that homosexuality is unnatural because it does

not lead to procreation, which is the natural purpose of sexual intercourse (*Summa Theologica* II I 94). Yet who or what defines the natural purpose of an act and why should there be only one purpose?

How does Antigone know that she is right to bury her brother, even if her act will entail her death? She is following a “custom” – the Greeks buried their dead. Other cultures cremate their dead, or leave them out to be devoured by carrion-eating birds – “sky burial.” It is difficult to see burying the dead as an absolute requirement of natural law, though some unspecified honoring of the dead seems common to all human cultures.

Fate

The Ancient Greeks attributed much that happens in life to fate. Fate was often personified as three women – the *moirai*. The word derives from *meros*, a part, share or portion. *Clotho* spins the thread of a life; *Lachesis* allots the life to a particular person; and *Atropos* cuts the thread at death. Neither human nor divine intervention can affect the actions of the fates. The following is a print of *The Three Fates* (1558) by Giorgio Ghisi.



Although Antigone has obeyed the unwritten code of heaven, the

gods cannot intervene to save her from her ignominious death. That has been otherwise ordained – it is her fate. After Antigone is led away, the Chorus remarks that such apparently unjust ends have been suffered by others before her. Fate is a terrible thing:

The power of fate is a wonder,
dark, terrible wonder –
neither wealth nor armies
towered walls nor ships
black hulls lashed by the salt
can save us from that force.
(ll 951-954, Fagles' translation)

Fate is described as *deinos* (terrible), the same word that the chorus used to describe man. We are both made and unmade by fate. We should follow the unwritten code of the gods, but doing so will not prevent death. The Fates operate according to some other code. Perhaps they follow necessity rather than justice. Perhaps they follow laws that operate beyond the individual life. The chorus briefly mentions such a possibility: Antigone may be paying for the sins of her father. However, it is possible that the Fates do not follow any code of justice. They may just enforce the physical laws by which the universe operates.

Justice

Justice is the human concept of what is right. Our words related to justice – law, morality, fairness, equity, right, righteousness – overlap in their meanings. The Greeks at the time of Sophocles also had many words (Steiner, 1984, pp 248-251; Nonet, 2006). Precise translations distinguishing these one from another are usually not possible, and the usage of the terms changed over the years.

The Greeks often personified their ideas in terms of gods. *Themis* was a Titaness who personified divine law. Zeus and

Themis had three daughters: *Dike*, law; *Eunomia*, order; and *Eirene*, peace. Dike is customarily represented with a sword and a set of scales for weighing right and wrong (as in the illustrated statue from the Frankfurt Fountain of Justice, an 1887 bronze replacement for the original 1611 stone statue). Another Greek word *dikaiosune* came to mean both a system of justice and the virtue of righteousness (Havelock, 1969). Antigone appeals to Dike as the supporter of the unwritten laws which require the burial of the dead.



The Greeks differentiated *nomos* – the set of socially constructed laws – from *phusis* – the laws underlying the universe. The word *nomima* (laws, regulations, customs) derives from *nomos* but Antigone used it to distinguish the eternal and unwritten laws from human laws. Words do not clearly show us what is right. And they fail to clearly differentiate laws that are given from those that are constructed. Sophocles' tragedy deals in part with our inability to know with certainty what is just.

Modern Adaptations

The story of Antigone has been retold many times (Chancellor, 1979; Steiner, 1984). These versions stress different aspects of the story, supplement the main plot with other events, or place the story in a different time and place. For brevity I shall only consider a few recent adaptations.

(i) Anouilh

During the Nazi occupation of France, Jean Anouilh wrote a version of *Antigone* that was set in modern times. The play was accepted by the censors and produced in Paris in 1944. Anouilh made Kreon a more sympathetic character. He removed from the play the character of Tiresias, who in Sophocles' original play confirmed that Antigone was right. The chorus was no longer a group of Theban citizens who commented on the actions. Rather the chorus acted as a foil between the audience and the actors, describing what was going to happen and why. In this way Anouilh distanced the audience from becoming directly involved in the tragedy.

Anouilh's *Antigone* is more of an existential heroine than a tragic one – she did what she did because she was seeking a reason for her life. As Kreon explains

She wanted to die! None of us was strong enough to persuade her to live. I understand now. She was born to die. She may not have known it herself, but Polynices was only an excuse.

At the end after everyone who had to die has died, Kreon goes on about his work of governing the city. The chorus explains

It's over. Antigone's quiet now, cured of a fever whose name we shall never know. Her work is done. A great, sad peace descends on Thebes, and on the empty palace where Creon will begin to wait for death. Only the guard are left. All that has happened is a matter of indifference to them. None of their business. They go on with their game of cards.

Anouilh's chorus thus appears to attenuate the tragedy. However, Anouilh and his audience most certainly understood the nature of Antigone's fever as *La Résistance*.

How could the German occupation authorities have allowed such a production? Steiner (1984, p. 190) notes that the evaluation of Antigone's story in Germany between the world wars differed

from that in other countries. Frightened by the communist revolts that followed the Great War, Germans saw the need for people like Kreon to maintain the safety of the state. So even if they might have felt that Antigone was right, they also knew that Kreon was not wrong. The great German philosopher Hegel had said that the state must necessarily take precedence over family and personal conscience.

(ii) Brecht

Bertolt Brecht wrote and produced a theatrically stunning version of *Antigone* in Switzerland in 1948. The play was preceded by a prologue set in Berlin in April 1945. This tells the story of how a young deserter from the army came to his sisters' home bringing food for his hungry family. However, he was captured by the police and hung for treason. His body was left hanging as an example to other would-be deserters. The prologue is doubly distanced from the play. As well as being set in the near present, the prologue is narrated to the audience by one of the sisters but acted out by both. The prologue ends with a police officer asking the sisters whether they knew the traitor. The first denies her brother, but the second goes out to cut down his body.

The play then reverts to Thebes. However, the situation differs from that of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Thebes had not been under siege. Rather Kreon had embarked on a war against Argos to gain their iron ore. Eteokles had been brutally killed during this war. Polyneikes saw his older brother being trampled to death, deserted from the futile battle, and was then killed by his own people. The opening choral ode, rather than celebrating the survival of the city, welcomes the wagons of booty and plunder returning from the war.

When Antigone is captured and brought before Kreon, she is bound to a board. Effectively she is carrying a door upon her back. A door she cannot open. The illustration (taken from the Suhrkamp edition of Brecht's play) is from the first



production:

Brecht's Antigone acts politically. She defies Kreon not so much because of any unwritten laws but because she considers him an evil tyrant. She tries unsuccessfully to goad the chorus to join in her defiance. The exchange between Antigone and Kreon is more extended than in Sophocles. After her initial speech of defiance (much the same as in Sophocles), Kreon praises the success of the war, and Antigone continues:

Antigone: The men in power always threaten us with the fall of The State.

It will fall by dissension, devoured by the invaders
and so we give in to you, and give you our power, and bow
down;

and because of this weakness, the city falls and is devoured
by the invaders.

Kreon: Are you accusing me of throwing the city away to be
devoured by the enemy?

Antigone: The city threw herself away by bowing down before
you,

because when a man bows down he can't see what's coming at
him.

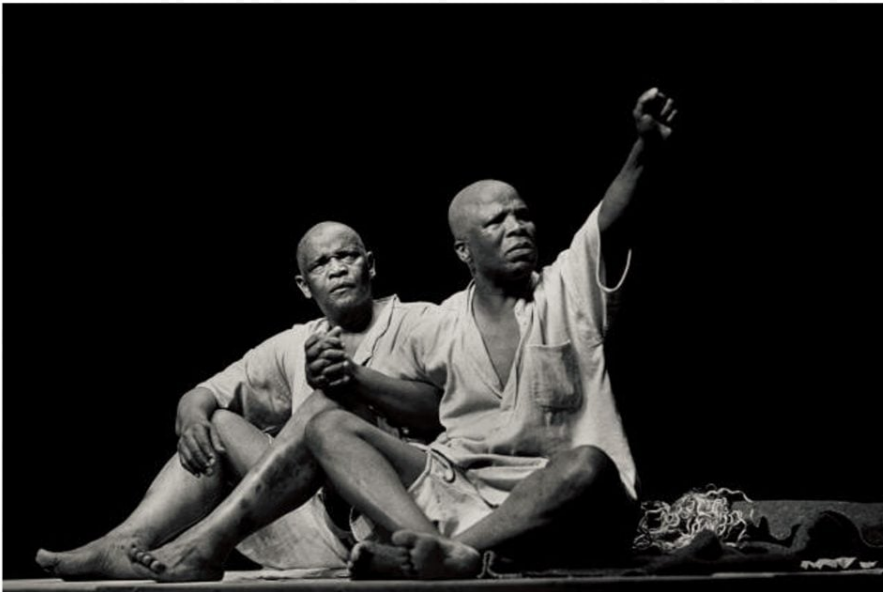
The story plays itself out as in the original Greek, but at the end the city falls to its enemies. The tragedy is that of the people who foolishly followed and who keep following a tyrant. The final words of the chorus are those of despair:

For time is short
and the unknown surrounds us; and it isn't enough
just to live unthinking and happy
and patiently bear oppression
and only learn wisdom in age.

(iii) Fugard

Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona created and produced a play called *The Island* in South Africa in 1973 as a protest against the persecutions of apartheid. The play is set in an unknown prison camp clearly modelled on Robben Island where Nelson Mandela was held. The play follows two cell mates, played by Kani and Ntshona, in prison for the minor offences of belonging to a banned organization and burning an identity card.

In successive scenes, the two men work at digging holes in the sand and filling them up again, rehearse a performance of *Antigone* that they plan to present to the camp, learn that one of them may be released but not the other, pretend to talk on the phone with friends and relatives, and finally present the dramatic confrontation between Kreon and Antigone. Below is a photograph showing Ntshona and Kani in the National Theatre revival of the play (2000):



Winston fears that his appearance as a young woman will only cause ridicule, and indeed John bursts into laughter when he first sees him in wig and costume. Yet no one laughs during the final scene when on a makeshift stage Winston tells John

You are only a man Creon. Even as there are laws made by men, so too there are others that come from God. He watches my soul for a transgression even as your spies hide in the bush at night to see who is transgressing your laws. Guilty against God I will not be for any man on this earth.

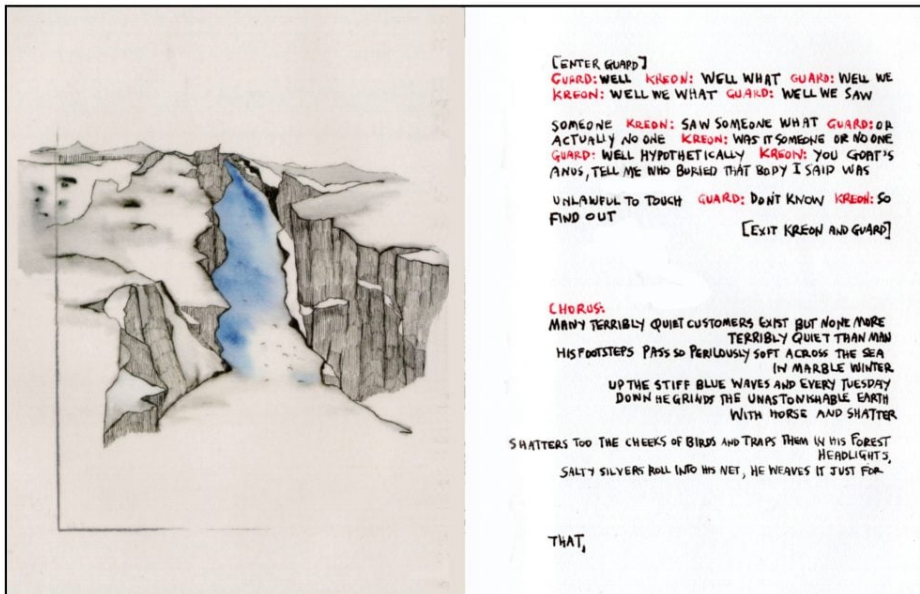
Nelson Mandela was imprisoned in 1962 for conspiring to overthrow the state. He was not released until 1990.

(iv) Carson

In 2012 Anne Carson wrote *Antigonick*, a version of *Antigone* that is more concerned with depicting the ideas and feelings of the play than rendering a literal translation. She added to the play the character of Nick, a surveyor who intermittently and mutely takes measurements of what is happening. Nick stands for the modern viewer who must somehow assess the play coming from a society many hundred years before our own.

The book is presented with a text that is handwritten by

Carson in small black capitals and illustrated with desolate landscapes and surrealistic images by Bianca Stone. These illustrations do not directly relate to the text but add to the book's sense of incomprehensible passion. Below is a representation the book's pages at the beginning of the *Ode to*



Man

As can be seen in the ode Carson's choice of words is designed to bring the audience the sense of the original Greek. The word *deinos* becomes "terribly quiet" – a description that captures the connotations of incomprehensibility and menace.

Many terribly quiet customers exist but none more
 terribly quiet than man

His footsteps pass so perilously soft across the sea
 in marble winter

The following illustration shows three other images from the book, one of a wedding cake in desolation, the second of cutlery flying apart under the influence of a thread (perhaps of fate), and the third of a horse upsetting a feast.



In addition, Carson sometimes includes commentary in the text. This brings the meaning up to date. In the original play just before Antigone exits to her death, the chorus provides a long discussion of the way in which fate has acted unfairly, quoting various stories from Greek mythology. A modern audience would not know these examples. In *Antigonick* Carson therefore replaces this choral ode by verse that slowly goes from mundane commentary to intense grief:

how is a Greek chorus like a lawyer
they're both in the business of searching for a precedent
finding an analogy
locating a prior example
so as to be able to say
the terrible thing we're witnessing now is
not unique you know it happened before
or something much like it
we're not at a loss how to think about this
we're not without guidance
there is a pattern
we can find an historically parallel case
and file it away under

Antigone buried alive Friday afternoon
compare case histories 7, 17 and 49

now I could dig up theses case histories,
tell you about Danaos and Lykourgos and the sons of Phineas
people locked up in a room or a cave or their own dark mind

it wouldn't help you
it didn't help me
it's Friday afternoon
there goes Antigone to be buried alive
is there
any way
we can say
this is normal
rational
forgivable
or even in the widest definition just
no not really

(v) Zizek

In 2016 Slavoj Zizek, a provocative philosopher and communist, wrote a version of *Antigone* that provides three different endings. This idea of multiple endings came from Tom Tykwer's film *Run Lola Run* (1998). The plot of Zizek's *Antigone* proceeds as in Sophocles until Kreon sentences Antigone to death and is told by Tiresias that he has offended the gods. The first ending then follows as in Sophocles and results in the death of Antigone.

In the second ending the people of Thebes enflamed by the way Kreon offended the gods, rise up and murder him. They set fire to the city. Antigone survives though she is half-mad and does not understand why her simple act of defiance has led to such devastation. The chorus tells her that divine laws are not the ultimate authority:

A society is kept together by the bond of Word,
but the domain of logos, of what can be said,
and this mysterious vortex is what all our endeavours
and struggles are about. Our true fidelity
is to what cannot be said, and the greatest wisdom
is to know when this very fidelity

compels us to break our word, even if this word is the highest immemorial law. This is where you went wrong, Antigone. In sacrificing everything for your law, you lost this law itself.

In the third ending Kreon and Antigone are reconciled, but the citizens of Thebes rise up against their rulers. Kreon is brutally executed because

Much greater evil than a lack of leadership is an unjust leader who creates chaos in his city by the very false order he tries to impose. Such an order is the obscene travesty of the worst anarchy. The people feel this and resist the leader. A true order, on the contrary, creates the space of freedom for all citizens. A really good master doesn't just limit the freedom of his subjects, he gives freedom.

Antigone claims to be on the side of the revolution. But the leader of the people has her executed:

But the excluded don't need sympathy and compassion from the privileged, they don't want others to speak for them, they themselves should speak and articulate their plight. So in speaking for them, you betrayed them even more than your uncle – you deprived them of their voice.

There is no catharsis. The revolution is brutal. The chorus attempts to excuse the horror by repeating the *Ode to Man*

There are many strange and wonderful things but nothing more strangely wonderful than man

But one is left with the nightmare of revolutionaries settling scores by murder. One longs for the simplicity of Sophocles's original wherein Kreon and Antigone were both striving to do what they thought was right. In Zizek no one is right. Violence is the only outcome. Justice is not possible. This is not my idea of *Antigone*. Zizek has not found a way out of the conflict at the basis of the story. Nor has he, a committed communist, portrayed the necessity of revolution as in any way attractive.

Novels

Natalie Haynes has retold the stories of Oedipus and Antigone from the point of view of Jocasta and of Ismene in her novel *The Children of Jocasta* (2017). In Sophocles' play Ismene, Antigone's younger sister, is the only member of Oedipus' family to survive. She initially serves as a foil for her sister, proposing compromise instead of defiance. Later she stands by her sister, though Antigone refuses her support. In Haynes' novel the plot has changed from that of Sophocles' plays, but the story still has its necessary confrontations and reconciliations. The plague plays the role of the Fates.

In *Home Fire* (2018) Kamila Shamsie has reinterpreted the story of *Antigone* in terms of Aneeka a young Englishwoman of Pakistani background. Her brother Parvaiz is recruited to ISIS and serves with the terrorists in Syria. Parvaiz is assassinated in Turkey when he tries to leave ISIS. The English government refuses to allow his corpse to be returned to England for burial, and arranges for it to be sent to Pakistan. Aneeka goes to Pakistan to protest this ruling but ultimately the body, the sister and her fiancé are blown to pieces in a suicide bombing.

The situation envisioned by Shamsie is clearly very possible. A citizen should have the right to be buried in his homeland. This right was recently tested in the case of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, one of the bombers at the Boston Marathon

(Mendelsohn, 2013). No funeral director or cemetery in Massachusetts would accept his body. After much dispute, a Christian woman in Virginia intervened, and the body was finally buried in an unmarked grave in a small Muslim cemetery in Virginia.

Novels are discursive. They provide us with a wealth of detail, in terms of both things and thoughts. They can discuss what might have been as well as what was. They lack the harsh simplicity of a play.

A Play for All Time

Sophocles' *Antigone* remains as a stirring invocation to do what is right. The world needs its Antigones. This was particularly evident in the days of Hitler (von Klemperer, 1992). Those who resisted Nazism did not succeed in changing their government. Yet they did show their countrymen that there were other ways to live and die than slavishly to follow a leader more concerned with power than with humanity.

Sophocles' play returns time and time again. Whenever governments repress the conscience of their people. World War II generated the *Antigones* of Anouilh, Brecht and Orff. The situation in South Africa brought about Fugard's *The Island*. The situation in Northern Ireland led to Paulin's *The Riot Act*. Judith Malina translated Brecht's *Antigone* while in jail in 1963 because her Living Theatre had run afoul of the US government.

The philosophy of Sophocles combines a respect for human morality and responsibility with an acquiescence to fate (Kitto, 1961, pp 123-127). In this recognition of the role played by fate, Sophocles differs from his predecessor Aeschylus:

The Aeschylean universe is one of august moral laws, infringement of which brings certain doom; the Sophoclean is one in which wrongdoing does indeed work out its own

punishment, but disaster comes, too, without justification;
at the most with 'contributory negligence.' (p 126)

Wonderful though man is he cannot control everything. This is most obvious in the fact of death. Yet before we die we can do what we believe to be right. This will not prevent our death but it will pay reverence to whatever ideas of transcendence we have conceived, be it the gods or the good.

We do not understand fate. I have already quoted the final words of Sophocles' chorus – their praise of wisdom. Just before this they make two comments about fate. In reply to Kreon's desire to die the chorus states

That's in the future. We must do what lies before us.
Those who take care of these things will take their
care.

And then when Kreon says that he prayed for what he longed for, they answer

Don't pray for anything – for from whatever good
Or ill is destined for mortals, there's no
deliverance.
(Gibbons translation, ll 1334-5, 1337-8)

Sophocles is clear. Do what you think is right. Be open to the ideas of others. Do not expect reward. You will die. Life will carry on.

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Note: the lines for the quotations in this posting are those in the original Greek (Brown edition) and may not fit the lines of the translations.

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Mitchell and Riopelle

From February 18 to May 6, 2018, the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) is presenting an exhibition of the paintings of Joan Mitchell and Jean-Paul Riopelle entitled *Mitchell/Riopelle: Nothing in Moderation*. This is the first time that many of these paintings have been seen together. The paintings are stunning, the relations between them fascinating.

Abstract Expressionism

The abstract expressionist movement in painting began in New York in the 1940s (Anfam, 1990, Sandler, 1970). Among its major artists were Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Robert Motherwell. Each artist had his own particular style, but they all attempted to convey meaning and emotion without recourse to representation. The Americans promoted the development of abstract expressionism as their particular artistic "triumph" (Sandler, 1970), and other abstract artists working later or in other countries have lived too long without proper recognition. Among these are Joan Mitchell and Jean-Paul

Riopelle.

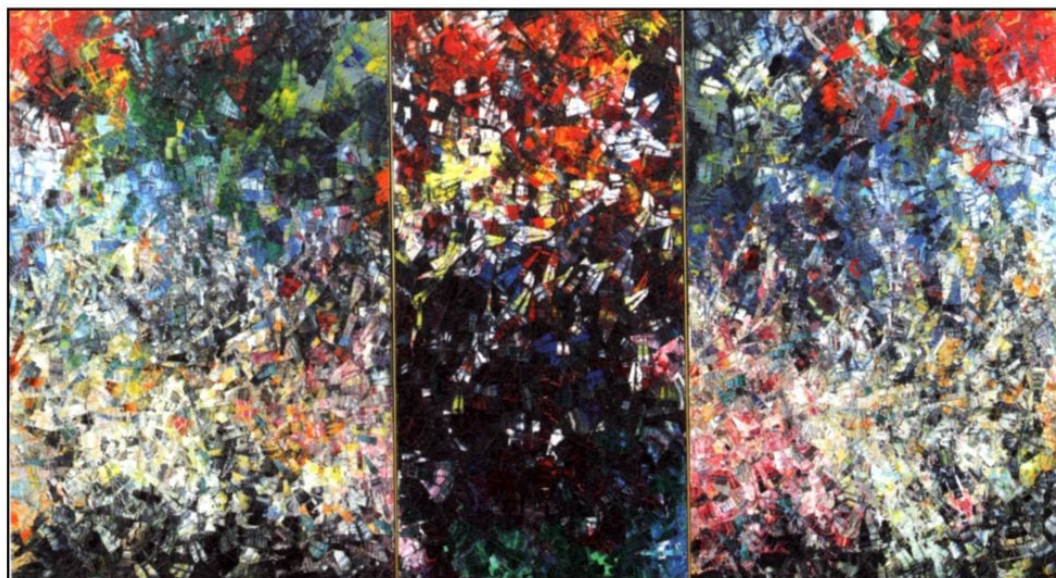
Riopelle developed his technique independently of the New York artists. He had studied with Paul-Émile Borduas in Montreal, who had extended the ideas of surrealism into a movement called *Les Automatistes*. Finding the society of French Canada unreceptive to his new art, Riopelle moved to Paris. Mitchell had been impressed by the New York Abstract Expressionists, particularly de Kooning and Kline, but began to evolve her own particular style after visiting France.

In parallel to New York, Paris had developed a similar artistic movement called *Abstraction Lyrique* (Moszynska, 1990, p 120). This differed from the New York movement mainly by rejecting the geometric approaches, such as those of Barnett Newman or Josef Albers, which was considered “cold abstraction.” Mitchell and Riopelle painted most of their major works in France, and could be considered proponents of this type of abstraction. However, the term is ambiguous since “lyric abstraction” was also used to describe a group of New York artists in the 1960s.

Lives of the Artists

Mitchell and Riopelle came from vastly different backgrounds. Mitchell (1925-1992) was born into a wealthy family in Chicago. Her maternal grandfather Charles Strobel was an accomplished engineer who had designed many of the early Chicago steel-frame skyscrapers. Her mother was a poet and co-editor of *Poetry*, her father a very successful dermatologist and amateur painter. Riopelle (1923-2002) was from the middle class. His father was a builder and Riopelle started out with the idea of becoming an architect. For both Riopelle and Mitchell, early teachers inspired their artistic talents, and they both decided to pursue painting – Mitchell in New York with the Abstract Expressionists, and Riopelle in Montreal with the *Automatistes*. Mitchell visited France in 1948 but began her painting career in New York. Riopelle moved to Paris

in 1948 and soon became recognized for his large abstract paintings, such as *Pavane* (1954) (not in the AGO exhibition) but reproduced below:



Mitchell

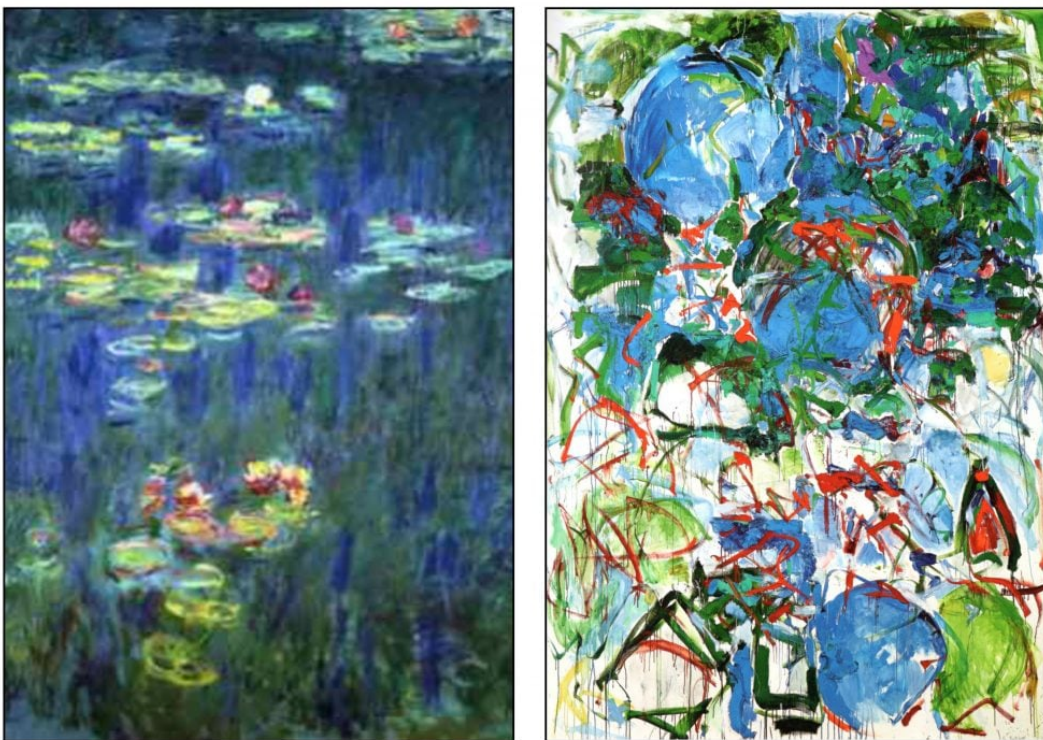
and Riopelle met in Paris in 1955. Both were married, but Riopelle was living apart from his wife and Mitchell had divorced her husband. They were mutually attracted and spent time together, ultimately moving into a shared studio apartment in Paris in 1959. Paris was the city where art was created and love was enjoyed. Mitchell considered the beginning of their relationship in terms of Piaf's famous *La Vie en Rose*. Their relationship was passionate and tumultuous, productive and persistent. Below are 1956 photographs of the artists in their Paris studios:



In 1967 Mitchell purchased an estate in Vétheuil about 65 km northwest of Paris. This was close to Giverny, where Claude Monet had painted his famous series of *Water Lilies*, and near a house where Monet had lived before Giverny. Riopelle

initially lived at Vétheuil, but he later purchased a separate studio several miles away, and spent much of his time working there or travelling.

The paintings of Riopelle and Mitchell give the same sense of shimmering light as the impressionist works from fifty years before. This is shown in the following illustration which compares a part of a Monet *Water Lilies* from 1916 to Mitchell's *Mon Paysage* (1967). Mitchell's painting seems to have abstracted the feelings from a landscape of flowers. Not water lilies – but the colors and the feelings are similar.



One might perhaps consider Mitchell's work as "abstract impressionism." This formulation has been used to describe some of the later abstract expressionists such as Riopelle, Mitchell, Sam Francis and Patrick Heron, but it never really caught on, and Mitchell disliked the term (Michaud in Martin et al. 2017, p 118).

And as for any artist, the sources of present art have many different predecessors. Some of the late Cézanne paintings which pieced together blue and green color-fields to represent

the garden at his home Les Lauves in Provence (1906) parcel out a similar experience to Mitchell's untitled diptych from her 1975 *Canada* series. Mitchell uses a different palette of colors and her painting is about twice the size, but the feelings evoked and the experiences suggested are very



similar: In 1974 Riopelle constructed a studio in the Laurentians in Canada and began to spend more and more time there. Mitchell visited. Some of her later monumental abstract paintings were

inspired by the Canadian landscape, such as *Canada I* (1975) shown below.



However, the relationship between Mitchell and Riopelle was beginning to fall apart. Mitchell's large quadriptych *Chasse Interdite* (1973) was initiated by an angry argument about hunting, which Mitchell deplored and Riopelle enjoyed. In 1978 Riopelle began an affair with Mitchell's young protégé and assistant Hollis Jeffcoat. In 1979 the relationship between Mitchell and Riopelle ended. Mitchell stayed in France and Riopelle returned to Canada. After their rupture Mitchell painted another quadriptych, bitterly entitled *La Vie en Rose* (1979). Though not in the AGO exhibition, it is reproduced below:



Abstract Meanings

All paintings convey meaning. However, representational art is far easier to understand than abstract art. The meaning is in the scene, person or object that the painting describes. The style of the painting can highlight certain aspects of this meaning, but ultimately the artist is saying something about what the painting represents.

Abstract art does not directly represent or portray the world. Moszynska (1990, p 7) suggest that abstract art comes from two different approaches. In one the artist starts from an experience of the real world but then simplifies and changes it to highlight its effect on the artist. This gives the viewer a new way of looking at the world. In the other approach the artist starts with some transcendent or mystical idea and tries to give it form. This provides the viewer with some insight into what is beyond any normal sensory experience. Mitchell and Riopelle used the first approach; Barnett Newman and Rothko the second.

Many people give up trying to understand abstract art. The artist provides little help, generally refusing to say what an abstract painting means. Sometimes the paintings are given simple titles, but these often come after the fact, and many paintings remain untitled or simply numbered. The artist insists that the painting means something that could not be expressed in words but only conveyed in paint.

The indefiniteness of abstract paintings has some similarity to music. A piece of music composed without any definite program is appreciated for its melody and rhythm, but most particularly for its emotional effect. William Pater wrote long ago that "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (Pater, 1893). Though he was discussing classical representational painting, his idea fits best with abstract art. Herbert Read proposed that all art involves a response to "harmonies" and "rhythms," whether they be musical or not:

All art is primarily abstract. For what is aesthetic experience, deprived of its incidental trappings and associations, but a response of the body and mind of man to invented or isolated harmonies? Art is an escape from chaos. It is movement, ordained in numbers; it is mass confined in measure; it is the indetermination of matter seeking the rhythm of life. (Read, 1931, p 42)

The difficulty in understanding an abstract painting can sometimes lead to hostility. Exasperated viewers may claim that a monkey or a three-year old could paint something similarly meaningless. They fear that the artist is putting one over on them.

Perhaps the best approach is to let the paintings directly provide a new sensory experience. This is helped by the large size of many abstract paintings, which can fill the viewer's field of vision. What emotions do the paintings trigger? Emotions are difficult to put into words. But this does not make them any less powerful, or any less meaningful. The following quotation is from the play *Red* which brought the art of Rothko to the stage

Wait. Stand closer. You've got to get close. Let it pulsate. Let it work on you: let it *embrace* you, filling your peripheral vision so nothing else exists or has ever existed or will ever exist. Let the picture do its work – But work with it. (Logan, 2009)

The direct sensory and emotional experience of abstract art can be illustrated in two paintings. The first is *La Forêt ardente* (1955) by Riopelle. The French *ardent* means “burning” or “passionate.” The experience of the painting is similar to that of being in an autumn forest. The darkness, the colored leaves, and the sky above are all there. But the essence of the experience is its passion.



The second painting is *Girolata* (1964) by Mitchell. Girolata is an isolated village on a bay on the west coast of Corsica. The following is a photograph of the bay by Pierre Bona (2006). And below that is Mitchell's painting. The experience of the painting is one of serenity. All is right with the world.





In relation to the idea of turning landscape into feelings, one may quote Mitchell's own words from the introduction to her exhibition at the Whitney Museum in 1974 (Tucker, 1974);

My paintings aren't about art issues. They're about a feeling that comes to me from the outside, from landscape.

I would rather leave Nature to itself. It is quite beautiful enough as it is. I do not want to improve it ... I could certainly never mirror it. I would like more to paint what it leaves me with.

The painting is just a surface to be covered. Paintings aren't about the person who makes them, either. My paintings have to do with feeling, yet it's pretentious to say they're about feelings, too, because if you don't get it across, it's nothing.

Differences

When one compares the paintings, it is important to realize that the work of both painters, particularly that of Riopelle, evolved through different styles. So we must talk in terms of artistic tendencies rather than fixed techniques – dispositions rather than rules. And it will be easy to find contradictory examples.

Mitchell always used a brush, whereas Riopelle used a palette knife or trowel. Riopelle's oil-paintings are characterized by an almost sculptural surface – *impasto* – whereas Mitchell's are flat and fleeting. The paintings therefore catch the light differently: Mitchell's reflect the light very gently and suggestively; Riopelle's shiny irregularities glitter or coruscate. The following illustration compares their surfaces, Mitchell's is taken from an untitled 1955 painting, Riopelle's from *La Forêt ardente* (1955).



Riopelle tended toward saturated primary colors, taking them straight from the tube; whereas Mitchell mixed her paints and used a much broader spectrum. The number of different shades in a Mitchell painting is generally far higher than in a Riopelle. Riopelle's colors are much more definite; Mitchell's tend to be lighter, sometimes fading in and out. Riopelle tended toward the red end of the spectrum, Mitchell toward the blue.

Mitchell's paintings almost always have a white or lightly tinted background – her shapes and lines appear briefly out of the mist. Many of Riopelle's paintings have no background, the colors intermingling without any limits. In others the background is dark, with bright colors appearing out of some primeval chaos.

Mitchell's paintings use two main structural elements. One is

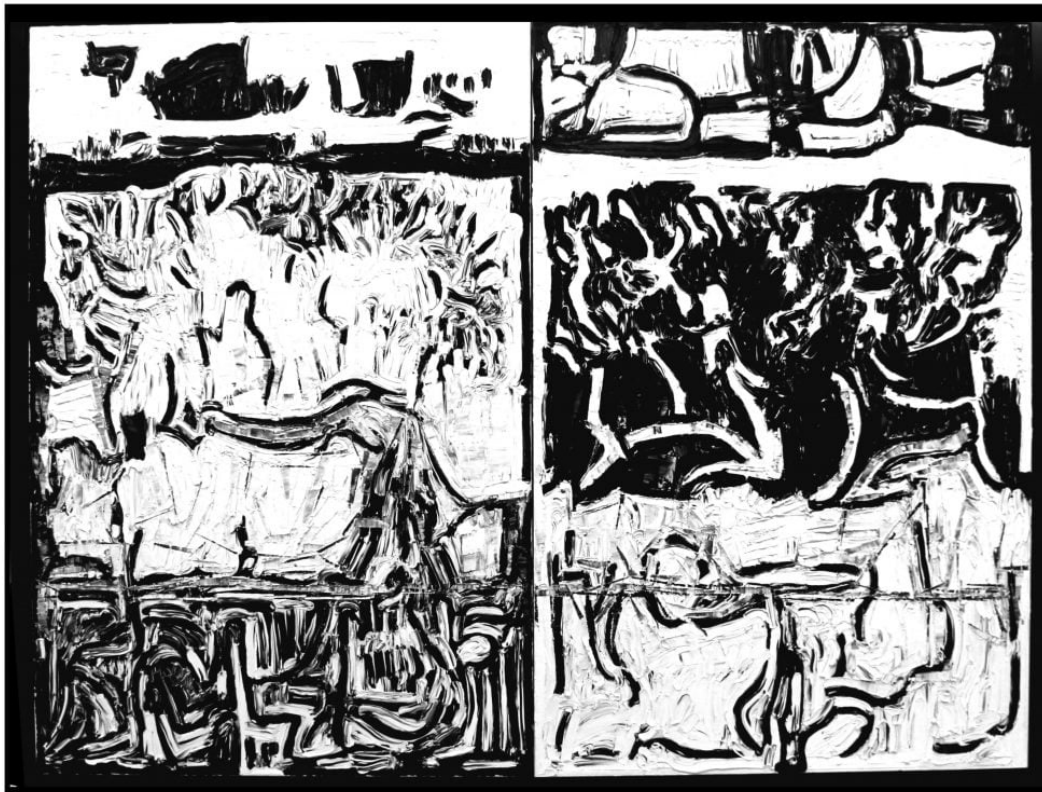
the color field – an area of color that floats in the background. The second is the free line that rides above the background and the color fields. Many of her lines are made with thin paint, and leave downward-dripping rivulets of color.

Riopelle's most famous paintings are composed like a mosaic out of brilliantly colored *tesserae*. In some later paintings, lines appear over the background, as though crystalizing out of the face of the deep. In other later paintings the colored regions become much larger and one can see the shapes more clearly.

Similarities

Both painters were very sensitive to symmetry. This was no mirror replication. Rather there was a balance from left to right of color, lightness and shape. Both Mitchell and Riopelle painted large diptychs and triptychs, wherein symmetry prevails. The following are two examples: Mitchell's 1992 untitled painting (finished just before her death) and one of Riopelle's 1977 *Iceberg* series (triggered by a trip to Baffin Island in the Canadian North) entitled *Le Ligne d'eau*.





Both artists derived their paintings from sensory experiences. Their paintings are abstracted from but not divorced from the real world. One gets a sense of the Vétheuil garden from the Mitchell's 1992 painting, and of Baffin Island from Riopelle's.

Sometimes the artists appear to be imitating each other styles. The exhibit pairs two untitled paintings to illustrate this. The Mitchell is from 1957 and the Riopelle from 1958; Riopelle is clearly trying out his companion's style.



The sharing between the two artists is perhaps more evident in Riopelle's work. His gouaches, such as the untitled 1956 example on the right, and his lithographs are composed of lines rather than shapes and have a light rather than a dark background. Nevertheless they are still in his style. His lines are short and replicate themselves. They are not Mitchell's long, independent and free-floating lines.



Mitchell's style was more consistent over the years. She was not as much affected by Riopelle as he by her. However, in 1963 she adopted the idea of painting triptychs from Riopelle, whose first triptych had been painted in 1953 (Brummel in Martin Brummel & Michaud, 2017, p. 74). Triptychs were used by artists in the altar-pieces of the Renaissance and the Middle

Ages. Pollack and other Abstract Expressionists had used the form for abstract works. Yet Riopelle almost certainly triggered Mitchell's first attempts in the early 1960s. Thereafter multi-panel works became a mainstay of Mitchell's art.

Endings

In 1992 Joan Mitchell died in Vétheuil of cancer. Jean-Paul Riopelle retreated to a studio on the Île aux Oies (Goose Island) in the Rivière Saint Laurent just north of Quebec City. Using a completely new technique – spray-cans and cut-out figures – he composed a series of images *L'Hommage à Rosa Luxemburg* (1992) as his memorial to Mitchell. A portion of this work, which resides permanently in the Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec and is not in the AGO exhibit, is shown below.



Riopelle's nickname for Mitchell was Rosa Malheur, a play on the name of Rosa Bonheur, a 19th century French painter. From that it was not far to Rosa Luxemburg, the Polish communist who was murdered in Germany in 1919 for promoting revolution. The painting also makes rueful reference to Mitchell's 1979 quadriptych *La Vie en Rose*. Riopelle's painting uses the bird-forms that were common in his later lithographs. These appear to signify freedom and its loss. This was Riopelle's last painting. He died in 2002.

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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

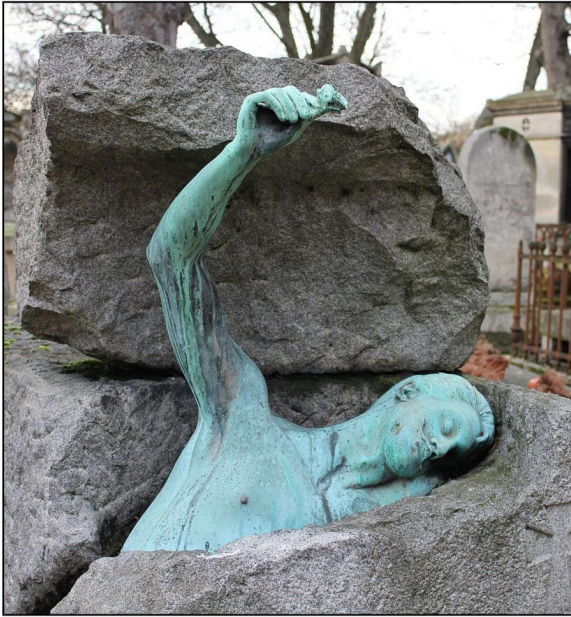
novel as its human characters. This was the first time that a work of fiction had been photographically illustrated.

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 Goncourt, 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.

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 whose 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)

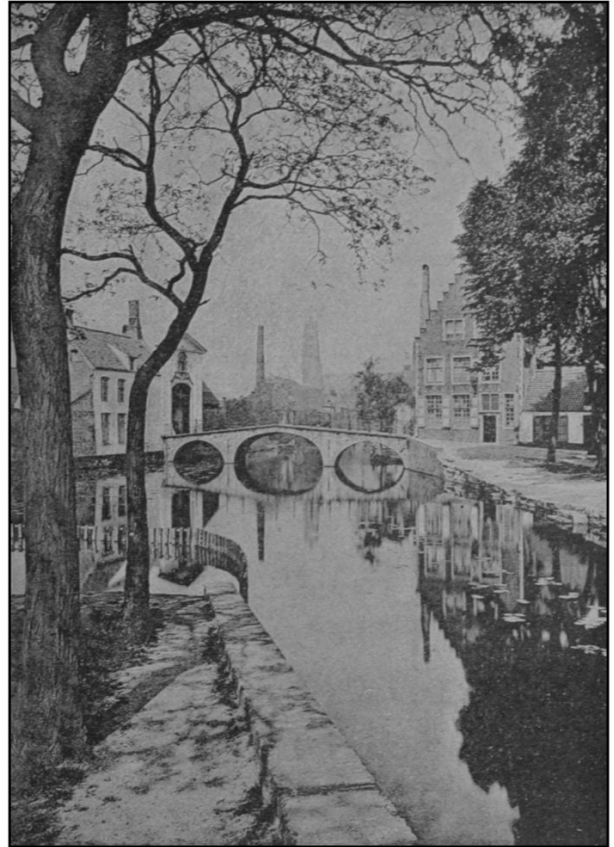
The Photographs

Rodenbach considered the photographs an essential part of his book. In his foreword 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 it 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.

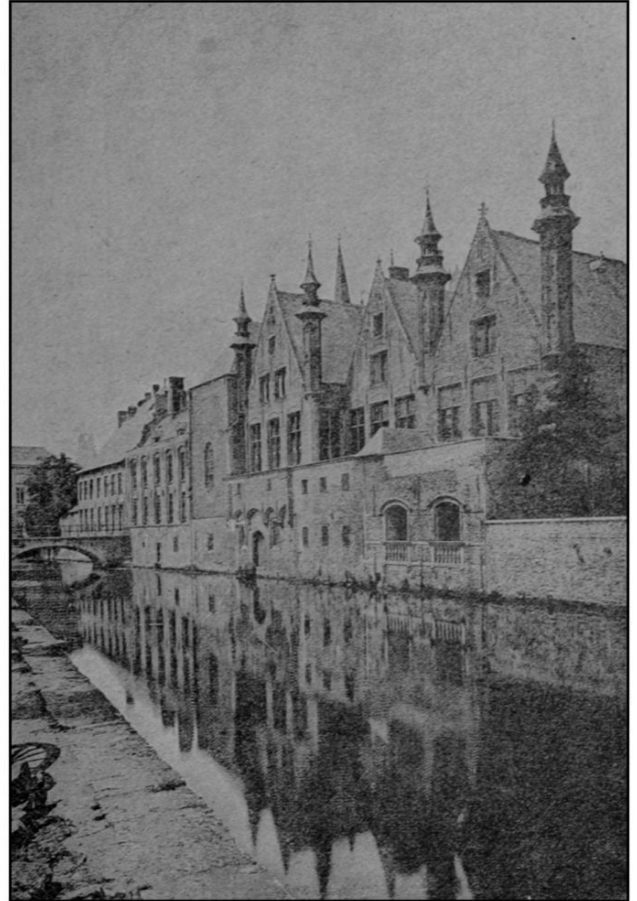


But as evening fell, he liked to wander about, looking for resemblances of his sorrow in the lonely canals and the religious quarters of the city. (p. 18)

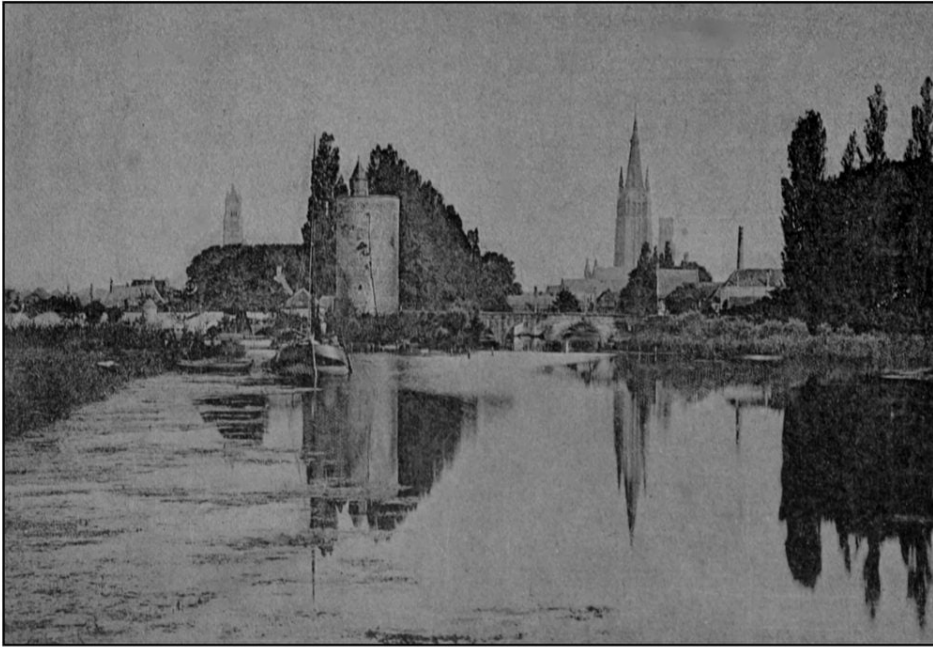
On the right is the illustration that faces the page containing this quotation. It shows the canals and the bridge leading to the entrance to the Béguinage.

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 Knopff's later works (1902), is in the Groeningemuseum in Bruges. It combines two images. The upper circular picture shows Knopff'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 itself 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 from 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. How true, a sad song.
P: Wie wahr, ein traurig Lied.	The song of true love, that must die.
M: Das Lied vom treuen Lieb, das sterben muss.	I know the song. I heard it often in younger, in better days.
P: Ich kenne das Lied. Ich hört es oft in jungen, in schöneren Tagen.	It has yet another verse— Do I know it still?

Es hat noch eine Strophe–
weiß ich sie noch?


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

Though sorrow becomes dark,
Come to me, my true love.
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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The 1913 edition is available on archive.org

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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Fernand Khnopff

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Divine Geometry

The Counter-Reformation, initiated by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) in response to the Protestant Reformation, promoted art as a way for believers to become emotionally involved in the Church. While Protestants were whitewashing church walls and destroying sculptures, Catholics produced the masterpieces of Baroque Art. For the Protestant, nothing should come between man and God; for the Catholic, the majesty

of art could bring man to the mystery of God.



Francesco Borromini (1599-1667) was born as Francesco Castelli in Ticino in the lake district of Northern Italy, which at that time was actually part of Switzerland (Connors, 1999). The son of a stone-mason, he studied in Milan and may have been taught there by the great geometer Muzio Oddi. The young man finished his apprenticeship and came to Rome in 1619 to work for Carlo Maderno, the Chief Architect of Saint Peter's Basilica and a fellow Ticinese. In Rome Francesco assumed the name of "Borromini" after San Carlo Borromeo (1538-84), Archbishop of Milan, leading force in the Counter-Reformation, and perhaps a distant relative of his mother.

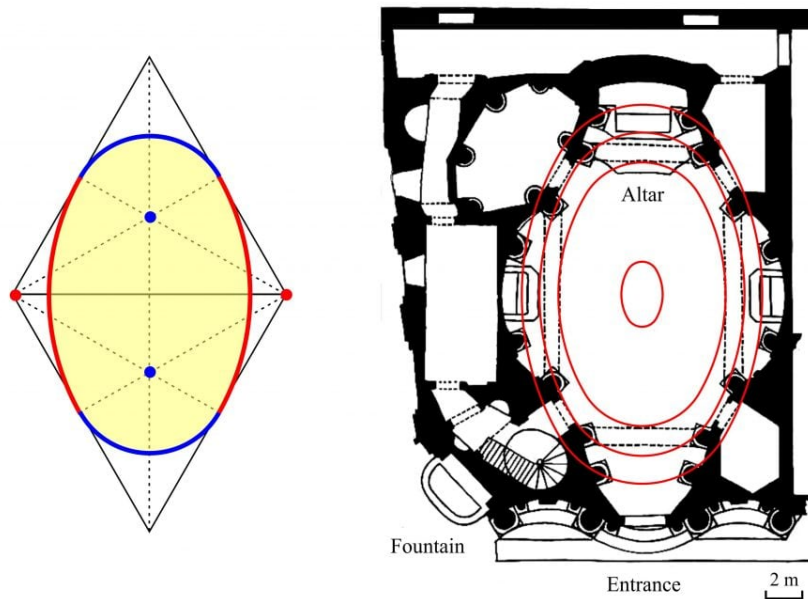
In Rome, Borromini met a young sculptor from Naples, Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680). Bernini was the most talented and productive of the Baroque sculptors. With his intense creativity and charming personality, he soon became the favorite of the Roman popes. In 1624, Bernini was commissioned to construct the *baldacchino* over the high altar at Saint Peter's, and after the death of Carlo Maderno in 1629, he was appointed Chief Architect of Saint Peter's.

For a brief time, Borromini acted as Bernini's assistant. They did not get along (Morrissey , 2005). They were of opposite temperaments: Bernini was charming and enthusiastic, Borromini was obstinate and melancholic. Borromini felt exploited, and thought that Bernini was not sufficiently grounded in the science of architecture to warrant his position. He severely criticized Bernini's proposals for the façade and bell-towers of Saint Peter's. The criticisms were correct and the plans were revised, but Bernini never forgave him.

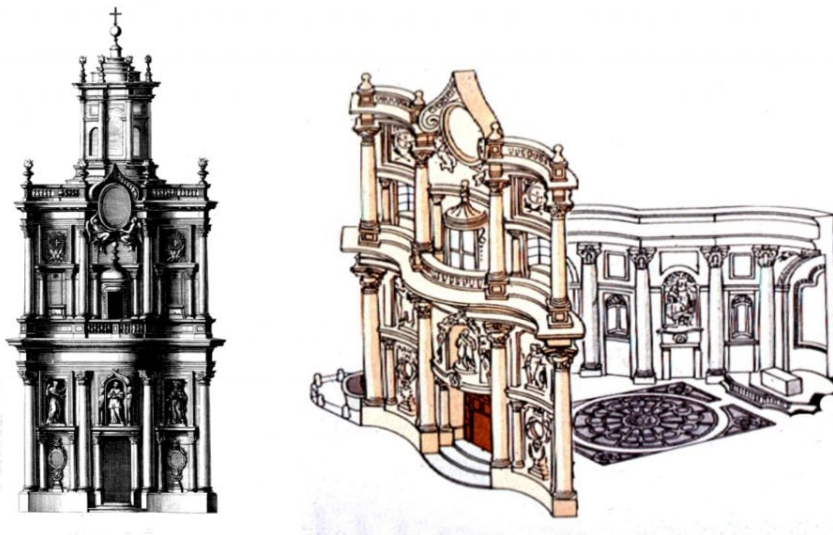
Bernini is the acknowledged genius of the Baroque Age (Hibbard, 1965; Beny & Gunn 1981; Wittkower, 1997; Hopkins, 2002). Recently, however, Borromini has become more widely studied (Blunt, 1970; Morrissey, 2005; Conors, 2007). His architecture is characterized by a marvelous sense of the effects of light on curving surfaces. In his geometry one may sense the divine. The *Naxos String Quartet No 7* (Davies, 2007) attempts to express in music the emotional effects of his buildings. The movie *La Sapienza* (Green, 2015) focuses on the visual splendor of his architecture. This posting concerns two small churches in Rome.

San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane

Borromini's first independent commission (1638-41) was to construct a small church, fittingly dedicated to San Carlo Borromeo. This Trinitarian church was located on a small space at the southern corner of an intersection with four fountains. Borromini's design was based on an oval, geometrically constructed using two adjacent equilateral triangles, symbolic of the trinity. The long circular curves of the oval (red) were drawn using centers (red dots) at each end of the triangles' adjacent sides. The short curves (blue) were drawn using centers (blue dots) located at each triangle's centroid. The following figure shows the construction of the oval and the ground plan of the church.



The façade is shown in the following figure, together with a cutaway perspective drawing. One of the innovations of Baroque Architecture was the use of curves in the façade (discussed in Blunt, 1979, p. 76). Because of funding difficulties, the façade of San Carlo was not finally finished until 1665, but Borromini's early sketches clearly define its subtle curves.



The oval dome of the church ascends to a cupola that contains the symbol of the trinity – a dove within a triangle within a flaming circle. Light enters the dome through lateral windows and through the cupola. A high resolution version of the following figure can be obtained in Wikipedia:



The coffered decoration of the dome is an intricate geometric mesh of octagons hexagons, and crosses. The design is based on the mosaic ceiling of the north ambulatory in the Mausoleum of Santa Costanza just outside the walls of Rome (see figure on the right). This was built in the 4th Century to house the remains Constantia, the daughter of Emperor Constantine I. Borromini not only adapted the design to a dome but also adapted it to give the dome an illusion of greater height.

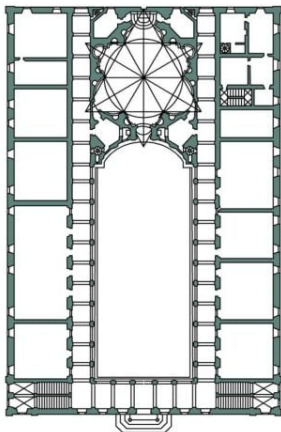


Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza

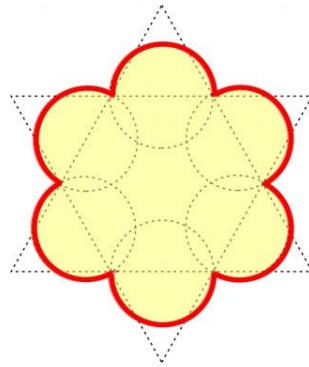
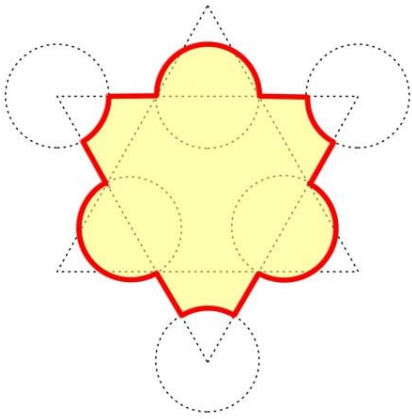
In 1641-1660, Borromini designed and built a church for the

University of Rome dedicated to Sant'Ivo, the patron saint of jurists. This was commissioned by Urban VIII (formerly Cardinal Barberini), under whose papacy Galileo had been sentenced to house arrest in 1633. Connors (2007) has suggested that the geometrical purity of its design may have provided a way for the papacy to heal its breach with science. Galileo died in 1642 soon after the church was begun. Urban VIII died in 1644, and the funding for the church fell away. It was only completed in 1660. The breach was difficult to heal.

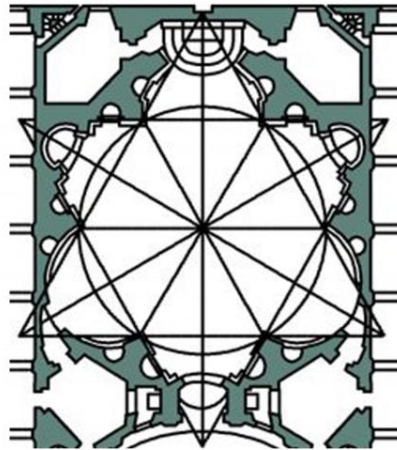
The church is located at one end of the arcaded courtyard of the Palazzo della Sapienza, built by Giacomo della Porta (1533-1602). The following figure shows the floor plan of the palazzo and the church, together with a photograph from Adrian Fletcher's Paradox Place.



Borromini based his church on two equilateral triangles overlapped to form a Star of David. This was also known as the Star of Solomon and thus was a symbol of wisdom. By locating circles at the apices of the triangles or at the midpoints of their sides two basic outlines could be obtained:



These two different outlines are evident in the dome and in the floor plan:





On top of the dome, Borromini placed a lantern, and upon that he built a striking spiral staircase that leads to a flaming emblem (Connors, 1996). What this virtuosic construction means has been subject to great debate: Tower of Babel, Lighthouse of Alexandria, beehive (for the Barberini bees) or papal tiara? In essence, the spiral likely indicates the ascent toward wisdom. In the past it was one of the great climbs for the adventurous tourist in Rome.

Endings

Geometry did not bring Borromini serenity. Plagued by funding difficulties, paranoid that others might be stealing his ideas, lonely and embittered, Borromini entered old age. In 1667, he committed suicide. He wounded himself with his sword and died a day later, after having written down his own account of his death:

Last night the idea came to me of making my will and writing it out with my own hand, and I began to write it about an hour after supper and I went on writing with a pencil till about three in the morning. Messer Francesco Massari my

young servant ... who sleeps in the room next door to look after me and had already gone to bed, seeing that I was still writing and had not put out the light, called to me, 'Signor Cavaliere, you ought to put out the light and go to sleep because it is late and the doctor wants you to sleep.' I replied that I should have to light the lamp again when I woke up and he answered: 'Put it out because I'll light it again when you wake up'; and so I stopped writing, put away the paper on which I had written a little and the pencil with which I was writing, put out the light and went to sleep. About five or six I woke up and called to Francesco and told him to light the lamp, and he answered: 'Signor, no'. And hearing this reply I suddenly became impatient and began to wonder how I could do myself some bodily harm, as Francesco had refused to give me a light; and I remained in that state till about half past eight, when I remembered that I had a sword in the room at the head of the bed, hanging among the consecrated candles, and, my impatience at not having a light growing greater, in despair I took the sword and pulling it out of the scabbard leant the hilt on the bed and put the point to my side and then fell on it with such force that it ran into my body, from one side to the other, and in falling on the sword I fell on to the floor with the sword run through my body and because of my wound I began to scream, and so Francesco ran in and opened the window, through which light was coming, and found me lying on the floor, and he with others whom he had called pulled the sword out of my side and put me on the bed; and this is how I came to be wounded.(Blunt, 1971, pp. 208-209.)

The violent passions of the dark gave way to an amazingly cool rationality during the light. At his request, Borromini was buried in the tomb of Carlo Maderno in San Giovanni dei Fiorentini. The will enjoined his heir and nephew Bernardo to marry the granddaughter of his mentor Maderno.

The 17th Century was a time of great changes in how we

conceived of the universe and its creator. The heavenly spheres were no longer. The planets moved around the sun and not around the earth. Geometry became a guiding principle for understanding the universe. The circular orbits of Copernicus ceded to the ellipses of Kepler. Kepler used the geometry of perfect solids to explain the different radii of the planetary orbits (Hatch, 2002). And in 1687 all was explained by Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation. Science was explaining the universe with geometry. God was perhaps a mathematician. Baroque art, and Borromini in particular, sought for God in the geometrical interplay of curve and light.

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Hammershøi

The Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) has recently acquired a 1905 painting by the Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864-1916), the first by this artist in a Canadian public collection: *Interior with Four Etchings*:

The etchings are arranged on the wall above an elegant side-table, upon which stand three pieces of Royal Copenhagen porcelain. The details of the etchings cannot be seen, but the upper two appear to be portraits. Light comes in from the window on the left, giving a subtle violet tinge to the grey walls and emphasizing their white trim. To the left of the table stands Hammershøi's wife Ida. She faces away from us, and we cannot see what she is doing. Perhaps she has just placed the plate on the table and has turned to look out of the window; perhaps she has taken something to the window to look at. The sunlight on her neck is vaguely erotic. Everything is balanced: the shadows share the space with the light; the blue-white porcelain complements the red-brown frames; the human figure suggests movement in a room that is otherwise completely still.



Perhaps she has just placed the plate on the table and has turned to look out of the window; perhaps she has taken something to the window to look at. The sunlight on her neck is vaguely erotic. Everything is balanced: the shadows share the space with the light; the blue-white porcelain complements the red-brown frames; the human figure suggests movement in a room that is otherwise completely still.

To celebrate this acquisition, the gallery is exhibiting this picture alongside 25 other Hammershøi paintings, all except one coming from the National Gallery of Denmark (*Statens Museum for Kunst*). The exhibition runs from April 16 to June 26, 2016. This is one of the most impressive exhibitions I have seen in recent years. I apologize that my enthusiasm has led to another long post. However, it contains more to see than to read.

Hammershøi is quite different from other painters. His palette is austere. The main colors are, gray and white and black. On one of the walls in the AGO exhibition is a commemorative poem

by Sophus Clausen written in 1916. The poem, at least in the English translation, is unremarkable except for occasional lines:

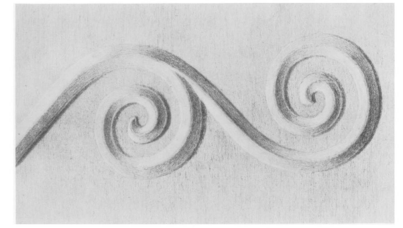
How sweet to know that blacks and greys
Give shelter to the light and let it stay
...
Gray is not grey nor is black ever black.

The greys in a Hammershøi painting are subtly tinged, often with violet, sometimes with yellow, occasionally with pink or green. On the predominantly grey background, objects are delineated in subdued browns. The most striking characteristic of the paintings is the way that they represent light. Light seems almost to move through the painted surfaces, filling out the space, defining what is present, bringing people into existence, and leaving without a sound.

The restricted palate of Hammershøi's paintings lead his friend Karl Madsen, an artist and historian, to suggest that he was Denmark's first "neurasthenic painter" (quoted in Vad, 1992, p. 73). The diagnosis of neurasthenia was popular at the time (Harris 2013). Its various symptoms, both physical (fatigue, dizziness) and mental (anxiety, melancholy), were attributed to a weak nervous system, unable to cope with the stress of modern urban life. The diagnosis is out of fashion nowadays, though similar symptoms occur in modern disorders such as chronic fatigue syndrome and dysautonomia. Although Hammershøi was quiet and withdrawn, he was far too productive to be considered neurasthenic. Nevertheless, his paintings have a tranquility that can provide respite from the hubbub of city life. They might represent a cure for rather than a result of neurasthenia.

In this posting, the paintings in the exhibition have been photographed within their frames; other paintings by Hammershøi and paintings by other artists are shown without frames.

Early Life



Hammershøi was the son of a prosperous Danish businessman. He displayed an early talent for drawing, and his family arranged for him to have lessons from the painter Niels Christian Kierkegard, a cousin of Søren Kierkegaard. The drawing on the right (Vad, 1992, p 11), from when Vilhelm was 11 years old, illustrates his early appreciation of light and shadow.

He continued his studies both at the Royal Danish Academy of Art and in the Free Study Schools. One of his teachers, P. S. Krøyer remarked that

I have a pupil who paints most oddly. I do not understand him, but believe he is going to be important and do not try to influence him. (quoted in Vad, 1992, p 24)



His 1885 *Portrait of a Young Girl* (his sister Anna) was entered into competition for a prize at the Academy. Though it did not win, it was acclaimed by his fellow students, who protested the judges' decision. It is a remarkable painting: the face and posture are sensitively portrayed; the muted palette of the background gently situates the figure; the hands suggest both rest and tension. Anna's left hand steadies the image and allows the picture's transition from three to two dimensions.



In the autumn of 1888, Hammershøi stayed with his friend Karl Madsen, who lived in an old house just north of Copenhagen. There he painted his first “interior” – a picture of an old stove with an open doorway leading into a brightly sunlit room. The light seems almost personified – it enters the other room, comes through the door, pauses on the floor and casts a shadow toward the stove. The painting makes the viewer long to go into the next room to see whence the light comes from. This type of painting was to become Hammershøi's signature style.

Though an accomplished painter of portraits and of architecture, Hammershøi is most famous for pictures showing the effects of light on lonely rooms.

In 1888, the dentist, writer and art-collector, Alfred Bramsen, bought his first painting by Hammershøi. Over the next quarter century, he was an unflagging promoter of Hammershøi's work. After Hammershøi's death in 1916, Bramsen arranged for the first catalogue of the paintings. Artist and patron were totally unlike: one introverted, reticent and solitary, the other gregarious, confident and worldly-wise.

With this patronage, Hammershøi became self-sufficient, and in 1891 he married Ida Ilsted, the sister of a fellow artist, Peter Ilsted. Following the wedding, Vilhelm and Ida went to Paris for six months. They then returned to Copenhagen, living for a while in the Hammershøi home together with Vilhelm's mother.

Over the next few years, Hammershøi painted landscapes, portraits and architecture. In 1897 Bramsen commissioned a painting of Kronborg castle in Helsingør (Hamlet's Elsinore). Hammershøi produced a masterpiece in terms of its striking perspective and subtle color.

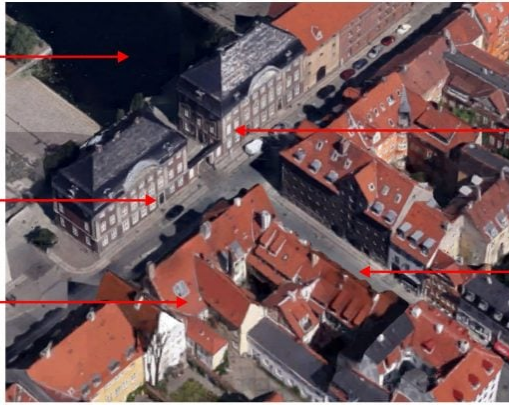


Strandgade 30

In December 1898, Hammershøi rented an apartment on the second floor of an old building on Strandgade in the old dockyard district of Copenhagen called Christianshavn. The building had been constructed in 1636. Hammershøi was likely pleased that his home originated in the time of Johannes Vermeer and Pieter de Hooch. The apartment was spacious and endowed with windows facing in all directions. As well as a home, it served as both studio space and subject matter for his art.

The building still exists. The following figures show its location on a google world-map, as well as a recent photograph (from Wikipedia) and the floor plan of the apartment (from Vad, 1992, p 187, with several revisions based on another published plan: the position of the window in room F corrected, the door between B and F doubled, and room D divided).

Dock of Asiatic Company

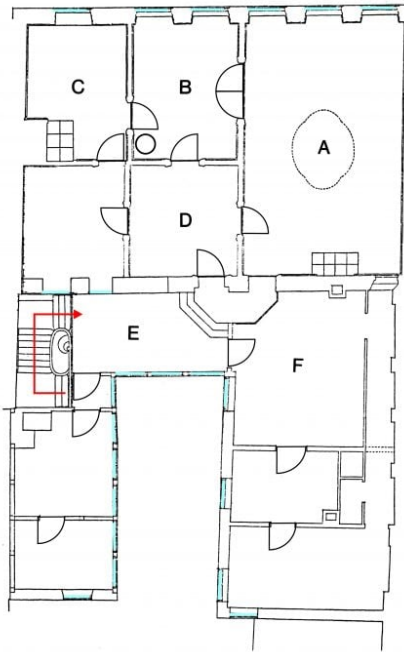


Offices of Asiatic Company

Strandgade 25

Strandgade 30

Sankt Annae Gade

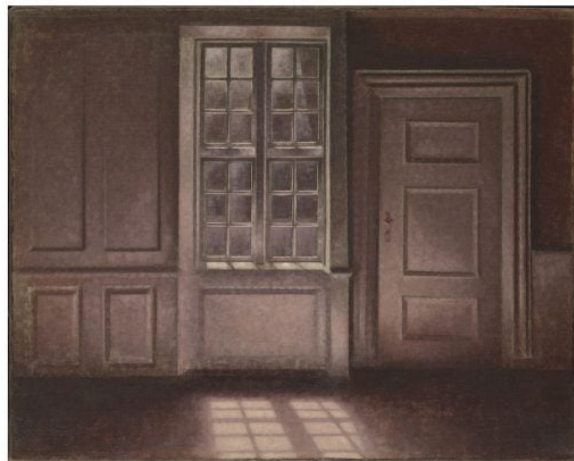


Strandgade 30, Copenhagen



In his new apartment, Hammershøi began to paint the interior pictures that became his most recognizable images. Many of the pictures were painted in Room F facing the window and door. In some the room is empty; others include a portrait of Ida sitting or standing to the left of the window. *Interior in Strandgade, Sunlight on the Floor* 1901 (in the AGO exhibit and illustrated on the right) shows Ida working at some task at a table. The painting is both realistic and impressionistic. The old house had shifted slightly over the years, and the painting shows clearly that the door is slightly askew. Yet it is impossible to tell the subject of the etchings or the focus of Ida's concentration.

This view painted with the room empty is the subject of some of Hammershøi's most famous pictures, such as *Dust Motes Dancing in the Sunbeams* (1900, Ordrupgaard, Denmark) and *Moonlight, Strandgade 30* (1906, Metropolitan Museum)





The AGO painting *Interior with 4 Etchings* (1905) was painted in Room A. Over the years the arrangement of the furniture changed. An earlier painting *Interior with Piano, Strandgade 30* (1901), illustrated on the right, shows the same view but with a piano and a bookcase rather than a table. Hammershøi tended to simplify his pictures as he grew older. His later paintings show less detail and a more restricted palette.



Interior with the Artist's Easel (1910) was painted in Room B looking toward Room A. It is a variation on a theme long used painting: the artist at his easel. Yet here there is no artist other than the light coming in the window. Since we can only see the painting from its back, we have no idea of its subject. The true subject of the actual painting is the bowl on the table in the far room. The shape of the bowl and the reflections of the light upon its curves are rendered exquisitely. If this were a photograph rather than a painting, the bowl would be in focus, and the easel in the blurred foreground.

Hammershøi's new apartment was directly across from a striking building that housed the offices of the Asiatic Company. This was the subject of several large architectural paintings. The 1902 version in the AGO exhibition shows the offices in fog. The buildings are visible but the dockyard behind them, accessed through the arch, is obscure. Masts of ships are faintly visible in the harbor-fog. Other versions of this painting show the buildings without the fog.



Sources

Hammershøi is often considered as isolated from the history of painting, as someone whose work was without either precedent or following. Yet all persons are part of the past they learn about, and all are made by the present that they experience. And everyone affects the future.

Hammershøi's paintings ultimately derive from the great paintings of the Dutch Golden Age of the 17th Century, when Vermeer and de Hooch depicted the effects of light coming through windows onto people. Hammershøi's paintings study the way light plays on domestic interiors, but the interiors are minimal rather than extravagant, the light is cool rather than warm, and the people are either absent or unobtrusive.

In the late 19th Century, James Abbott McNeill Whistler

(1834-1903) had begun to work with a restricted palette. His most famous painting is entitled *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1 Portrait of the Artist's Mother* (1871). In Hammershøi's 1886 portrait of his own mother the color is even more subdued and the background even less detailed.



Many of Hammershøi's interiors include a representation of Ida viewed from the back. This motif derives from the *Rückenfigur* ("figure viewed from the back") used in German Romantic painting, most characteristically by Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840). Most of Friedrich's *Rückenfiguren* are in landscapes, but occasionally they are in domestic interiors. The following illustration compares Friedrich's *Woman at a Window* (1822) with Hammershøi's *The Tall Windows* (1913). The latter was painted after Hammershøi had moved across the street to Strandgade 25.



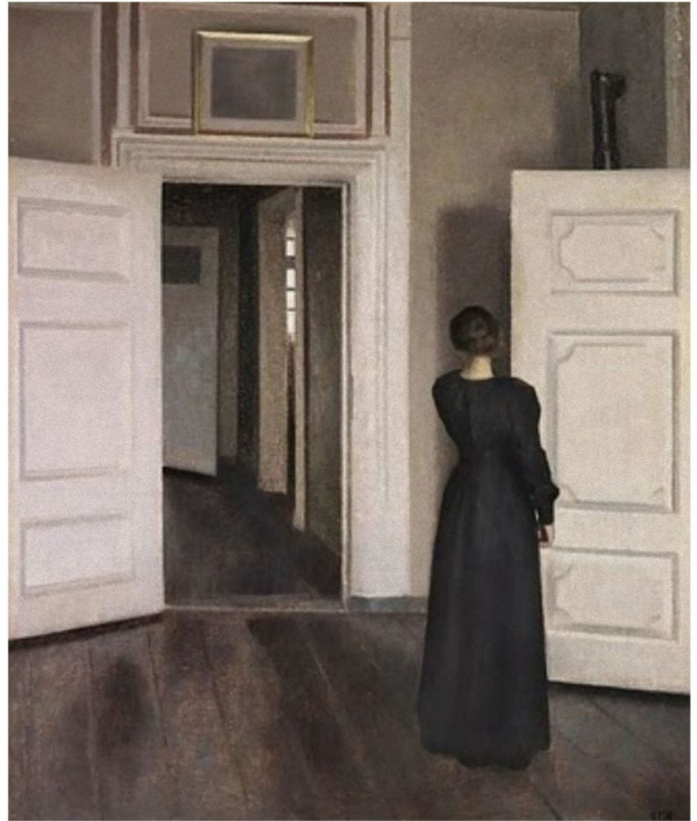
The *Rückenfigur* can be used for various purposes (Koerner, 1990, pp 233-244; Prettejohn, 2005, pp 54-59). One is to provide a foil for the viewer to enjoy the same perceptions as the artist who painted the picture. The *Rückenfigur*

is not just a represented object in the picture, but also the embodied subject of the aesthetic experience of the picture – we look *with*, rather than merely *at* the *Rückenfigur*. (Prettejohn, 2005, p 56).

In some sense the *Rückenfigur* obscures what the painting is about. We see the man rather than the sunset. We feel that we have come late – the glories of the sunset have already been seen and we can only imagine what the experience was like (Koerner, p. 233).

The presence of Ida in Hammershøi's paintings differs from Friedrich's *Rückenfigur*. Most importantly, Ida usually stands or sits on the edge of the painting rather than in the center. She complements rather than obscures the picture's subject. She gives the image a sense of intimacy: we are sharing her domestic space. We get a sense of her existence: the small tasks that make up the domestic day. She gives a human ground

to what we see and prevents it from becoming too abstract.



Sometimes, as in the *Interior with a Woman Standing*, *Strandgade 30* (1905) painted in Room A looking into Room D, the viewer feels uncertain. By which door has she come in? Which door is she about to go out? The woman seems “caught in the moment of deciding which door to pass through” (Alsdorf, 2016, p. 271). Although this uncertainty derives simply from the static nature of the representation, it resonates with our inability to know what is in the mind of another person.

This particular problem fascinated the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). In a recent article, Bridget Alsdorf (2016) considers Hammershøi’s interior paintings in relation to Kierkegaard’s book *Either/Or* (1843). The title of the book highlights the idea of uncertainty. In the section of the book entitled *Shadowgraphs*. Kierkegaard wrote about the difficulty in representing in art the inner state of another

person, especially the state of "reflective sorrow." Kierkegaard's idea is that art can only represent such a state of mind indirectly. He likens the process to a "shadowgraph:"

It is this reflective sorrow I now propose to draw out and render visible, so far as that is possible, in some pictures. I call them 'shadowgraphs', partly to remind the reader by the very designation that I am summoning them from the dark side of life, partly because, just like shadowgraphs, they are not visible straightaway. If I take a shadowgraph in my hand, I gain no impression from it, can form no real idea of it; it is only when I hold it up to the wall and look not at the immediate image but at what appears on the wall, it is only then that I see it. Similarly the picture I want to show here is an inner picture which can also only be detected by looking through the exterior. There may be nothing striking about the exterior, it is only when I look through it that I discover the inner picture, which is what I want to show, an inner picture too refined to be visible on the outside, woven as it is of the softest moods of the soul. If I look at a sheet of paper, to outward observation there may be nothing remarkable about it; it is only when I hold it up to the light of day and see through it that I discover the delicate inner picture which is as though too insubstantial to be seen immediately. (p. 130)

Unfortunately, Kierkegaard is quite unclear about the nature of a shadowgraph. On the one hand it might be like a transparency or silhouette through which light is projected to give an image on another surface; on the other hand it might be like a watermark seen when paper is held up to the light. In either interpretation, the image is not immediately apparent but only occurs when light is passed through the artistic representation. Kierkegaard's metaphor is as ambiguous as the title of his book.

Kierkegaard then goes on to consider the state of reflective sorrow in three characters from literature. His bravura

descriptions of their invisible state of mind *either* subvert his claim that such states cannot be represented in art *or* clearly demonstrate the process of the sympathetic shadowgraph.

Alsdorf also considers what Hammershøi might be trying to represent in his interiors by relating them to another section of *Either/Or* entitled *The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage*. In this section, Kierkegaard's character Judge William compares romantic love with married love: the one an ever-changing erotic quest, the other an unchanging relationship. Hammershøi interiors certainly suggest the timeless intimacy of the latter.

Hammershøi's images have a mystical aura to them. They are delicately balanced between serenity and disquiet. Perhaps a little like meditation when one begins to feel an underlying eternity but still senses the sorrows of the real world.

Many critics have remarked about the lack of narrative in Hammershøi's paintings. When the rooms are empty, we cannot know what has happened in them; when the rooms contain a solitary person, we have difficulty seeing what she is doing and we cannot know what she is thinking.

Yet there is an emotional force in the paintings that no amount of exegesis can attenuate. The emotions are like those aroused by music. Hammershøi appreciated music, and counted the English concert pianist Leonard Borwick among his friends. We do not fault music for lack of narrative or the absence of simple interpretation. Hammershøi's paintings fit very well with quiet music. Try them with the beginning of the Allegretto from Grieg's 1887 Violin Sonata Opus 45 (Ingolf Turban and Jean-Jacques Dünki):

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Sonte-C-Moll-Allegretto-espressivo-alla-Romanza-beginning.mp3>

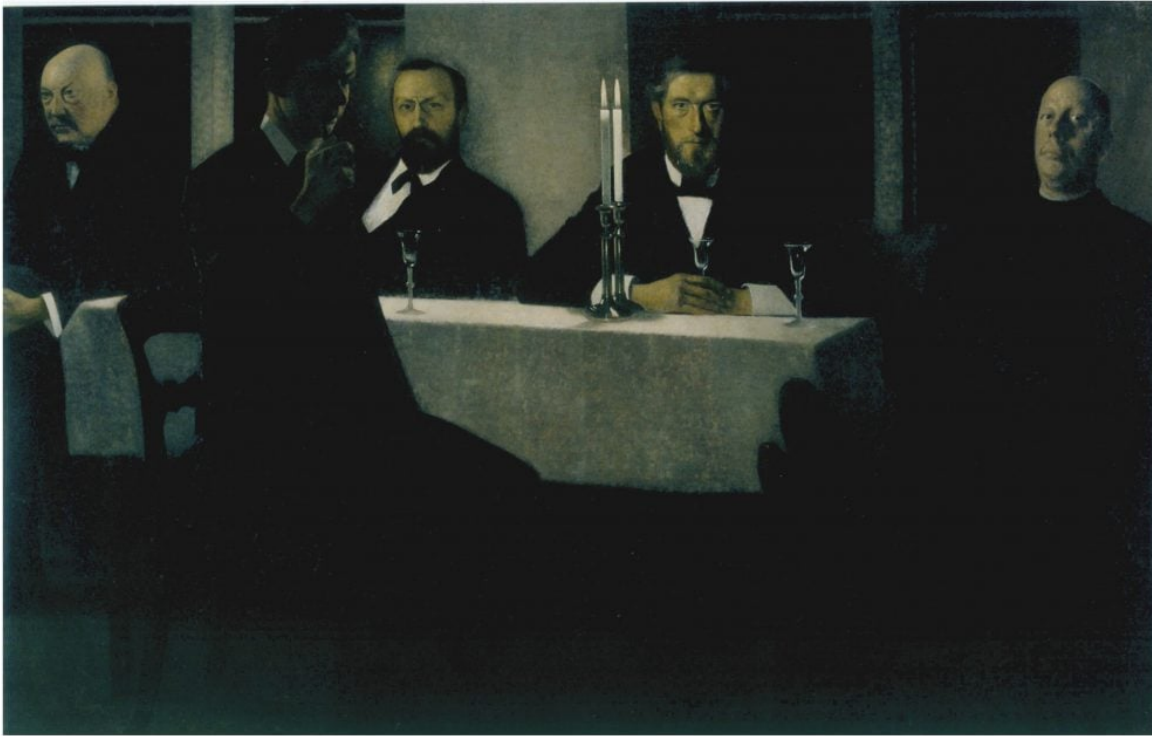
Portraits



Hammershøi was an accomplished and sensitive portraitist. The 1907 portrait of Ida with a teacup illustrates clearly the intimacy of their relationship. She stares off into space. We cannot know what she is thinking; perhaps even she does not know. The initial impression is of sadness although another version of the same portrait perhaps shows the hint of a smile. The portrait is very affecting. There is something timeless and classical about its serenity, but it is also quite momentary and individual. We can almost hear the clink of the spoon as she stirs her tea.



The 1901 portrait at the left is of J. F. Willumsen, a friend and fellow-artist. The strength of the gaze is clearly represented, but the portrait is otherwise unremarkable. However, this picture was a study for Hammershøi's largest painting entitled *Five Portraits*, completed in 1902 and presently in the Thiel Gallery near Stockholm. This fascinating painting shows four colleagues seated around a table at night in front of the windows in Room A. Karl Madsen is on Willumsen's right. In front of the table, Hammershøi's brother Svend is seen in profile. The two colleagues on the edges of the painting are the architect Thorvald Bindesbøll and the painter Carl Holsøe. The latter has his feet up on a chair, and his shoes give the painting a striking three-dimensional tension. The group appears to be gathered for after-dinner drinks, following a late but not last supper. The painting's darkness contrasts with the lightness of most of Hammershøi's interiors (and makes it difficult to obtain a good representation – I have done my best):



The most striking aspect of this group portrait is that no one interacts with anyone else. Each person seems completely engrossed in his own thoughts. Monrad (2012, p. 29) quotes a review of the painting's first exhibition:

The situation is more or less this; there has been profound talk about something or other that has moved everyone deeply, and they are now waiting for a conclusive word from a sixth party.

The sixth party could be the painter. This interpretation is possible, but Monrad discounts it as not in keeping with Hammershøi's general lack of narrative.

Robert Rosenblum (in Fonsmark et al., 1998, p. 45) remarked:

The effect is like standing before a tribunal, which comes into fixed, focal focus with the hypnotic stare of Willumsen.

It is unsettling to be judged by a painting.

Despite its starkness, I find the picture comforting. Each

person exists within his own intense solitude. Yet, as in the daylight pictures, the play of light on the faces and the table serves to bring them all together.

After Hammershøi

Hammershøi died of cancer in 1916. Bramsen donated his collection to the Statens Museum for Kunst in 1917. But fashions change, and in 1930 the paintings were returned to the donor. Hammershøi came to be considered only a minor artist in Denmark; in the rest of the world he was almost completely unknown. His reputation only began to change in the early 1980s when a retrospective exhibition of his paintings was mounted at Ordrupgaard, a gallery just north of Copenhagen, and other exhibitions were held in North America.

Hammershøi had little direct effect on subsequent artists. His friends Carl Holsøe and Peter Ilsted continued to paint interiors, though their pictures were more detailed and less affecting than those of Hammershøi. In France, Pierre Bonnard and Eduard Vuillard painted domestic scenes. One might even consider the possibility of an artistic movement called “intimism” (Hvidt, in Monrad et al., 2012, pp. 197-218). Yet their paintings lacked Hammershøi’s simplicity of color and the underlying mysticism.

The American Edward Hopper (1882-1967) painted pictures that are imbued with a similar mood to those of Hammershøi. They depict the same lonely silence, the same play of light on simple interiors, and the same existential anxiety (Rosenblum in Fonsmark et al., 1998, p. 42). Yet Hopper was likely unaware of Hammershøi’s work. Their relationship is an affinity rather than a direct connection. The following illustration compares Hammershøi’s *Ida in an Interior with Piano* (1901) with Hopper’s *City Sunlight* (1954).



To me the glowing color spaces of Hammershøi's paintings presage the completely abstract paintings of Mark Rothko. Rosenblum (1975) has suggested that a tradition in art that is particularly "northern," one that sees light as cool rather than warm, one that tends towards abstractions, one that goes from Friedrich to Rothko. Rosenblum does not mention Hammershøi in his book, but we could easily place him along this path.

The Danish film director Carl Theodor Dreyer (1889-1968) was profoundly affected by Hammershøi's images (Balló et al. 2006). The closing scene of his last movie *Gertrud* (1968; Schamus, 2008) ends on an image that could easily be a Hammershøi painting. The movie, based on a 1906 play by the Swedish writer Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941), concerns the passionate life of a woman who sought the freedom to love whomever she wished to love. At the end of the movie, the elderly Gertrud, living as a recluse, is visited by her old friend Axel Nygren. She returns his letters; he burns them: they say goodbye. The final minute can perhaps serve as our farewell to Hammershøi

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Gertrud-final-scene.mp4>

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Folia and Sarabande

Listening to variations on a theme is one of my great musical pleasures. I remember the original notes and am fascinated by how they change. The comfort of the old plays with the excitement of the new. Sometimes I am amazed by how much more can be said about something I already know. Sometimes I am more impressed by the many different aspects of one message.

This posting is about two of the most popular themes in Classical music and their variations. Be forewarned: such catchy tunes may stay in your head for a while.

Basso Ostinato

Western music often uses a bass line to set the rhythm and to determine the chord progressions. In much of Renaissance and Baroque music the same bass line repeats throughout the piece. The melody is played (and widely varied) in the higher registers while the basso ostinato (stubborn bass) continues in the lower. The meaning is in the high notes, the rhythm in the low. The idea of the “tenor” as the voice that “holds” the melody can also describe the main line of thought in spoken or written communications.

In some ways, this type of music is very similar to the way we speak. The fundamental of the voice is determined by the vibrations of our vocal cords. These vibrations continue throughout our speech. They provide a basic pitch and their on-and-off rhythm determines the cadence of our speaking. The meaning of the speech is then determined by modulating the higher harmonics of the sounds to give consonants and vowels.

The ground bass is the underlying structure of such forms as the Chaconne, the Passacaglia, the Folia and the Sarabande

(Ross, 2010). It provides a stable rhythmic and harmonic structure for the melody to play upon. Many of these musical forms came into prominence in the Iberian Peninsula in the 15th and 16th Centuries. Some likely derived from medieval folk tunes. Some may have arrived from the New World or the Canary Isles.

La Folia

La Folia appears to have begun in Portugal. The word means “folly” or “madness.” Italian spells it “Follia.” Various versions finally evolved into the “late Folia” (Hudson, 1973; Gerbino & Silbiger, 2016):



Diego Ortiz (1510-1570), a composer in the Spanish court, wrote several ricercadas based on La Folia (1553). A ricercada is a form of variation, often using several melodies, and sometimes playing these together in a fugue. The following is the eighth ricercada, played by Jordi Savall and his colleagues:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Diego-Ortiz-Recercada-Ottava-sobre-la-Folia-1553.mp3>

The most common of the chordal progressions built on the bass line of La Folia is in D minor, as illustrated in the following example (from Campenon & Rustique, 2012) which has a very simple melody in the upper register:

Ré m La M Ré m Do M Fa M Do M Ré m La M

Ré m La M Ré m Do M Fa M Do M Ré m La M Ré m

The 16-

bar chord progression is

/Dm___ /A7___ /Dm___ /C___ /F___ /C___ /Dm___ /A7___ /
 /Dm___ /A7___ /Dm___ /C___ /F___ /C___ /Dm A7_ /Dm___ /

Corelli



The most famous piece of music to use this progression is the Violin Sonata XII of Opus 5 (1700) of Arcangelo Corelli

(1653-1713), an Italian composer working in Rome. The following is the beginning of the sonata played by Andrew Manze (violin) and Richard Egarr (harpsichord):

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Corelli-Violin-Sonata-No.12-in-D-minor-op.5-beginning.mp3>

This is the first page of the sheet music:

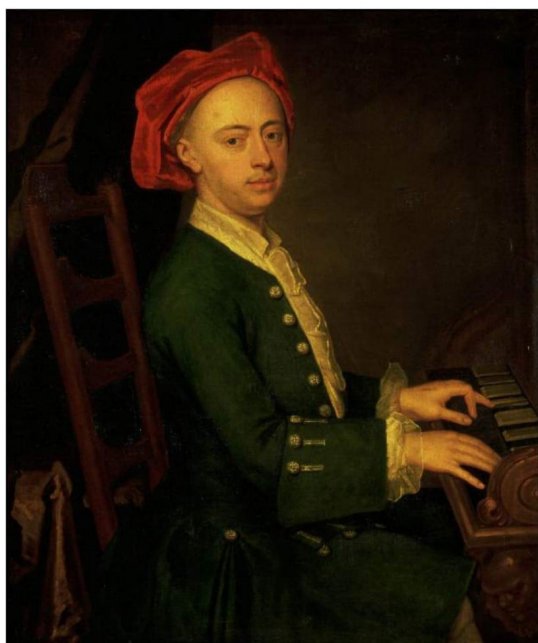


Corelli's sonata was immensely popular. One of his pupils, Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762) arranged the sonata for a string orchestra in 1726, while he was composing and teaching in London. London was quite taken with *La Follia*. The following selection is the latter half of the Geminiani adaptation as played by *Les Violons du Roy* under the directions of Bernard Labadie.

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/geminiani-follia-violons-du-roy-ending.mp3>

In the years after Corelli, the theme of La Follia was widely used by many different composers in many different contexts. The internet hosts a great website on Corelli (Campenon & Rustique, 2012), and a truly magnificent website devoted to La Folia in all its manifestations.

Sarabande



While in London, Geminiani's violin-performances were often accompanied by George Frideric Handel at the harpsichord. In 1733 Handel published his Suite No. 4 in D minor for Harpsichord (HWV 437). One of its movements is a Sarabande, a stately dance in three-quarter time (Hudson & Little, 2016).

Handel's Sarabande uses a 16-bar progression similar to that of La Folia:

/Dm___ /A7___ /F___ /C___ /Gm___ /Dm___ /Gm___ /A7___ /
 /Dm___ /A7___ /F___ /C___ /Gm___ /F___ /Gm A7___/Dm___ /

Compare this to La Folia:

/Dm___ /A7___ /Dm___ /C___ /F___ /C___ /Dm___ /A7___ /
 /Dm___ /A7___ /Dm___ /C___ /F___ /C___ /Dm A7___/Dm___ /

Though similar, it is clearly not the same. However, as the webpage on La Folia, states “this piece breathes the same atmosphere, and most likely Handel had the Folia-theme in mind when composing this Sarabande.” Indeed the movement became known as “Handel’s Folia.”

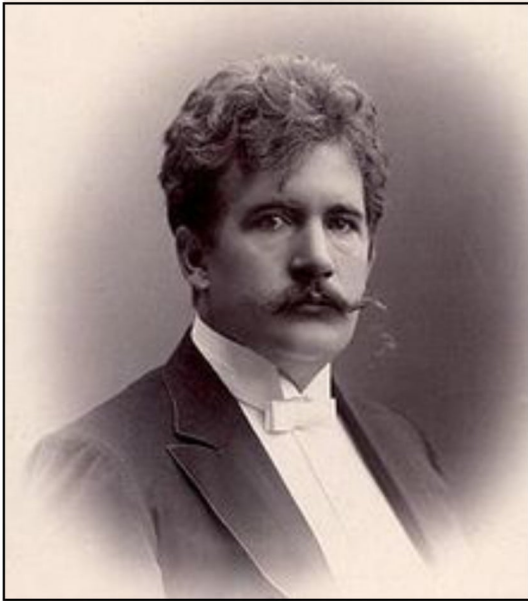
The following is the beginning of the Sarabande played by Alan Cuckston:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Handel-sarabande-beginning.mp3>

Together with the sheet music for the theme:

Orgue
ou
Clavecin

Variations



In 1897, The Norwegian violinist and composer Johan Halvorsen wrote a lovely series of variations on Handel's Sarabande for violin and viola. Halvorsen's virtuosity as a violinist was only matched by the elegance of his moustache. The following is the beginning of his variations as played by Natalia Lomeiko (violin) and Yuri Zhislan (viola):

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/halvorsen-sarabande-con-variazioni-first-half.mp3>



In the 20th Century the popularity of La Folia increased. In 1929 Manuel Ponce wrote a set of guitar variations for Andre Segovia. And in 1931, Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) wrote a bravura set of piano variations on La Follia. In the following clip, Mikhail Pletnev plays the theme and first seven of the twenty variations:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Rachmaninov-Variations-on-Corelli-Theme-and-first-7-variations.mp3>

I shall conclude this posting with the main title theme from Stanley Kubrick's 1975 film *Barry Lyndon*: Handel's Sarabande as arranged for the National Philharmonic Orchestra by Leonard Rosenman. The movie is characterized by stunning photography,

with many of the indoor scenes lit by candles. (I have appended a still photograph of the opening scene.) The music is perfectly chosen to represent the time and the place. The film won Academy Awards for both Cinematography and Musical Score.



<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Rosenbaum-Barry-Lyndon-Sarabande-Main-Theme.mp3>

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